

John Forster as Biographer: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Biography

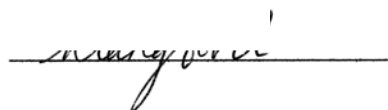
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Declaration

I, Helena Langford, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helena Langford', is written over a horizontal line.

Abstract

John Forster as Biographer: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Biography

John Forster (1812-1876) has traditionally been glimpsed almost exclusively via his relationships with key nineteenth-century figures such as Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens. His biographical works can be seen as a nexus between the often conflicting positions which he occupied as a journalist, editor, literary agent and advisor, barrister, philanthropist, husband and government secretary.

Forster's biographical career is roughly divided into three periods; the early biographies (1830-1864) constituted several historiographies of key figures in the history of the long parliament, concluding in the two-volume *Sir John Eliot* (1864). The years 1848 to 1875 were occupied with biographies of eighteenth-century poets, novelists and dramatists, in particular *Oliver Goldsmith* (1848) and *Jonathan Swift* (1875). In the last decade of his life, Forster was diverted from these two passions by the memoirs of his friends, *Walter Savage Landor* (1869) and *Charles Dickens* (1872-4).

Arising out of collaborative work with UCL and the Victoria and Albert Museum, this study centres on the National Art Library's Forster bequest. Examining and documenting in detail the materials which Forster collected and exploited to write his biographies, it explores the nature, both physical and intellectual, of Forster's library, and its importance in analysing his research and writing interests. The works are situated within the development of biography as a genre, and alongside the emerging ethos of unrestricted education and the new printing and binding technologies and techniques which were becoming available. The archive's material elements - images, bindings, annotations, Grangerizations, the ways in which it has been curated and catalogued – form a unique documentation of standard Victorian biographical practices, and of Forster's individualistic working habits.

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John Forster as Biographer: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Biography

Introduction

The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it ... Concerning the Age which has just passed, our fathers and grandfathers have poured forth and accumulated so vast a quantity of information that the industry of a Ranke would be submerged by it, and the perspicacity of a Gibbon would quail before it. It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict that singular epoch. If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined. He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be considered with a careful curiosity.¹

This was Lytton Strachey's response to the Victorians' overwhelming archival legacy. *Eminent Victorians* (1918) steered the course of modern biography away from 'those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead' (Strachey, p. viii). In the early nineteenth century, Leopold von Ranke's methodological principles of collection, examination and interrogation of documentary evidence established the archive as 'a symbol of truth, plausibility, and authenticity' as well as emphasising objectivity.² Since this led to what Strachey felt to be an over-reliance on documents, he remoulded the genre in the form of biographical sketches with fluidity and character, written with the brevity and eloquence of the academic *éloge* and the individualism of Carlyle's heroic pen portraits.

The nineteenth century is generally seen as the age of biography; Richard Altick defined it as such in his *Lives and Letters* (1960); A. O. J. Cockshut readjusted the timeframe to 1813-1914, with the years 1840-1875 as a 'parabola of prudence and restraint'.³ John Forster's biographical career marginally out-spanned these dates, from 1831 to 1876. Forster wrote and continually revised nine

¹ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1918), p. vii.

² Iggers and Powell, *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, New York; Syracuse University Press, 1990); Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 116-120; and Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth About History* (London: Norton, 1994), pp. 73-76.

³ A.O.J. Cockshut, *Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Collins, 1974), p. 32.

volumes of biographical essays and five 'full' biographies. His biographies and historiographical sketches sold well (in the main) and won him regard as a historian and biographer, but were superseded even in his own lifetime by more rigorous historical research. Despite his interest and lively humour, Forster's moralistic tone and hagiographic style quickly became outmoded. The waning of his reputation as a popular scholarly writer and journalist began soon after his death, leaving anecdotal traces of relationships with his more famous friends; Browning, Carlyle, Lamb, Hunt, Macready, Bulwer Lytton, Dickens.

In 1869, Forster oversaw the bequest of the extensive collection by his friend, the late Alexander Dyce, to the South Kensington Museum. His own library followed in 1876. The Forster archive in what became the Victoria and Albert Museum contains over eighteen thousand printed books, over sixty bound folio volumes of manuscript material, forty-eight oil paintings, and a large number of drawings, prints and sketches. Although the Forsters lived less than a mile from the original site of the Museum, the collection took eighteen months, over the years 1876-77, to transport. The ebullient Forster (1812-76) was a critic, an editor, a literary agent and adviser, and a barrister; he campaigned for the reform of copyright law, and set up a rival charity to the Royal Literary Fund; he held posts as Secretary and then Commissioner to the Lunacy Commission. Forster also haunts Victorian fiction, appearing in Rosina Bulwer's sardonic novel *Cheveley* (1839); his Lincoln's Inn Chambers were the inspiration for Tulkinghorn's chambers in *Bleak House*, and at a downturn in his friendship with Dickens, he was recreated as Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). Both collections are significant in size and in content. More traditionally scholarly and bibliophilic, the Dyce collection, which is often contrasted with Forster's in this study, is known for its rare editions and bindings. The Forster Collection, on the other hand, is a unique example of a working library, the possession of each volume or document contributing to a sense of biographical

authority and ownership. Any rarities picked up by its compiler were gathered in the practical needs of task-specific study.

The ‘aura’ of the archive is a quality which has undergone a fascinated scrutiny in recent years. The critical approach to the archive, driven by Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1994)⁴ has resulted in a cross-disciplinary interweaving of archaeological and psychoanalytical theory and methodology. More recently, Carolyn Steedman presented a fresh analysis of the connections between Victorian notions of the public archive and modern historical narrative; of archival fetishism and the way in which this continues to influence the approaches to archival research by social, literary and book historians.⁵ Like the archive, the genre of biography, with its speculations, hypotheses and envisioning of human drives and experiences, arises out of the desire to present an authoritative, holistic representation of something which cannot be recreated. Forster was seduced by the illusory quality of a past not only recoverable, but re-constructible, via the archive and via the biography.

Books and journalism on bibliomania from the nineteenth century and earlier (the term ‘bibliophile’ was first used in English by Thomas Frognall Dibdin in 1824, according to the *OED*)⁶ describe the sale room, the auction house, the library, the family archive and the bookshop in corporeal terms. Contemporary newspaper accounts of book-sales which tell of the ‘horror’ of the auction room describe the ‘deaths’ of libraries and book-collections, giving an interesting insight into Forster’s wish for his library to remain whole and utilised. This kind of ‘fetishism’ has been described as

⁴ Michel Foucault, *L’Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1969); trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972). Jacques Derrida, *Mal d’Archive: Une Impression Freudienne* (Paris: Galilée, 1995). First given as a lecture at a colloquium in London on 5 June, 1994. Trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

⁶ *The Library Companion*, 2 vols (London: Harding, Triphook and Lepard, 1824).

a passion a little too intimate with the past ... here is a desire to hold, look, touch; captivation by the consecrated object ... The wholeness of the past is lost in the melancholic holding of the [object].⁷

Shanks's description is couched in the language of archival violation, and antiquarians are compared to intruders, voyeurs and rapists.⁸ By Ranke, the document was seen as 'innocent'; he himself alluded to archives as princesses or virgins,⁹ the metaphor in his case implying an agreeable union, unlike the language of sexual violence which has recently been employed by critical thought. His ideal was historical objectivity, 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' ('as it actually was'). Forster sought to achieve this by augmenting the problematic, ever-present voice of the historiographer in favour of the discretion of the curator: via the archive, with its alluring, authoritative, 'unadulterated' source material, he invited the historian to come closer to a truer representation of the past.

Biography is a process of collection and selection, and a form of systematic censorship. The temptation of Forster's archive is to seek within it that which has been excluded from the text. However, the archive is itself a construction, intended not only to be available for education and improvement, but to represent its donor and his biographical subjects to the nation. By comparing the texts of Forster's biographies to his archive, we gain a small glimpse of the process of inclusion and exclusion which characterises and problematises the archive in general. It allows us to see the decisions made over which materials were borrowed, lent and purchased. Although we are still forced to rely on conjecture for material now missing, that may have been cut up and pasted into a manuscript, rejected by Forster, by his executors, by Henry Morley, who originally compiled the

⁷ Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Re-constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 99.

⁸ Terry Eagleton, quoted in Carolyn Steedman, 'The Space of Memory: In an Archive', *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1998), 65-83 (p. 71).

⁹ Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Forster Collection Catalogue, or misplaced on a library shelf, the Forster archive exposes some of the practical ways in which ‘excluded’ material can come to be so.

This study aims to explore the Forster Collection as an extension of Forster’s biographical works. There is considerable documentation relating to many of the biographies, and illustrating how Forster’s methodologies and ethics followed standard nineteenth-century practices. Moving with and beyond the text, it examines the collection as a ‘characteristic specimen’ of a nineteenth-century working library to be examined alongside the histories of Victorian publishing, book-collecting and biography. However, the archive also reflects the singularity of Forster’s career and the individualities of his working processes. These idiosyncrasies are resituated within the bewildering web of social connections which now composes Forster’s reputation.

Forster: A Biography

Frustratingly, Whitwell Elwin, Forster’s friend, executor and the writer of the preface to the first catalogue of the Forster Collection (1888), carried out faithfully the instructions in Forster’s will to destroy any personal documents. There are very few such documents in the Forster Collection; neither can they be found elsewhere. Forster was born in 1812, in Newcastle upon Tyne. There is some confusion among biographers over his paternal family; Richard Renton (1913) claimed that the Forster family records show John Forster’s great-grandfather to be a landowner in Corsenside, Tyndale - a ‘man of some considerable substance’ (these family records were not included in the Forster bequest).¹⁰ However, the family property was divided between the two eldest sons, and Forster’s grandfather, Christopher, received nothing. Christopher’s profession is unrecorded, but his sons, John and Robert (Forster’s uncle and father) became butchers and cattle dealers in Newcastle.

¹⁰ Richard Renton, *John Forster and his Friendships* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1912), p. 4. Renton mistakenly says that John Forster of Corsenside was Forster’s grandfather.

It would appear that Forster, as he grew, was surrounded by communities which encouraged progressive education. The family attended the Unitarian meeting house in Hanover Square, Newcastle, which was at the centre of the city's 'flourishing' Unitarian community.¹¹ The minister was the renowned theologian and author William Turner, who was an active force for social change, not only campaigning within the Newcastle Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and later in the Society for Promoting the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, but also committed to provincial, working class education (*ODNB*). Turner established one of the first Sunday schools in North-East England, which taught not only religious knowledge but reading, writing and arithmetic. He also maintained a good library in the chapel vestry for the adult congregation, and co-founded institutions such as the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, which later became primarily a library, and the Newcastle Mechanics Institute. It is unclear how much the Forster family were involved with the chapel or endorsed Turner's views, but it is possible that his youthful exposure to Turner's teaching may have influenced Forster's later commitment to extend adult literacy and public access to books.

Forster's father struggled financially, and it was Uncle John who paid the 15s. quarterly fee for himself and his elder brother, Christopher, which allowed him to attend Newcastle's Royal Free Grammar School. This was a time of upheaval for the school. Its previous headmaster, Hugh Moises (1722-1806), had reinvigorated a school 'almost entirely deserted of scholars'.¹² The grammar school boys were from a range of backgrounds; the most recent history of the school cites merchants, lawyers, clergy, watchmakers, joiners, cordwainers and tanners among its pupils.¹³

¹¹ James A. Davies, *John Forster: A Literary Life* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), p. 5.

¹² J. Brewster, *A Memoir of the Late Rev. Hugh Moises M. A., head master of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: Walker, 1823), p. 21.

¹³ Gordon Hogg, 'Achievement amidst Decay 1700-1820', *Royal Grammar School, Newcastle Upon Tyne: A History of the School in its Community*, ed. Brian Mains and Anthony Tuck (Stocksfield: Oriel, 1986), p. 54.

However, as the century progressed, and new schools were established offering education geared to the demands of industry and commerce, attendance declined and the social background of the boys became more exclusive, with the school now catering for the sons of Newcastle's larger merchant families. The school offered a traditionally classical education, but 'paid more than lip service to other subjects'; texts in the lower school included Pope, the *Spectator* and Goldsmith's *Abridgement of Roman History*; from the fifth class onwards, subjects such as algebra, hydrostatics, trigonometry, mechanics and geometry were offered (Hogg, p. 64).

Following the appointment of Moises's nephew, Edward, in 1787, the school's reputation began to wane. The curriculum seems to have narrowed, and attendance figures became unstable. In 1820, the year Forster would first have been able to enter (the school registers pre-dating 1870 have not survived), there were only nine pupils.¹⁴ While an enquiry made at this time led to the hiring of new masters and a re-widening of the curriculum to include English grammar, writing, history, geography and mathematics, leading to an increase in pupil numbers to eighty by 1827, this was a troubled and uncertain time for the school.¹⁵

Despite this, Forster felt himself to have received 'an excellent preliminary education'.¹⁶ He excelled in mathematics and the classics, and became known, his cousin wrote, as one who had 'the power to turn desirable acquaintances into friends' (Renton, p. 5). He also became one of Moises's favourite pupils, and was made head boy. During his time at the Royal Free Grammar School, he cultivated friendships in the local literary and dramatic social circles, such as William Mitchell, the publisher of the *Newcastle Magazine*. In the auxiliary section of the Forster Collection, in which

¹⁴ Brian Mains, 'Uncertain Progress 1820-1888), *Royal Grammar School, Newcastle Upon Tyne: A History of the School in its Community*, ed. Brian Mains and Anthony Tuck (Stocksfield: Oriel, 1986), p. 71.

¹⁵ Eneas Mackenzie, 'Institutions for Education: The Royal Free Grammar School', *Historical Account of Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Including the Borough of Gateshead* (1827), pp. 415-443. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43363>. Date accessed: 17 September 2009.

¹⁶ W. L. Harle, 'John Forster: A Sketch', *Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend*, vol II (1888), p. 50.

are kept the documents added by or donated to the museum since the original bequest, is Forster's interleaved and annotated dramatisation of *Ali Baba or the Forty Thieves*, written at the age of fourteen. There is also the manuscript of *Charles at Tunbridge or the Cavalier of Wildinghurst*, which was written in June 1827 and performed at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle on 2 May 1828. It is a crudely constructed melodrama which explores his interest in the history of the Revolution and Restoration, and demonstrates the influence of Scott's novels, both of these would characterise his later historiography.

In September 1828, Forster spent a month at Cambridge, again financed by his Uncle. Forster himself later wrote:

In London the mere merchant and the mere politician have been removed from the liberalising influence of letters; and at Oxford and Cambridge the man of letters, kept apart from the real business of life, has declined into the cloistered bookworm ... Most of the latter class who may have felt a genuine aspiration to mix in the struggles of active life, and participate in, or ameliorate, the common destinies of their kind, have been obliged to desert the English Universities at an early period of life.¹⁷

His biographers have suggested several reasons why he may have left; Forster admitted that 'his expences [sic], were 'very great',¹⁸ leading Harle, a Newcastle journalist, to draw the implication that they were too great for Uncle John (Harle, p. 51). Whitwell Elwin believed that Forster's interest in modern rather than ancient learning led him to London;¹⁹ James Davies believed that Forster may have been influenced by the fact that Dissenters could not take degrees (Davies, p. 8).

Instead, he enrolled in the non-sectarian London University as a student in Andrew Amos's law class. He remained there for two academic years but took no degree; the university did not grant degrees until 1836. Forster's interest in literature and Reform deepened during his studies, finding vent through his friendship with classmates James Emerson Tennant and James Whiteside,

¹⁷ 'Encouragement of Literature by the State', *Examiner*, 5 January 1850, p. 2.

¹⁸ Forster to Mrs Leigh Hunt, BL. Add. MS 38109, f. 93 [1830].

¹⁹ 'John Forster', *Forster Collection: A Catalogue of the Printed Books* (London: 1893), p. viii.

who entered Thomas Chitty's chambers along with Forster in 1830, and who later found positions as Governor of Ceylon and Chief Justice of Ireland, respectively. Thomas Chitty was a successful special pleader, who wrote a number of textbooks, at a time of judicial reform in the system of pleading. An 'immense number' of eminent lawyers passed through his chambers as trainees (*ODNB*). It seems that Forster showed great potential as a practical lawyer, and regularly acted himself for the 'distinguished special pleader';²⁰ and Chitty was disappointed in Forster's ultimate rejection of a career as a lawyer (Renton, p. 14). Forster's time with Chitty was short, although their friendship continued.²¹

In 1832, Forster left his traineeship to pursue a literary career. Literature and politics had been constant distractions throughout his studies and short training period. Forster and his classmates founded the *London University Magazine*, and with Whiteside he 'devoured the Monthly Magazines' (Davies, p. 10). At Henry Colburn's literary receptions in Bryanston Square, he met his future wife, Eliza, and probably Leigh Hunt, with whom he became firm friends (Renton, p. 158).

Forster's creative ambitions were short-lived. The *Englishman's Magazine* published his short story 'Prodigious!', and he privately printed a volume of verse, *Rhyme and Reason*, in 1832. These adolescent poems were heavily influenced by Wordsworth and Byron, Gray, Crabbe and Cowper, and reflect Forster's interest in history (Davies, p. 11). Forster was not averse to sending scribbles to friends, such as the 'congratulatory verses' sent to Walter Savage Landor in 1846 following the second edition of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, which he had co-edited. The archive contains a run of the *Englishman's Magazine*, and therefore 'Prodigious!', but *Rhyme and Reason* is notably absent.

²⁰ FC MS, vol xix. Newspaper cutting from the *Globe*, 5 January 1856.

²¹ Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, *John Forster, by one of His Friends* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1903), p. 74.

Leaving fiction and poetry behind, Forster turned his hand to reviewing in the *New Monthly Magazine* and William Mitchell's *Newcastle Magazine*,²² which also accepted an article from James Emerson Tennant, on Forster's suggestion (Harle, p. 51). His interest in biography as a means of retelling history and of re-examining contemporary political problems also began to take form. Forster at that time began collecting material for what was to become, nearly twenty years later, *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* (Davies, p. 11). His play *Charles at Tunbridge* had already indicated his interest in Commonwealth history and its potential as a context through which to explore the political issues which impassioned him. He now began to plan a biography of Oliver Cromwell; to Forster's lodgings at 4, Burton Street, St Pancras, Tennant wrote to ask 'How goes on Cromwell? Have you made a commencement yet?'²³

The *Englishman's Magazine* (April-October 1831) was Edward Moxon's first periodical venture, following his departure from Longman only the previous year. The monthly journal was edited by the Irish Poet, William Kennedy, and the Scottish Novelist, Leitch Ritchie. Despite its short run, it featured an impressive host of writers, including Lamb, Hunt, Clare, Hood and Tennyson. In the first issue (April 1831), a composition entitled 'Our Early Patriots' honoured the Wordsworthian spirit of the journal by opening with the sonnet, 'Great men have been among us'. It served as an introduction to three further essays on reformist Parliamentarians from the seventeenth century, John Pym, Henry Vane and John Eliot, which appeared between April and September.²⁴

At the present time it may not be uninteresting to turn aside for a while from the political strife in which our contemporaries are engaged, and consider attentively the character of these 'first patriots,' who vindicated the rights of Englishmen in an age far removed from our own, though not altogether dissimilar in the great interests which divided it. ('Our Early Patriots', p. 351)

²² 'Remarks on two of the annuals', *Newcastle Magazine*, January 1829, pp. 27-38.

²³ Henry Morley, *A Handbook to the Dyce and Forster Collections* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1880), p. 59.

²⁴ 'Our Early Patriots', *Englishman's Magazine*, (April-August 1831), pp. 351-356; 'Our Early Patriots; John Pym', *ibid.*, pp. 499-512; 'Our Early Patriots; Sir John Eliot', *ibid.*, pp. 623-637; 'Sir Henry Vane's Scheme of Parliamentary Reform', *ibid.*, II (September 1831), pp. 1-13.

Even before he left a promising and comparatively secure career in the law, Forster showed a literary inclination to biography; Henry Morley said it was ‘his nature to see history most clearly through the lives of men’ (Morley, p. 59).

The fervour with which Forster discussed reform with Tennant, Whiteside and his tutor, Andrew Amos, characterised his writing.²⁵ This later won him the admiration of Carlyle; in the meantime, the ‘striking... well written’ sketches were acclaimed and reprinted in *The Times*.²⁶ As a result, Dionysius Lardner, a former Professor of London University, commissioned from the young historiographer a number of sketches of ‘Eminent British Statesmen’. Alongside Scott, Southey and Thomas Moore, Forster was one of the earliest contributors to the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, described on the title pages of each work as ‘conducted by the Rev. Dionysius Lardner... assisted by eminent literary and scientific men’.²⁷

Lives of Eminent British Statesmen was published during 1836-9, by which time Forster had firmly established a new career as dramatic critic at the *Examiner*. His journalistic career had a troubled start. After a brief period in 1832 as dramatic editor at the *True Sun*, he was given the editorship of Moxon’s *Reflector*, which collapsed after only three issues. Almost immediately, however, the post of ‘Theatrical Examiner’ was offered by Albany Fonblanque. It is likely that Leigh Hunt was influential in securing both positions; he was a founder of what was still known as ‘Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner*’, and was at that time the editor of the *True Sun*. Earlier in 1832, Forster had arranged for the publication of Hunt’s *Christianism* with Moxon, as well as securing him a

²⁵Eliza Forster to Whitwell Elwin, 18 December 1879, John Forster Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Forster to Tennant, 13 April 1851, *ibid.*

²⁶ ‘John Pym’, *Times*, 9 July 1831, p.3; ‘Sir Henry Vane’s Scheme of Parliamentary Reform’, *ibid.*, 5 September 1831, p. 7.

²⁷ Walter Scott, *Scotland*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1830); Robert Southey, *Lives of the British Admirals*, ‘continued by Robert Bell’, 5 vols (London: Longman, 1832); Thomas Moore, *Ireland*, 4 vols (London: 1835-46).

grant from the Royal Literary Fund. The two remained friends, and Forster, as well as correcting Hunt's proofs, provided him with regular, influential reviews.

Forster proved a shrewd and talented reviewer. Until he left the *Examiner* in 1855, he entrenched himself firmly within the literary world. Forster's reputation has dwindled, partly because of the destruction of most of his personal documentation. His executors were ruthlessly thorough, and very few letters or related documents have survived. Elwin followed zealously the instructions in Forster's will, that 'all letter coming under the denomination of merely private correspondence shall at once be destroyed'. Only those 'which derive interest from the reputation or position of the writers' were to be preserved.

The lack of personal correspondence or other documentation hides much that a biographer might otherwise be tempted to glean or surmise. Even Eliza's presence is mitigated – she left all her own books to her nieces. Forster's passbooks from 1838 to 1877, with a rough inventory of the books, letters and manuscripts in Palace Gate in 1864 as well as a few legal documents, were kept in the Collection. As a personality, he appeared abundantly, and often to his disadvantage, in the memoirs and sketches, biographical and autobiographical, of his contemporaries. It is perhaps for this reason that biographies of Forster focus almost exclusively on his friendships with the social commentators, poets, painters, novelists and actors who shaped the arts in the nineteenth century.

The representations of Forster in the memoirs and letters of his contemporaries are of a jovial, loud man; a generous host, fond of good food and wine; with a quick temper and an overbearing nature; sensitive and fiercely loyal. Thackeray wrote to Tennant, in 1847:

Forster is the greatest man I know. Great and Beneficent like a Superior Power – He is the Chief of the Daily News and conducts it with great ability I think and whenever anybody is in a scrape we all fly to him for refuge. He is omniscient and works miracles ... His bath is a miracle too – he gets into it every morning and he is so stout and the bath not much bigger

than a Biddy (excuse the expression). We are going to have him in a statue at Madame Tussauds.²⁸

It should be noted that Forster's friendship with Thackeray was tempestuous. His tone was occasionally seen as 'supercilious', as Macready noted to himself in 1840, and his eagerness to assume the role of patron often attracted animosity.²⁹ J. P. Collier wrote in 1846 of the Shakespeare-like character of 'patron – the butcher's son who had come to London so poor and pitiable' (Davies, p. 83). Macready had perceived, however, that his friend's condescension, later characterised by Dickens as pomposity, arose from a sense of social unease. After his death, Eliza 'earnestly' entreated Elwin to remove a reference from his memorial sketch, in which John's father was described as a 'grazier' and a 'dealer in cattle'. 'Even if it is true,' she asked, 'what need or compulsion to mention it?' (Renton, p. 110).

The Examiner Years

It was at this time that Forster cultivated the friendships which defined his reputation. In 1834, he moved into 58, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Here he entertained a social circle which included Thackeray, Bulwer Lytton, Browning, Carlyle, Lamb, Macready, Landor and Dickens. Legal training as well as a deep and intelligent love of literature made Forster irresistible as an informal agent for many actors and writers; and on a more official footing, he held the position of literary adviser to Chapman and Hall for twenty-five years (1836-1861). The firm purchased the *Foreign Quarterly Review* from Black and Armstrong in 1841, and Forster was given the editorship from 1842 to 1843; within a few months of resigning this post, he was in the process of setting up the *Daily News* with Dickens. Forster took up the editorship of this after Dickens's emotional departure in February 1846.

²⁸*The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. Gordon Ray, 4 vols (London: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945-46) II, 252-253.

²⁹ W. C. Macready, *Diaries*, ed. W. Toynbee, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912), II, p.75.

When Fonblanque resigned as editor of the *Examiner* in 1847, Forster seemed a natural replacement. The position provided a comfortable salary of £500 per year, and his biographical work on Goldsmith also came to fruition when the popular *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* was published in 1848. As will be seen in chapter three, *Goldsmith* was largely a manifesto of the Guild of Literature and Art. It was published in six editions over twenty-five years, in various formats and at varying prices.

The years 1855-6 saw Forster resign from the *Examiner* and take up a secretarial post in the Lunacy Commission. At this time he began work for John Murray on a projected life of Jonathan Swift, and Murray published his *Historical and Biographical Essays* (1858; revised and enlarged edn. 1860); *The Arrest of the Five Members by Charles I* (1860) and *The Debates on the Grand Remonstrance, November and December, 1641* (1860). In 1856, Forster married Eliza Colburn, the widow of Henry Colburn, and the couple moved into 46, Montague Square while work began on Palace Gate, Kensington; they took up residence there in 1863. Apart from a brief and fruitless courtship with Laetitia Elizabeth Landon in 1833, Forster had seemed a confirmed bachelor, and the engagement came as a shock to his friends. ‘I have the most prodigious, overwhelming, crushing, astounding, blinding, deafening, pulverizing scarifying secret, of which Forster is the hero ...’ Dickens wrote to his sister-in-law. He was suffering at home with a cold on the morning of Tuesday 11 March, 1856, when Forster called by to share his news; on hearing it, he wrote to his sister-in-law that he ‘lay down flat, as if an Engine and Tender had fallen upon me’.³⁰

The 1851 census puts Eliza Forster’s birth-date at around 1817, in the parish of St James, Piccadilly. At the age of twenty-four, she married the publisher Henry Colburn. By some dubious

³⁰ Dickens to Georgina Hogarth, 11 March 1856. *The Letters of Charles Dickens; Pilgrim Edition*, ed. Madeleine House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965-2002), VIII, p. 70.

business practices and astute choices in three-volume novelists,³¹ Colburn's firm was one of the few publishers not only to have weathered 1826's financial 'crash' in the book trade, but to have expanded (*ODNB*). When he died on 16 August 1855, Colburn left £35,000 and several copyrights of lasting value.³² The stock and copyrights were auctioned on 26 May 1857, increasing Eliza's dowry by more than £14,000.³³ As John Sutherland has suggested, the auction indicates that Colburn's will prevented the copyrights from passing to Eliza's successive husband. Forster himself purchased the correspondence of David Garrick, as well as the copyrights of Burke's *Peerage* and, as a gift to his wife, the Stricklands' *Lives of the Queens of England*.³⁴

Eliza was thirty-nine at the time of her marriage to John. They were married by Whitwell Elwin, at All Saints Church, Upper Norwood, on 24 September 1856, and spent a two-month honeymoon in Ambleside (*ODNB*). Renton described Eliza as the 'most charming, the sweetest-natured woman it is possible to conceive. Petite, dainty in form and feature, and shrewd beyond the average woman of her day ...' (Renton, p. 94). I have been unable to find much information about Richard Renton; in the 1901 census, at the age of 54, he is listed a 'journalist, novelist and author', and he refers to himself as one of the 'average men of letters' (Renton, p. 79). His qualifications as a biographer are rather dubious; he describes a brief, star-struck brush in the park with Carlyle (p. 46), and claims that a favourite aunt was 'well-known to Dickens' (p. 86). He also claimed to have some acquaintance with the Colburns:

Her calls at our house were certainly not frequent; confined mainly to when she was Mrs Colburn, and when I was quite a lad; but I distinctly remember how sweet and nice she was to my dear mother, who, at that time, and to the end of her life, was practically an invalid. In those days, Christmas gifts were a great institution ... we children were always agog with excitement as Christmastide approached, for we knew that Mrs. Colburn would not forget us, as, indeed, she never did. But with her second marriage the old state of things altered

³¹ John Sutherland, 'Henry Colburn, Publisher', *Publishing History*, 19 (1986), pp. 59-84.

³² Michael Sadleir, *XIX Century Fiction*, 2 vols (Constable: California University Press, 1951), II, p. 114.

³³ *Notes and Queries*, 2nd Series, Vol III (1857), p. 458.

³⁴ Sutherland, p. 79. John Burke, *A General and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826); Agnes and Elizabeth Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*, 12 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1840-48).

altogether, presents, visits – all communication, in fact – vanishing like an Arabian Night's Dream. John Forster was, it must be confessed, an exacting husband, a despot in his own house, one whose 'word was law' for all who were in any way dependent upon him. (Renton, p. 114)

His description of her is confirmed by both Elwin and Fitzgerald, but the marriage, though childless, was generally considered a success. Eliza's letters to the Landor family on her husband's behalf, for example, seem to show her as a gentle, friendly sort of person, full of care for her (often complaining) husband.

Forster's friends, though, were initially concerned for the quiet Eliza.

By God Sir the depreciation that has taken place in that woman is fearful! She has no blood Sir in her body - no color - no voice - is all scrunched and squeezed together - and seems to me in deep affliction - while Forster Sir is rampant and raging, and presenting a contrast beneath which you sink into the dust. She *may* come round again - *may* get fat - *may* get cheerful - *may* get a voice to articulate with, but by the blessed Star of Morning Sir she is now a sight to behold!³⁵

The above description by Maclise was repeated by Dickens to his wife during Forster and Eliza's engagement. Jane Carlyle's letters, however, indicate that she and Eliza established a close friendship:

I expect you to return without that tired look which I understand so well! and [sic] with your eyes as bright as the[y] are by nature. And then I shall expect you to drive very often to Cheyne Row, and let us try to Cheer one another up a bit. Hang it! Why mightnt [sic] we go sometimes with a mutual carpet bag, and spend a day and night at some way-side Inn, when we feel to need 'a change' from our own comfortable homes, and men-of-genius Husbands!³⁶

Jane, notwithstanding her great affection for 'Fuzboz', felt a certain affinity for his apparently long-suffering wife.

Life as a Lunacy Commissioner

In 1861 Bryan Procter (also known as the poet Barry Cornwall) resigned as one of the Government's twenty National Lunacy Commissioners. Forster, for years a close friend of Procter,

³⁵ Charles Dickens to Catherine Dickens, 9 May 1856, *Letters*, VIII, p. 114.

³⁶ Jane Carlyle to Eliza Forster, 30 October 1862. MS National Library of Scotland. Quoted in Rosemary Ashton, *Thomas and Jane Carlyle: Portrait of a Marriage* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002), pp. 423-4.

as their correspondence in the Forster Archive attests, had been Secretary to the Commission for six years, and he now took on Procter's role at an annual salary of £1,500. The impressive Palace Gate House, with its magnificent galleried library, was soon completed, and the Forsters took up residence in 1863.

The two-volume *Sir John Eliot* was published the following year. Almost immediately, projected lives of Strafford and Swift were put on hold when Walter Savage Landor died, and Forster was left to supervise an edition of *Imaginary Conversations*, and to write his friend's biography. In 1870, the same thing happened again when Dickens died unexpectedly, and a grieving Forster was obliged to wade through masses of personal correspondence and manuscript material. In 1871, in the face of this mountainous task and suffering badly from bronchitis and rheumatism, Forster resigned from the Lunacy Commission. In the final years of his life, he was occupied with revisions to *Dickens* and *Landor*; he also finally had the opportunity to work on his biography of Jonathan Swift. This was never finished. The first volume was published only a few months before his death, in 1876.

Henry Cole and the South Kensington Museum

The motives for Forster's bequest can only be surmised. His Unitarian upbringing may indeed have sown the seeds of an interest in widening public education, which appears to have borne fruit in his writings, and in public initiatives such as the lending library scheme. Since this study is concerned with the origins of the Forster archive as a V&A collection, it may be helpful to examine briefly here the establishment of the South Kensington Museum, and the views of its founder, Henry Cole.

The National Art Library became the repository for Henry Cole's correspondence, diaries and other documentation relating to his involvement with the development of the South Kensington

Estate. Despite the volume of material contained in the Library, a biography of Cole has not yet been written. His diaries were used in Ann Cooper's ostensibly biographical evaluation of Cole's political career and its fundamental contribution to South Kensington's evolution as a centre of learning. To a biographer, Cole's archives offer similar problems to the Forster Collection; Cole's public persona is the focus. His diaries are perfunctorily written and give fond but cursory mentions to time spent with his wife and children, their moods and health; this is the most intimate information left by Cole.

Cole was an interesting figure in the nineteenth-century debate on the State's involvement in public education. He was born in Bath in 1808, and educated at Christ's Hospital School from 1817 to 1823 (*ODNB*), a time when the school was flourishing under the headship of Arthur Trollope. On leaving, Cole took up employment as a clerk to Francis Palgrave, a sub-commissioner at the Record Commission. He found lodgings in the home of Thomas Love Peacock, whose son was a colleague of Cole's. Here he established friendships with writers and artists, in particular with the 'philosophical radicals' John Stuart Mill and Charles Buller. Mill's ideas were to influence Cole's vision for State sponsorship of public education through the institutions of South Kensington; he cited in a public address in 1857 Mill's view that 'a help in education is help towards doing without help, and is favourable to a spirit of independence'.³⁷

The record commission and the state of the public records were under scrutiny at this time. Following a disagreement with his employer over his salary, Cole attempted to expose the jobbery and corruption in the record commission in a series of articles, two of which were published in Fonblanque's *Examiner*. He was removed from his post, but as a result of a parliamentary enquiry led by Buller, was cleared of all imputations and restored to his position in 1837. The enquiry

³⁷ Henry Cole, *The Functions of the Science and Art Department* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1857), p. 9.

resulted in the Public Record Office Act of 1838, which classified government records and gave control of them to the Master of the Rolls. The records were to be curated by a Deputy Keeper and a number of Assistant Keepers, one of whom, from 1836, was Cole.

Cole established a reputation as an efficient and visionary civil servant during his time at the Record Commission. However, he earned a greater income during this time as a contributor to the *Examiner* and *Railway Chronicle*. The editor, John Scott Russell, introduced Cole into the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Sciences and Manufactures (RSA) in 1845; 'in this society Cole found the like-minded people with whom he could work to achieve reforms and improvements in almost any aspect of life, from sewage to education, industrial design to army reform' (*ODNB*).

Cooper also claims that it was Cole's involvement with the RSA which spring-boarded him into a central position on the organising committee of the 1851 Great Exhibition. It may also have been that Cole's role in the transitional government Department of Practical Art propelled him to this position; Cole filled the roles of: superintendent of general management (1852-3); joint secretary at the Department of Science and Art (1853-5); inspector general (1855-7) and at the South Kensington Museum as general superintendent (1857-73). A timeline of the South Kensington Museum can be found at the end of this chapter.

As might be expected, Cole's views on education evolved throughout his career. In terms of the teaching of science, art and design to the artisan, his response to the Samuelson Committee, set up in 1868 'to enquire into the provisions for giving instruction in theoretical and applied science to the industrial classes', was that the Department would support the teaching of 'principles' but not specific trades; the aim was to broaden the mind of the working man, not to teach him his trade (Cooper, pp. 144-145).

On 13 August 1851, Cole wrote in his diary that he had been summoned by Prince Albert and made privy to Albert's scheme of buying land almost opposite the exhibition site, south of Kensington Road, and the bringing together on that site of the major artistic and scientific societies.³⁸ In 1851, the Great Exhibition Commission purchased land on Kensington Gore in order to establish a comprehensive cultural centre - a permanent home for the Department of Practical Art, the South Kensington Museum, and other bodies which would 'achieve their central aim of bringing science and art to bear on industry'.³⁹ Following the Great Exhibition of 1851, many of the Exhibition 'treasures' were stored, open to public view, in Marlborough House. This arrangement was superintended by Cole and advertised as a step towards a 'Metropolitan Museum of Practical Art, for the benefit and instruction of all our art workmen throughout the Empire'.⁴⁰

In 1857, the first permanent building on the site of the South Kensington Museum was opened. It was erected to the north of a series of iron constructions, popularly ridiculed as the 'Brompton Boilers', which were designed temporarily to house the collections of the School of Design and the Government purchases from the Great Exhibition. Inside, the collection of John Sheepshanks (1787-1863) was displayed, a wealthy cloth merchant from Leeds. This was the only large-scale collection of contemporary British Art, mainly genre paintings and largely commissioned directly from artists including Turner, Constable, Edwin Landseer, William Mulready, C. R. Leslie, Clarkson Stanfield and David Wilkie.

The only comparable collection of this time was that of Robert Vernon (1774/5-1849), whose acumen had expanded his father's hackney-man business and invested the profits in modern art and

³⁸ Ann Cooper, *For the public Good: Henry Cole, his circle and the development of the South Kensington Estate* (PhD Thesis, Open University, submitted 30 June 1992), p. 84.

³⁹ F. H. W. Shepherd (General Editor), 'South Kensington and the Science and Art Department', *Survey of London: volume 38: South Kensington Museums Area* (1975), pp. 74-96. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=47518> Date accessed: 05 October 2009.

⁴⁰ 'New Museum of Practical Art', *Daily News*, 19 May 1852, p. 5.

old masters. A selection from Vernon's works was made by the National Gallery in 1847, where it was 'squeezed into the lower floor' before being transferred to Marlborough House in 1850 and to South Kensington in 1859 (*ODNB*). Both Vernon and Sheepshanks had desired their collections to form the nucleus of a public collection of British Art. Although the Sheepshanks Collection has remained in its entirety at the Victoria and Albert Museum, most of Vernon's donation is now stored at the Tate Gallery; six pieces can now be found at the National Portrait Gallery, and nine have perished.

'Everything has been done to render the new Museum a source of instruction and amusement to all classes alike,' one journalist wrote, following a royal visit, 'the exigencies of time being taken into consideration, as well as the exigencies of the pocket'.⁴¹ On 'Student's days', which were held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, admission was 6*d.*, otherwise, entry was free. Opening hours were Monday to Saturday, 10am to 4pm, re-opening on Mondays and Thursdays from 7pm to 10pm ; and following prolonged controversy over the opening of national institutions on the Sabbath, the Museum's first Sunday opening was on Sunday 6 April 1896.⁴² Sheepshanks had specified that his Collection was to be

... placed in a gallery in an open and airy situation, possessing the quiet necessary to the study and enjoyment of works of Art, and free from the inconveniences and dirt of the main thoroughfares of the metropolis.⁴³

The 'airiness' sought after by Sheepshanks was achieved by a series of skylights in the roof, although the gallery was reported to be crowded after dusk, when it was lit by gaslight to 'splendid effect' (*ibid.*). Simon Eliot's studies of book prices have shown that the cost of lighting added to the initial outlay for a book, and was a factor in preventing many people from being able to afford

⁴¹'The South Kensington Museum', *The Era*, 28 June 1857, p. 10.

⁴²J. F. D. Donnelly, Science and Art Department, South Kensington Museum, to *The Times*, 31 March 1896; published 1 April 1896, p. 10.

⁴³Sheepshanks's deed of gift, *National Gallery of British Art, Victoria and Albert Museum: Abridged Catalogue of Oil Paintings by British Artists and Foreigners Working in Great Britain* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1908), p. vii.

all but the most ephemeral works.⁴⁴ South Kensington's investment in this 'splendid' gaslight shows the same commitment to enabling the working classes to access art and literature as the publishers of home library serials (see chapter one).

Cole's diaries do not record any meeting with Alexander Dyce, who was the first donor of a significant contribution to the library, and they imply only a superficial acquaintance with Forster. In 1850, they shared breakfast to discuss a 'working classes committee'; in 1851 they met at a dinner held by Joseph Paxton, the designer of the Crystal Palace.⁴⁵ They met three times in 1869 to discuss Dyce's bequest; Forster called the first meeting only three months before Dyce's death, to ask if the South Kensington Museum would be amenable to receiving Dyce's library. He also asked for information on the conditions of Sheepshanks's donation.⁴⁶ Alexander Dyce's bequest of 1869 was, Forster himself wrote, 'drawn up on the plan of Mr. Sheepshanks's gift of pictures'.⁴⁷

The Dyce Collection

It is unclear how Dyce and Forster first met. R. J. Schrader implies that they were introduced by the novelist Harrison Ainsworth; Forster and Ainsworth had been friends since 1834,⁴⁸ and Dyce first visited Forster in 1837.⁴⁹ Forster was a frequent visitor to the Gray's Inn chambers which Dyce inhabited until 1859,

where the books that lined every wall had overflowed into all the nooks and crannies in the passages; where, within deal chests and drawers of a marvellous ungainliness, were concealed drawings and engravings of supreme beauty by the earliest and rarest masters; and where treasures of editions that would have deprived a bibliomaniac of his last remaining vestige of reason, were hidden away from all eyes, including his own. He went often to the British

⁴⁴ Simon Eliot, '“Never Mind the Value, What about the Price?”; or, How much did *Marmion* cost St. John Rivers?' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56 (September 2001), pp. 170-178.

⁴⁵ Henry Cole Diaries, National Art Library; Tuesday 4 June 1850 (45.C.112; 4.VI); Thursday 17 July 1851 (45.C. 113; 17.VII).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Tuesday 23 February 1869 (45.C.123; 28.X).

⁴⁷ *Dyce Collection: A Catalogue of the Printed Books and Manuscripts bequeathed by the Reverend Alexander Dyce* (London: HMSO, 1875), p. xxiii.

⁴⁸ John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872-4), II, p. 77.

⁴⁹ *The Reminiscences of Alexander Dyce*, ed. R. J. Schrader (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 8.

Museum to consult a rare book, which it would have taken him too much time to dig out of his own recesses. (*Catalogue to the Dyce Collection*, pp. xvi-xvii)

The spaces in which the two libraries were gradually constructed would seem to be quite different. Matthew Ward's portrait of Forster in his library at 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields shows Forster 'at work' in 1850 (Plate 1), with a remarkably tidy desk and books at hand. The drawing of the galleried library at Palace Gate by John Watkins (Plate 2) shows a similarly orderly layout on a grander scale. Journalistic and lunacy commission commitments, rather than idiosyncratic organisation, kept Forster from the British Museum, as will be seen in the chapters relating to Forster's historiography.

Following Dyce's death in 1869, Forster completed the third edition of the works of Shakespeare; he also acted as Dyce's executor, reminding South Kensington, after the bequest had been catalogued and handed over, of their duty to provide a public room or gallery for the collection. The Dyce Collection contains an impressive collection of miniatures and watercolours, including some fine examples by Cozens and Gainsborough, and one of the finest collections of drawings to enter the museum.⁵⁰ He also donated over fourteen thousand books. Dyce, unlike Forster, paid special attention and gave great care to both text and bindings. As a result, while the content of the archive centres on Dyce's fields of study, these fields are represented by an impressive quantity of exceptional first and rare editions.

Dyce was a well-reputed editor of Elizabethan and Restoration drama, and his edition of Shakespeare⁵¹ became widely accepted as the most authoritative text then available (*ODNB*). While the bequest itself was largely ignored by the press, the First Folio (1623) and rare quartos of

⁵⁰ Anna Somers Cocks, *The Victoria and Albert Museum: The Making of the Collection* (Leicester: Windward, 1980), p. 156.

⁵¹ *The Works of William Shakespeare, the text revised by the Rev. A. Dyce*, 6 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857); rev. edn. 9 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1863-7).

individual plays⁵² were prized by the Museum, and noted in the Catalogue as ‘a highly interesting and valuable portion of the library’ (*Handbook to the Dyce and Forster Collections*, p. 24); they were selected, for example, for Queen Victoria to look over on a visit in 1870.⁵³ Dyce produced the first collected editions of both John Webster and Thomas Middleton, and the collection contains a good number of first editions for both dramatists. There are also exceptional editions of the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, John Ford and Robert Greene, also edited by Dyce.⁵⁴ In terms of the volumes for the Aldine Edition of the British Poets, which Dyce edited, including Beattie (1831), Pope (1831), Shakespeare (1832) and Akenside (1835), these are all well-represented.

The short biographical sketch of Dyce which prefaced the Catalogue of the Dyce Collection, from which I have quoted above, is also useful in determining Forster’s public motives for leaving his own library to the Museum:

Dyce’s books it had been his intention to bequeath to the Bodleian; but it was suggested that they ought rather to be placed, with the rest of his collections, where they would be within reach of a wider world of students. This appeared to satisfy a wish he himself had strongly indulged, that they should be kept together not merely as a memorial of the employments and enjoyments of his own life, but as a means of helping others engaged in like pursuits; and the South Kensington Museum was chosen to receive them. (*Dyce Catalogue*, p. xxiii)

Forster, as far as is known, had never considered leaving his books to the Bodleian. In 1859, he had offered his collection of literary manuscripts, along with an endowment of £10,000, to the Royal Literary Fund, as an encouragement to accept a number of proposed reforms. The Fund, opposed to these reforms and being aware of the donation’s provenance, refused. The entire collection was thus passed to the South Kensington Museum, as a practical memorial.

⁵² *Merchant of Venice*, 1600, 1st edn.; *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1600, 1st edn.; *Henry V*, 1608, 3rd edn.; *Troilus and Cressida*, 1609, 1st edn.; *Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1619, 2nd edn.; *Othello*, 1622, 1st edn.; and 1639, 2nd edn.; *Hamlet*, 1611, 3rd edn.; *Loves Labours Lost*, 1631, 3rd edn.

⁵³ ‘Visit of the Queen to South Kensington’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 27 March 1870, p. 6.

⁵⁴ John Webster, *Works*, 4 vols (London: Pickering, 1830); Thomas Middleton, *Works*, 5 vols (London: Lumley, 1840); Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Works*, 11 vols (London: Moxon, 1843–46); Robert Greene, *Works*, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1831); John Ford, *Works*, 3 vols (London: Murray, 1869). This was a revision of William Gifford’s 1827 edition.

Renton wrote that it was at Forster's suggestion that Dyce left his library to South Kensington (Renton, p. 202). This assumption is easily drawn from Forster's biographical sketch; the terms, and therefore presumably the ideological aims, of the bequests are virtually identical. A careful selection of letters, chosen and earmarked, were to be bound, 'for reference, not for publication,' with the order that everything else be destroyed. Forster left his paintings and manuscripts to the Department of Science and Art at the South Kensington Museum (now the National Art Library at the V&A) with the proviso that they were to have their own separate room or gallery, that they always be open and accessible, and that no part should ever be sold. If they were unable to comply, the literary works were to go to the British Museum, and the paintings to the National Gallery, or, in Dyce's case, the entire donation would transfer to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

An unlabelled newspaper cutting in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum claims that Forster had been compiling a catalogue of his bookshelves and that he was on the letter 'T' at the time of his death.⁵⁵ This may have been an extension of the preliminary lists made in 1864, in the assortment of banking passbooks later given by Eliza;⁵⁶ it was completed by Forster's secretary, Henry Rawlins, and appears to have been finished by 1879.

Under the terms of Forster's will, his library and sifted papers were the property of his wife until her death. Eliza, however, gave over the bequest immediately. Rawlins wrote that 'she lives only for one thing, the realisation of Mr Forster's wishes as to the library at S. K.'⁵⁷ Eliza often augmented the collection with items, retaining for herself the remains of Forster's diary and 'hundreds of letters'. She refused access to the papers even to Elwin, who was thus unable to use them in his memoir, and to Charles Kent, who wrote Forster's entry in the *DNB* (Davies, p. 261). It may be that an awareness of Forster's sense of social inferiority caused Elwin to remove his

⁵⁵ Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, MA/1/D2023/3.

⁵⁶ Forster and Dyce Auxiliary Collection, FD.5 Box.

⁵⁷ Rawlins to Elwin, 15 December 1879, John Forster Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

reference to the Forster family's trade as cattle dealers, and Eliza to maintain her protective uncooperativeness.

In 1851, Forster wrote to an unknown correspondent:

I do not know whom I have the pleasure of addressing, but I thank you for the courtesy which at least makes me cognizant of the notice with which you propose to favour me.

You will permit me to say, however, that I am too little aware of any such notice to have the desire to dictate its terms. In so far as my public writings are concerned they are the property of whomever it may please to be interested in them; but I cannot help thinking that anything in the shape of assumed private details concerning one whose intercourse with the public has been almost wholly impersonal - can as little be expected to prove attractive, as to fail with any claim to authenticity from one to whom I must presume myself - by the tenor of the printed paragraph sent to me - to be wholly unknown.

What earthly concern can the public have in the fact that I was born nine and thirty years ago, or that such and such gentlemen are among the list of my private friends.

I would therefore beg of you to omit all such details - and, if you still think it necessary to introduce me in your book, to mention me (introducing no other name than my own) simply as one who has written the books already named by you (& which I do not wish to be characterized in any way) who has written in the Examiner for 18 years and for the last 5 of those years has been, as he still continues, its sole Editor - who was, as you state, Editor of the Daily News for the first 10 months of its existence and who, during this long service to journalism, has contributed also not inconsiderably to the Edinburgh Review, the Foreign Quarterly Review (of which, nine years ago, he was Editor for 4 years), and other periodical publications.

I have written in much haste, but I beg you to believe me
Your obed. Sert.
John Forster⁵⁸

The letter was written on 30 December 1851, possibly to the editor of the biographical dictionary *Men of the Time*.⁵⁹ If so, the recipient appears to have heeded the letter, since Forster's entry was remarkably similar to the above. This desire to control one's literary memorial as a continuation of autobiography has been explored by Michael Millgate, with reference to Browning, Hardy, James and Tennyson.⁶⁰ *Landor* and *Dickens* were conceived as biographies at least thirty years before their subjects' deaths, as explained in my later chapters. Their subjects anticipated the biographical

⁵⁸ Forster Collection, MS vol 65.

⁵⁹ *The Men of the Time* (London: Bogue, 1852).

⁶⁰ *Testamentary Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

construction of a posthumous memory, and acted to manipulate it by selectively (or unquestioningly, in Dickens's case) destroying letters; writing seductively fragmentary memoirs; and appointing as their memorialist Forster, who had, as proof-reader, adviser and reviewer already greatly influenced the shape of their reputations. Eliza's reticence and Forster's letter to the above correspondent seem to indicate that he was similarly concerned; it is not known if he discussed the idea of a biography with Percy Fitzgerald. Forster's memory was clearly to be preserved via his archive.

Both the Forster and Dyce donations are unique examples of working libraries, put together with biographical and textual editing aims in mind. Elwin wrote in the preface to the 1888

Handbook:

Neither he nor Dyce were collectors of bibliographical curiosities from the pride of possession. They bought books for use. Literature had been followed from youth to age by Dyce with the leisurely deliberation of one who was free to live as he pleased; by Forster with the unrelenting industry imposed by conflicting employments; and by each alike with the devotion of men who had been drawn to the pursuit by its intrinsic attractions. Their libraries, which were the instruments of their labours, were the slow gleanings of years, got together with pains, and their desire was that after-comers with kindred tastes might have the benefit of the gathered harvest. In averting the dispersion of their accumulated treasures they doubtless indulged their fondness for them, but chiefly their literary ardour was gratified, as their surviving friends can testify, by the conviction that in the wide public there would always be a succession of heirs who would enter upon the inheritance in the spirit of the original owners.⁶¹

Despite the good intentions of Forster and Dyce, the collection reading room was never filled with eager readers. Francis Espinasse remarked with rather forced astonishment in 1893 that no-one else had inspected the correspondence and manuscript material of Carlyle, including his biographer Froude.⁶² Twenty years later, Renton could 'personally testify to the neglect of this mine of untold literary wealth by those to whom it legally belongs' (Renton, p. 264).

⁶¹ *Forster Collection: A Catalogue of the Books Bequeathed by J. Forster*, biographical notice by Whitwell Elwin (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1888), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

⁶² Francis Espinasse, *Literary Recollections and Sketches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), p. 119.

Thesis outline

This study does not attempt to re-evaluate textually the biographies as enduring historiographical or literary works in the scholarly sense. It moves beyond an intellectual contextualisation of the biographies, to look materially at Forster's library. Using methodologies developed within the study of book history, I have attempted to examine the Forster archive as an act and in terms of its physical elements (such as images, bindings, annotations and Grangerisations). His archive offers the opportunity to trace the publishing history of many of his biographical works, from the collection, selection and exploitation of material, through composition, the printing process, advertisement and reception, and the variation in format of each edition. Forster preserved many of his amanuenses' records and transcriptions of historical documents, as well as several manuscripts and sets of printers' proofs in various forms. By comparing Forster's footnotes, marginalia and correspondence with the archival catalogues I have also attempted to establish which sources are 'excluded', and whether they were ever present in Forster's library.

I have selected six of Forster's biographies, having divided his work into three chronological periods which correspond roughly with the development of his career. The first two chapters discuss his historiographies of seventeenth-century parliamentarians, beginning with the publication history and reception of *Sir John Eliot*. One of Forster's earliest biographies, this was published in the *Englishman's Magazine* in 1831, as one of a series of articles on English patriots. The series was highly acclaimed; large parts were reprinted in the *Times*, and Forster was commissioned by Lardner to extend the sketches for his *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. The *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* series is compared with similar serial publications of the 1830s and 1840s, particularly Charles Knight's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and the sketches are briefly positioned within a time of widening audiences and technical advances in book and paper production.

This chapter traces *Sir John Eliot*'s history from the earliest article to the two-volume biography (1864); the manuscript and galley proofs of these are in the Forster Collection and provide the clearest continuous example of Forster's work in progress. Forster's interest in the Caroline and Commonwealth eras began at an early age, as his juvenile writings show, and chapters one and two contextualise his biographies within the wider Victorian search for answers to problems of reform in this period of history. His claim for historiographical authority is situated alongside his social rise, and the feelings of inferiority which this engendered, resulting in the aggressive (and sometimes hypocritical) criticism of previous historiographers, such as Isaac D'Israeli. These feelings of social inferiority are implied in the grandiose library space of Palace Gate House. Finally, this chapter introduces Forster's mythologisation in terms of his psychological reinterpretations of behaviour, such as Sir John Eliot's attempt to stab a neighbour, in an attempt to make it seem natural or acceptable to his audience.

The second chapter discusses another sketch, *Cromwell* (1839), which first appeared in Forster's sketches for Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. *Cromwell* was admired by Thomas Carlyle for its vivacity, achieved by techniques such as the novelisation of seventeenth-century sources, and the description of the physiognomy of the biographical subjects through their portraits (a method also employed by Carlyle in works such as *On Heroes and Hero Worship*). He did not, however, approve of Forster's view of Cromwell as a dissembler. Forster became a close and trusted friend of the Carlyles, and his writing and material-gathering practice is revealed in his letters to the couple. He lent many of his books on Cromwell to Carlyle, now to be found in the Forster Collection with Carlyle's abundant, often acerbic annotations. This chapter examines Carlyle's influence on his friend's scholarly methods, as well the influence of the conceptual 'hero' on Forster's biographical thinking. This can be seen in his 1856 essay on Cromwell for the *Edinburgh Review*, largely supervised by Carlyle, in which Forster repealed his condemnation.

The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith (1848) was Forster's first full-length literary biography, and differed considerably from his scholarly historiographies. Forster succeeded in reaching a wider audience with *Goldsmith*, by publishing in a variety of formats; the third chapter uses publisher's catalogues and advertisements in order to explore the work's complex publishing history. Although a two-volume edition of *Goldsmith* was published in 1854 (entitled *The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*), this chapter focuses on the 1848 edition, which had no lengthy footnotes or political digressions, and which was heavily illustrated by Maclise, Stanfield, Leech, Doyle and R. J. Hamerton.

I have been unable to find an earlier biography which integrates illustration with the text on the page in the way that Forster uses it in *Goldsmith*. This chapter illustrates its uniqueness among Forster's biographies as a narrative, and the interplay between Forster's text and images.

Forster had undertaken extensive research for the historiographies, and uncovered much new and original source material. *Goldsmith*, however, was a reinterpretation of several works by earlier biographers (leading to a charge of plagiarism by his immediate predecessor, Sir James Prior). Very little of Forster's biographical source material can be found in the Forster archive. Forster's preface, however, details the lenders of the materials used, and so establishes a clearer picture of the circle of gentlemen scholars among whom Forster was working, several of whom also belonged to the Guild of Literature and Art. Forster, along with Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer Lytton, was involved at this time with the creation of the Guild, which was intended to better the Royal Literary Fund's provision for struggling literary talent. *Goldsmith* can be seen as a manifesto for the Guild, arguing for society's duty to nurture and provide for its gifted writers.

The Life of Jonathan Swift is the only work to break the chronological coherence between Forster's career and his subjects. The writing of *The Life of Jonathan Swift* took place over twenty years, and the biography was left incomplete (the first volume was published three months before Forster's death, in 1876). Over this period, Forster and his publisher, John Murray, amassed a huge collection of Swiftiana, which now fills over eighteen boxes, manuscript volumes and bundles of papers in the Forster archive. The preface to *Swift*, like that to Goldsmith, details the materials which Forster had collected, or been granted access to, and this chapter traces, as far as possible, the histories behind these purchases or loans. Since Forster died before completing the biography, his archive is particularly valuable in determining his view of Swift – the archive, in a sense, becomes the biography.

This chapter attempts to link the collection, in a material sense, to the myths which Forster reinterpreted. Looking at previous editions of Swift, I have examined his place in Victorian literary culture, and the myths, created by Swift's previous biographers (and occasionally by Swift himself) which Forster sought to challenge. Forster's archive, like the man himself, has been valued for its relation to literary heroes; the Swiftiana in particular draw their interest more from personal association with Swift and his circle than as bibliographical rarities. This is illustrated by an examination of the binding of Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705), a presentation copy made to Swift, and noted by late nineteenth-century bibliographers as original, and therefore outstanding. Finally, this chapter examines the visual representations of Swift which Forster collected in the form of prints, or frontispieces.

My final two chapters deal with biographies written late in Forster's life. Both are of Forster's close friends, on whose writing careers he had exercised considerable influence as an adviser and editor. *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography* (1869) was Forster's first attempt to write

a biography of a contemporary. As executor to both Landor and Dickens, much of Forster's time in his closing years was given to the sorting through of personal papers. This chapter discusses Forster's role as executor, and Landor's choice of Forster as his future biographer. For almost thirty years, Forster had been Landor's friend and editor; even during several years of estrangement, Forster had transferred Landor's annuity from his brothers to Robert Browning, who acted as Landor's guardian during his final residence in Florence.

Landor's presence in the archive is shaped by the concerns of the book; his correspondence with Southey, for example, is central both to the biography and to the archive. The documents chosen for the biography, as for the *Life of Dickens*, suggest Forster's belief that as editor, he assisted in the artist's creative process. This chapter argues that both the biography and the construction of the archive are influenced by Landor's Romantic hope for posterity, and by the ethical necessity of co-operating with the remaining Landor family.

The *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-4) is the most popular of Forster's works and has been the subject of much critical discussion. This chapter situates the work alongside the mass of 'unofficial' biography which anticipated it, and briefly explores the contemporary critical backlash, including the implicit withdrawal from the biography by Dickens's children. As with Walter Savage Landor, the choice of Forster as Dickens's future biographer is examined, particularly with reference to the autobiographical fragment in chapter two of the biography.

The Dickens manuscripts are now the star items in the Forster Collection, but it is important to visualise the bequest in its historical context, rather than in terms of the significance that Dickens's works, textually, culturally and materially, have assumed in our own times. Forster's aim in writing the biography was to present Dickens 'as the man he actually was. The story of

Dickens's books was therefore Forster's first care' (*Pilgrim Letters of Charles Dickens*, I, p. xii). It is unsurprising, therefore, that Dickens's manuscripts take pride of place in Forster's archive; they are a concrete interface of the relationship, showing Forster's editorial authority as well as reflecting his creative contributions.

In my final chapter, I will conclude this case study by reviewing Forster's approach to biography, in the context of changing attitudes to biography and to the archive. The broad scope of this study perhaps raises more questions than it answers, with regards to many of the aspects which I address only briefly – the technical aspects of the archive, such as paper production, type, bindings, images, marginalia; ideas of literary friendship; concepts of literary property; the development of writing as a profession; the expansion of readership; the future of the archive. Some of these questions are raised in this chapter, as are the implications of this study for future investigations. I would like to argue, via this thesis, that the contextualisation and examination of Forster's biographical aims and practices can help us to understand (as in the cases of all of his biographical works) the archive as it was compiled, exploited, donated, and as it now exists.

Timeline of the development of South Kensington

1835	Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures set up
1837	As a direct result of the Committee's recommendations, the Government School of Design was set up in Somerset House. The school was directed by William Dyce from 1838-1843
1847	Robert Vernon donation of British pictures
1849	French Exhibition of Manufactures, Paris
1851	Great Exhibition. Profits used to purchase a large parcel of land south of Kensington Road, envisioned by Prince Albert and Commissioners as a centre of culture intended to counterbalance Bloomsbury
1852	<p>Department of Practical Art set up under the Board of Trade, Cole as general superintendent. Aim: to administer art education and to set up a national system of museums of design and art. Based at Marlborough House, which also housed the Department's Museum of Manufactures, which soon became the Museum of Ornamental Art. This was made up of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchases from the Great Exhibition • The School of Design's archival legacy from Somerset House, containing a number of casts of ancient sculptures; and purchases from the French Exhibition of Manufactures • Examples of British Ornamental Art collected by Dyce • A 'Chamber of Horrors' of badly designed products (this was quickly dismantled since the manufacturers were identified) • Loans from private collections • Subsequent acquisitions, made according to Gladstone's policy that all works published should be purchased on the basis of 'public interest'
1853	<p>Science and Art Department created as a subdivision of the Board of Trade. Took over School of Design, which became the National Art Training School.</p> <p>Cole's plans for the South Kensington site included space for the Department of Science and Art, the National Gallery, the Museum of Inventions (the Patent Office collection of models produced in support of patent applications), the Society of Arts, the University of London, the Royal Academy of Music and an Industrial School for Youth, as well as student accommodation on site</p>
1855	<p>French Exhibition of Manufactures, Paris.</p> <p>Works begins on iron structures to house the Department and South Kensington Museum</p> <p>Negotiations opened for Sheepshanks donation</p>
1857	<p>Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition</p> <p>John Sheepshanks donation of modern British paintings and drawings</p> <p>Science and Art Department moved from Department of Trade to new Board of Education. Offices, Schools, and Museum of Art moved from Marlborough House to South Kensington. South Kensington Museum opened, housed in the Brompton Boilers and the Sheepshanks Gallery</p>
1866	Treasury sanctions a plan for permanent buildings to be erected in South Kensington
1867	French Exhibition of Manufactures, Paris
1899	Construction work on current building begins. Museum renamed 'Victoria and Albert Museum' by Queen Victoria
1909	Current museum building opened to the public

Chapter One: *Sir John Eliot.*

Introduction

To John Forster, the Long Parliament's defiance of Charles I was a turning point in terms of the civil and religious freedoms of the people. John Eliot (1592-1632) became his hero in this biographical drama. Knighted in 1618, Eliot was an eloquent Member of Parliament, critical of the arbitrary rule and collection of taxes by Charles I, and led the impeachment of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, Charles's favourite minister and Eliot's former patron. Following his sustained parliamentary attacks on Charles's right to autocratically impose tonnage and poundage, Eliot was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1629. He spent the short remainder of his life here, producing his memoirs, *Negotium Posterorum*, as well as two political works, *The Monarchie of Man* and *De Jure Maiestatis*. These documents, along with Eliot's correspondence, were preserved by his descendants, the Earls of St Germans.

Sir John Eliot (the title I will use in this study to refer to the 1864, two-volume biography), compares poorly in terms of sales to Forster's other biographies, and like all of his historiography has been superseded by much more rigorous scholarship. However, it is the work which best demonstrates Forster's biographical methodology, being present in the archive, as far as it could be, at every stage of production, from the initial ideas contained in the journalistic sketch 'Sir John Eliot' (1831), through the gathering and annotating of information, to the edited manuscript, and finally to print. Through Forster's personal records, we can also see how the development of his library intersects with the writing of *Sir John Eliot* at its point of publication in 1864.

Writing process and publishing history: 1831

Forster's biography of Sir John Eliot began as one of a series of articles written for the *Englishman's Magazine* in 1831.¹ At this time Forster was a law student with 'brilliant potential' (Davies, p. 9), under the tutelage of Andrew Amos at the London University; one classmate remembered him at the age of nineteen, 'a raw, oddly-dressed, energetic, impetuous youth from the provinces'.² The series, entitled 'Our Early Patriots', arose out of Forster's interest in the pan-European agitation of the early 1830s, in particular the July Revolution of 1830, the Italian uprisings of 1831 and the intense social agitation in Britain prior to the 1832 Reform Act. Forster attended Parliament during his time at the University and discussed politics at length with his classmates and with Amos, writing excitedly to James Emerson Tennant, his classmate, on his support for the ballot.³

During his youth in Northumbria, Forster had poured his enthusiasm for the history of the English civil war and the Caroline reigns into the writing of his play *Charles at Tunbridge or the Cavalier of Wildinghurst*, which received a performance at Newcastle's Theatre Royal in May 1828 (Davies, p. 6). 'Our Early Patriots' allowed Forster to combine his fascination for the seventeenth century with his enthusiasm for reform. Amos himself was an authority on constitutional history ('Our Early Patriots' quoted from his edition of the writings of Fortescue, Henry VI's chancellor),⁴ and he encouraged his students' interest in the seventeenth-century roots of the 1830s Reform movement. Forster's title article set the scene for the life sketches which followed, and celebrated the English people's resistance of the attempts by James I and Charles I to diminish parliamentary power.

¹ 'Our Early Patriots – Sir John Eliot', *Englishman's Magazine*, (April-Aug, 1831), pp. 623-37.

² Davies, p. 9, quotes Forster's classmate Whiteside from K. J. Fielding and G. G. Grubb, 'New letters from Charles Dickens to John Forster,' *Boston University Studies in English*, 2 (1956), p. 149.

³ Davies, p. 10, quotes Huntington Library MS: Forster to James Emerson Tennant (5 Mar 1831).

⁴ 'Our Early Patriots', *Englishman's Magazine* (April-Aug 1831), pp. 351-6.

Forster's articles caught the eye of more influential reformists such *the Times* editor Thomas Barnes (1785-1841). Under his direction, the paper loudly supported the Whig opposition in Parliament, receiving in 1830 its nickname 'the Thunderer' (or the Blunderer to its opponents),⁵ but Barnes's opposition to the New Poor Law of 1834 led to a shift in the paper's direction to progressive Tory. Barnes's career is notable in that its progress mirrored Forster's in many ways. Unlike Forster, whose dissenting background would have prevented him from graduating, he completed a Cambridge degree, graduating in 1808; but after two years study in the Inner Temple, he decided against a law career in favour of journalism. After seven years as drama critic and parliamentary reporter for *The Times*, Barnes was made editor in 1817. During this time, he had also assisted Leigh Hunt, a fellow student from Christ's Hospital School, at the *Reflector* and the *Examiner*. Twenty years later, Hunt and another of Barnes's associates, Charles Lamb, were sought out and befriended by John Forster as he advanced his own journalistic career, in friendships which became strange mixtures of 'patronage, affection and reliance' (Davies, p. 25). Lamb wrote to Edward Moxon from his home in Edmonton, in 1832:

I am a little more than half alive
 I was more than half dead
 The Ladies are very agreeable
 I flatter myself I am less than disagreeable
 Convey this to Mr Forster
 Whom, with you, I shall just be able to see 10 days hence
 & Believe me ever yours
 CL
 I take Forster's name to be John.
 But you know who I mean,
 The Pym-praiser
 not pimp-raiser.⁶

⁵ According to Sally Baker, the nickname was first used in the *Morning Herald* on 15 February 1830 ('Thunderer and enlightenment on our nickname', *The Times*, 30 September 2006; *Times Online* archive <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/letters/feedback/article655258.ece>. Last accessed 12 January 2010. The name is often wrongly attributed to Barnes, who wrote in 1831 that 'unless the people everywhere come forward and petition, ay, thunder, for reform, it is they who abandon an honest Minister – it is not the Minister who abandons them' (*The Times*, 29 January 1831, p. 2).

⁶ Charles Lamb to Edward Moxon, 1 July 1832. Forster Collection, National Art Library, 48.E.3.

Whether Forster's sketches were brought to Barnes's attention by a mutual friend, or whether the liberal values of the *Englishman's Magazine* caught his eye in a more general way is unclear, but 'Henry Vane' and 'John Pym' were selected and reprinted with the notice that they were taken from 'a publication displaying extensive and various information, and very considerable talent'.⁷

Writing process and publishing history continued: *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* and *Statesmen*

Following this notice by the *Times*, Forster was invited by Dionysius Lardner to contribute to Longman's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. In the mid-nineteenth century, a profusion of these collections of knowledge were being published. Alongside utilitarian innovations such as the establishment of the Mechanics' Institutes (1824), a new reading public was emerging as the average family income rose, the cost of book production fell and publishers could therefore target the middle classes with collectable, reasonably priced works. Cheap, illustrated books such as George Craik's *Pictorial History of England* (1838-41) ran to numerous editions. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, responding to the inadequacy of the literature contained in working men's libraries, began in 1832 to publish the *Library of Useful Knowledge*. Historical biography played a significant role; Thomas Arnold, writing to the treasurer of the SDUK in praise of an article on Mirabeau, observed that 'History and Biography are far better vehicles of good [...] than any direct comments on Scripture'.⁸

London publishers were quick to realise the lucrative potential of the series format; the number of publishers issuing collectable series of either fiction or non-fiction almost tripled between 1835 and 1897, growing from 165 to 883.⁹ The *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* ran an article in 1844 which suggested, apparently on Charles Knight's recommendation,

⁷ 'Sir Henry Vane's Scheme of Parliamentary Reform', *The Times*, 5 September 1830, p. 7; 'John Pym' was reprinted in *The Times*, 9 July 1831, p. 3.

⁸ Quoted in Valerie Gray, *Charles Knight: Educator, Publisher, Writer* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 45.

⁹ Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1910* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 103.

that readers form provincial reading associations which would purchase books by subscription:

In proposing this series of unequalled cheapness and universality, we rely upon an extensive sale, amongst the usual number of individual purchasers - great body in these days. Some individuals will content themselves with selection; others will purchase the entire series. We also depend upon a large support of persons of wealth and influence, who are willing to render every aid in the formation of Lending Libraries. But we also see that a *new element of association* remains to be developed among the great body of the people, and we have especially adapted our plans to meet the formation of this medium of popular improvement, which requires only to be explained to be easily acted upon.¹⁰

Similarly, Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* was designed for 'the substantial middle classes [...] the farmer, the artisan, the resider in the country, and all who are not provided with a regular library'; it was cloth-bound, small octavo and sold at 6s. per volume, containing 'as much letterpress as a thick octavo of regular print' (cheaper, in fact, than the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, also cloth-bound, and which retailed, at this time, at 7s. 6d. per volume).¹¹ Since the series was sub-divided, the artisan-class readers 'who buy only what they intend to read, and read only that which carries upon it the stamp of direct utility' could form their own encyclopaedia.

A survey of the *London Catalogue of Books - 1814-1846* shows that Longman and Co. had been quick to take advantage of this market, with the largest share (14%) of all 'history' titles published.¹² The firm attracted illustrious Whig historians such as Lord John Russell and Thomas Babington Macaulay, and it was the natural choice for Forster, already the author of a series of articles on 'Our Early Patriots' which had been reprinted in the *Times*.

The 'Early Patriots' sketches formed the basis of his contribution to the *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1836-39). The *Lives* established Forster's reputation as a biographer and historian, as well as a respected critic. The

¹⁰ 'Books for the Million', *Northern Star and Leeds Advertiser*, 1 June 1844, p. 3.

¹¹ 'Dr Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia', *The Morning Chronicle*, 26 December 1829, p. 3.

¹² *London Catalogue of Books - 1814-1846* (London: Hodgson, 1846).

Athenaeum, for example, though it found the style ‘somewhat artificial’, also praised the first volume as ‘a valuable piece of British Biography, and of great interest’.¹³ Lord Holland, whom Forster praised in the *Lives*,¹⁴ wrote to thank their author for dedicating a work ‘so valued & as I believe so useful to the cause of freedom & truth as your Lives of our Great Countrymen of the Seventeenth Century.’¹⁵

Following this success, Longmans & Co. detached Forster’s biographies from their place in the Cabinet Cyclopaedia series and re-issued them in 1840. With an introductory preface, *The Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England, with a treatise on the popular progress in English history* could be purchased with or without an accompanying ‘Treatise on the History of the Commonwealth’.¹⁶ *Eminent British Statesmen* evidently succeeded in establishing Forster as an authority - the historical treatise which precedes the 1840 *Statesmen of the Commonwealth* claims that its publication responds to ‘A desire having been expressed in many quarters, that this portion of a series of British Statesmen, originally published in Dr Lardner’s “Cabinet Cyclopaedia” should be given to the world in a distinct form, that desire is here complied with’.¹⁷ Among Forster’s correspondence, there is a signed agreement between Forster, and Chapman and Hall, dated 22 September 1843, for Forster to write a series ‘to consist of twelve volumes commencing with the reign of Henry the Eighth and closing with that of Queen Anne’.¹⁸ The first volume was to be

¹³ *Athenaeum*, 18 June 1836, p. 430.

¹⁴ *Sir Henry Vane, Lives*, II, p. 40. ‘As this volume is passing through the press, lord Holland’s signature again appears alone to one article of a protest on the subject of religious liberty, which appears to me to condense into a few words its most comprehensive principles ... A collection of Lord Holland’s protests would be an invaluable text book of statesman-like reasoning, of pure constitutional doctrine, and of the most generous and ennobling sentiments.’

¹⁵ Lord Holland to Forster, 23 Jan 1840. Forster Collection, National Art Library. Forster dedicated the *Statesmen* to Lord Holland ‘in memory of his illustrious kinsman Charles James Fox, worthiest successor to the statesmen of the commonwealth, and as a humble tribute to his own unceasing exertions to protect the rights of the English people’.

¹⁶ Forster’s *Statesmen* reviewed in the Longman publication, *The Monthly Chronicle*, 5 (Jan-June 1840), pp. 185-186.

¹⁷ *The Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England. With a treatise on the popular progress in English History*. 5 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840) I, iii.

¹⁸ National Art Library, Forster Collection, FD. Box 5.

ready for publication on 1 July 1845, with succeeding volumes to be released at six-month intervals. Despite Forster already having received £100 toward this, the project was never completed, and although I can find no related correspondence, the demands of Forster's editorships of the *Foreign Quarterly Review* from 1843 to 1845, the *Daily News* in 1846 and the *Examiner* from 1847 to 1855, and the subsequent damage to Forster's health, may well explain the abandonment of the project. Forster's research instead found its way into the treatise which opens *Statesmen of the Commonwealth*, and later his *Historical and Biographical Essays*, *The Arrest of the Five Members*, *The Debates on the Grand Remonstrance* and *Sir John Eliot: A Biography*.¹⁹

A note on prices

Appendix 1 contains a list of the release dates and prices of the biographies discussed in this thesis. It is clear that Forster was instrumental in a professional network whose ideology instigated what Richard D. Altick called in 1957 the 'aspirational purchase'.²⁰ By including book prices in bibliography, within their economic context, we can speculate with more confidence on the new social and economic groups met by these innovations, and on who might remain out-priced (this is discussed further in chapter three, which explores the complex bibliographical history of Forster's *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*). Simon Eliot's work in the field of quantitative book history has proved invaluable in this. *Some Patterns and Trends in Victorian Publishing: 1800-1919* identified chronological peaks and troughs in three bands of book prices, 'low-price books' (1d. – 3s. 6d.); 'mid-price books' (3s. 7d.- 10s.) and 'high-price books' (above 10s.). Eliot's data, collected from trade journals of the period showed how high-price books, which dominated the

¹⁹ *Historical and Biographical Essays*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1860); *The Arrest of the Five Members by Charles I* (London: Murray, 1860); *The Debates on the Grand Remonstrance, November and December, 1641*, With an introductory essay on English freedom under the Plantagenet and Tudor sovereigns (London: Murray, 1860).

²⁰ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 267-274.

market before 1825, were gradually phased out by the mid-price bracket until by 1855, sixty percent of book sales were 3s. 6d. or cheaper.

As might be expected, this broad study of prices as recorded in publishing journals registered a shift towards a drop in the average book price as the century progressed. Simon Eliot also expressed the need to consider and contextualise socio-economic factors, conveniently giving the example of what a 6s. novel (the same price as a volume of Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*) would cost a middle class family in 'real terms'. In 1842, the Inland Revenue placed the threshold for income tax at £150; Eliot set the lowest denominator for a middle-class family at a gross annual income which exceeded £160. Even a family with a comfortable middle-class income of £400 would find that a 6s. book would constitute roughly one fifth of the family's weekly disposable income; to a semi-skilled worker on a wage of 30s. a week, 6s. would also represent around twenty per cent, but gross.

As well as unrealistic pricing, the small print runs (2,500 of each *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* volume)²¹ also seem to indicate that the new market for educative middle-class works was not as large as might initially be expected. Rather than individual purchase, the works were made accessible via free libraries and Working Men's Institutes. The acquisition of Lardner's volumes by these was occasionally advertised in provincial journals, such as the Lancaster Mechanics and Apprentices Library's purchase of James Mackintosh's *History of England* in October 1830.²² In order to achieve a fuller picture of Lardner's reading public than book prices alone can determine, it would be instructive to examine the lending records of these institutions. However, since the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* is advertised for purchase by these 'substantial' middle classes by notices

²¹ Nora Crook, in her introduction to *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, 4 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002) ed. Nora Crook, vol I, p. xxv.

²² 'Lancaster Mechanics and Apprentices' Library', *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser*, 9 October 1830, p. 3.

such as the *Morning Chronicle*'s, and since such an investigation is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will continue to base my assumptions of Forster's middle class target market on the format and pricing of his books.

Writing *Sir John Eliot* (1864)

The two-volume *Sir John Eliot: A Biography* was published in 1864 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green) and reprinted with minimal corrections by Chapman and Hall in 1872. In the years between *The Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England* (1840) and *Sir John Eliot: A Biography*, Forster had completed the majority of his research on the life of Eliot (1592-1632). After twenty-four years of journalism, having begun as drama critic for the radical *True Sun* in 1832, Forster resigned as Editor of the *Examiner* in December 1855 and accepted the post of Secretary to the Lunacy Commission. The editorship, which Forster had held since 1847 had contributed greatly to his ill-health during this period, causing him to become a 'week-end scholar and trying to cram all else, the work of ordinary lifetimes, into the period from Tuesday morning to Friday night' (Davies, p. 107). The position of Lunacy Commissioner was a demanding one around which he was now forced to organise his many social and literary commitments; two sheets of the manuscript of *Sir John Eliot* are written on notepaper from 'North & East Ridings Lunatic Asylum, Clifton, York'.²³ The impact which these pressures had on Forster's historiographical methodologies will be explored in the following chapter. I would like here to look at *Sir John Eliot*'s place in Forster's library, and in order to do this, it is necessary first to look at some possible motives for writing.

The early 1860s were a key time in the development of the Forster archive. In 1862, Forster wrote to Bulwer that he was 'building a house at Kensington which has now risen to its third storey

²³ National Art Library, Forster Collection, Forster MS 201.

and looks very formidable'.²⁴ As Davies argues, Palace Gate House was in keeping with behaviour which throughout Forster's professional life 'reflected a continuing sense of social insecurity'. This is very evident in the construction of his 'magnificent oak-panelled library with gallery' (Davies, pp. 114-115).

Settled into his new library in 1864, Forster began to catalogue his collection of letters, manuscripts and printed books, in the back of a banking passbook.²⁵ Each item was recorded by location, down to its place in which drawer, in what piece of furniture. A month before publication, *Sir John Eliot* seems to have been uppermost in his mind; the manuscript and corrected proofs were kept in the 'wooden box' which seems to function as Forster's 'in-tray', along with his most recent correspondence and newspaper cuttings, 'D'Israeli's Eliot' and what would appear to be a manuscript of Carlyle's, although this list is particularly difficult to make out. *Sir John Eliot* on several occasions describes the excellence and importance of Sir Robert Cotton's library in Palace Yard, Westminster, and one cannot help wondering if Forster wished covertly to remind the reader of his own collection in Palace Gate House, from where he signed the preface.

Forster's treatment of his source material – Isaac D'Israeli

The preface to *Sir John Eliot* expressed Forster's keenness to bring forward a trove of unpublished information, and conveyed the aura of the old family archive:

If anyone had told me when I began, now very many years ago, the study of the popular movement against the Stuart princes in the seventeenth century, that there existed in the archives of one English family the still inedited papers of the most eloquent leader of the first three parliaments of Charles the First [...] if, I say, it had been stated to me that such manuscript treasures as these were lying in the old family mansion still occupied by the descendants of Sir John Eliot, I should hardly have dared to think credible what I too eagerly should have desired to believe. (*Sir John Eliot: A Biography*, I, vii-viii)

²⁴ Forster to Edward Bulwer Lytton, 27 September 1867. Lytton MS, Letters and Papers, vol. 15, quoted Davies p. 114.

²⁵ National Art Library, Forster Collection, FD Box 5. The notebook is dated February 1864.

Forster had not consulted the Eliot papers for the original *Englishman's Magazine* article, lifting instead many of his facts from previous research, such as Isaac D'Israeli's *Commentaries on the Life and Reign of Charles the First, King of England*, which (we see from his notebook catalogue) was kept to hand until *Sir John Eliot's* publication. Given that in 1933, several letters belonging to the family were discovered in the Forster Collection and returned to Port Eliot, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of Forster's material was loaned by Eliot's descendant, Edward Granville Eliot (1798-1877), who also loaned to Forster's rival scholars such as D'Israeli.²⁶ The interaction between these two accounts can be traced in the texts, and via marginalia in the Forster Collection, demonstrating Forster's methodology and illustrating *Sir John Eliot's* role in the construction of the Forster archive.

D'Israeli's *Commentaries* was first published in 1828-1831 (London: Colburn, 1828-1831), and reissued in 1851. In order to write the biography of Eliot, whose name previously 'was as a blank in our history',²⁷ D'Israeli had travelled to Port Eliot to transcribe 'a folio volume of about one hundred and fifty letters', which it was his 'martyrdom' to decipher (*Eliot, Hampden and Pym*, p. 9). The following description pre-empts Lytton Strachey's 'great ocean of material':

It is the object of these commentaries to form this necessary supplement to our knowledge, by combining secret with public history - these reflect light on each other. The revelations of private history give completeness to the imperfect tale of the popular historian, and the great results of human events, which the private memoir cannot afford, are to be found in the record he opens for us. Vast and innumerable are the sources of secret history which, during the last half-century, have accumulated in masses; and we are furnished with materials for the history of human nature, to which the ancients had no access [...] Immense archives of contemporary documents are opened to us in the entire correspondence of eminent men, and the inedited history of Manuscripts. By these we may best learn the genius which prevailed when the transactions occurred; by these the interest deepens of the great drama of history. The narrative opens a living scene, and the motives of the personage are sometimes as apparent as their actions. It is not fanciful to say, that we often know more of our ancestors than they

²⁶ V&A archives, Box MA/1/D2023/8.

²⁷ Isaac D'Israeli, *Eliot, Hampden, and Pym, Or, A Reply of "The Author of a Book" Entitled Commentaries on the Life and reign of Charles the First to "The Author of a Book" Entitled Some Memorials of John Hampden, His Party and His Times* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1832) p. 3.

themselves knew. Many a secret for them is none for us. The letter which was prayed to be thrown into the flames when read, we hold in our hands; the cabinet conversation, unheard but by two great statesmen, we can listen to. They viewed the man in his occasional actions; we scrutinize into his entire life. They marked the beginnings, but we the ends.
(*Commentaries*, 1828, vi-vii)

As in Forster's preface, the family archive is seen as a dark vault of 'Vast and innumerable ... sources of secret history'. Although D'Israeli's narrative had a more general scope than Forster's biographical sketch, their motives were directly comparable. He saw the events of this period as humanly driven by the Parliamentary actors, and through the discovery of biographical details, the 'revelations of private history', hoped to establish a unified vision of events.

Forster appreciated the value of this new body of work while preparing 'Our Early Patriots', and acknowledged D'Israeli as 'learned and ingenious' ('Our Early Patriots – Sir John Eliot', p. 633). He overestimated, moreover, the amount of material to which D'Israeli had access, assuming, for example, that D'Israeli had seen a portrait of Sir John Eliot commissioned from the Tower, shortly before Eliot's death in 1632. D'Israeli's *Commentaries*, however, claim that the portrait was described to him by a Mr Belsham (*Commentaries*, I, p. 533).

There are some interesting similarities between these - almost - contemporary biographers. Both favoured a largely biographical approach to historiography, focusing on the 'personal histories and private motives' of their subjects. Both writers came from lower middle-class backgrounds, rejected commerce in favour of literature, and, it can be argued, used historiography defensively from feelings of social inferiority in the literary world. Both placed immense value on their libraries, and, I believe, saw their authority as augmented by book-collecting. I will examine both of these points in further detail later. I would first, however, like to look at the struggle for authority which began with the publication of D'Israeli's *Commentaries*.

D'Israeli came to historiography as a mature and politically disillusioned writer. His biographer, James Ogden, suggests that horror at the excesses of 'the Terror' led D'Israeli to discard his Revolutionary enthusiasm, and resulted in his refusal to commit himself to a political party.²⁸ Forster, on the other hand, was a young man impassioned by the political uprisings then shaking Europe, but who had never lived through revolutionary and post-revolutionary times. He saw the *Commentaries* as an apology for Toryism, and by 1836, when it came to writing the *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen*, he had begun his attacks on those historians who sought to sully the names of the early patriots, and most vehemently on D'Israeli.

By refuting D'Israeli, Forster engaged in an already long-standing debate on the reliability and interpretation of seventeenth-century sources. Modern historians have noted the historiographer's tendency to view the period as 'king versus parliament, as absolutism against law and representative government'.²⁹ The preface to D'Israeli's *Commentaries* (1828-31) considers this dichotomy's presence in the early to mid nineteenth century:

An intelligent foreigner has recently observed, that since the days of our first Charles, English histories are the polemics of politics. The Monarchist and the Commonwealth-man have bequeathed their mutual recriminations and their reciprocal calumnies. At a later period, when Whigs and Tories infused their controversies into their degraded history, trying events and persons by their own conventional tests, they judged of their ancestors as of their contemporaries; narrowing their views by their own passions. Such partial estimates of human actions, and modes of thinking, may become anachronisms in morals and in politics.

(*Commentaries*, 1828, I, viii-ix)

D'Israeli thus claimed that the religious and political conflict which brought about the end of the reign of Charles I had continued to divide historians so absolutely that 'we almost despair of an impartial narrative' (*Commentaries*, 1828, I, viii).

²⁸ James Ogden, *Isaac D'Israeli* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 207.

²⁹ Charles Carlton, *Charles I: The Personal Monarch* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 53.

Previous accounts were thus parcelled, to some degree, into ‘favorable’ and ‘hostile’ and their scholarly reliability assessed accordingly. In a list of his sources, useful since it provides some direction to Forster’s own methodological journey, D’Israeli praised the ‘impartiality’ of the eighteenth-century historian Paul de Rapin-Thuras, who, as a ‘foreigner’, was seen as the most distant and impartial source, and Dr William Harris, whose constitutional histories of England from James I to the end of the Protectorate were published from 1753 to 1814. Rushworth and Hume were both criticized for their partisanship – D’Israeli accused them of suppression of material in the case of the former, and in the latter, of acceptance of general accounts, or gossip, and a lack of scholarly rigour.

An old charge against the bluestocking historian, Catharine Macaulay, was also raised.³⁰

D’Israeli had first taken issue with Macaulay’s scholarship in 1793, when in his *Dissertation on Anecdotes* he alleged that

when she consulted the Mss. At the British Museum, [she] was accustomed in her historical researches, when she came to any passage unfavourable to her party, or in favour of the Stuarts, to *destroy the page of the Ms.*³¹

Although this was subsequently disproved by her husband, D’Israeli continued his imputations in the *Commentaries*:

That female historian was a person of high passions, which were displayed in the extravagant incidents of her life; but a masculine genius invigorated her historical compositions; and her levelling reveries, which at the time had the delusion of novelty, and perhaps her sex, created about her a party of political enthusiasts. She beheld a statue raised to herself, but she lived to see it pulled down forever; and her unquoted name has long been deserted by every historical writer. (*Commentaries*, 1828-31, I, xxi)

The ‘party of political enthusiasts’, according to Sidney Lee’s entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, included Mary Wollstonecraft and Horace Walpole. The ‘high passions’ were

³⁰ Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England, from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line*, 8 vols (London: Nourse, 1763-1783).

³¹ Isaac D’Israeli, *Dissertation on Anecdotes* (London: printed for Kearsley and Murray, 1793), p. 70.

republican views, which Samuel Johnson mocked one evening at dinner by suggesting that her footman should dine with them. The ‘extravagant incidents’ include her love for gaiety, and her scandalous second marriage at the age of forty-seven to the twenty-one year old clergyman William Graham, with whom D’Israeli held an animated correspondence in the pages of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* regarding the accusations of defacing the British Museum manuscripts. Following the marriage, the statue of Mrs Macaulay in St Stephen’s, Walbrook, depicting her as History, and erected by her former friend, Dr Thomas Wilson, was taken down, and D’Israeli makes mention of this in the passage above. Brodie’s history, which took ‘a precursor in Mrs Macaulay’, was similarly criticised for its devotion ‘to the degradation of Charles the First’ (*Commentaries*, 1828, I, xxi).³²

D’Israeli claimed that an ‘impartial narrative’ was, in fact, impossible; ‘historical truth,’ he said, ‘is of a relative nature’ (*Commentaries*, 1828, I, ix). He projected himself as a ‘philosophical historian’, whose authority was validated by the reception of his ‘historical researches’, which, ‘as well as his opinions, [have been] referred to by writers of opposite parties; and were it a cause of exultation, he might exult with the great poet of Reason, that Whigs have denounced his Toryism, and Tories have misliked his independence’ (*Commentaries*, 1828, I, xii-xiii). Having disallied himself from the label of either Whig or Tory, he sought to vindicate the monarch (as he had with earlier work on James I),³³ aiming, as Ogden notes, ‘to defend the Stuart Kings against the attacks of Whig historians’ (Ogden, p. 155) such as Macaulay, Brodie, and later, John Forster.

³² George Brodie, *A History of the British Empire, from the accession of Charles I. to the Restoration, with an introduction tracing the progress of society, and of the constitution from the feudal times to the opening of the History, and including a particular examination of Mr. Hume’s statements relative to the character of the English government*, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1822).

³³ *An Enquiry into the Literary and Political Character of James the First* (London: Murray, 1816).

The *Commentaries* were commended on their publication as an advancement in the history of the period, and earned D'Israeli a Doctorate of Civil Law from Oxford University. Sidney Lee's entry on D'Israeli in the *Dictionary of National Biography* judges the *Commentaries* to be his 'most valuable work,' one which 'marked a distinct advantage in the methods of historical research'. D'Israeli was included in the 'History' section of Allan Cunningham's series of articles in the *Athenaeum*, entitled 'Biographical and Critical History of the Last Fifty Years' (14 December 1833), although Cunningham's praise of D'Israeli as a 'great writer of some kind' was rather vague.

His work soon met with severe criticism. In the interim between 'Our Early Patriots' and *Eminent British Statesmen*, George Nugent Grenville's reinterpretation of the Eliot papers and criticism of D'Israeli's scholarship induced Forster to discredit D'Israeli's conclusions. I will return to the idea of historical impartiality in chapter two, but in order to follow this debate, I would like to look at one event in Sir John Eliot's life which all of the historians whom I will be discussing see as crucial to understanding his character and his motives.

The stabbing

As a young man in Cornwall, while enjoying hospitality at the house of a neighbor, Mr Moyle, John Eliot quarreled with his host, drew his sword and stabbed Moyle in the side. Moyle recovered, Eliot wrote a letter of apology and the friendship was renewed; Eliot's apology and the correspondence between Eliot and Moyle on parish affairs, written during Eliot's final imprisonment in the Tower, can be found in the Port Eliot family papers. D'Israeli gave Laurence Eachard as his original source,³⁴ but he also claimed that the story was

too well authenticated to be omitted, in forming an idea of this remarkable character. Moyle survived the blow forty years, and with others of his family told the particulars to his

³⁴ Laurence Eachard, *The History of England, From the First Entry of Julius Caesar and the Romans (to the Conclusion of the Reign of Charles the Second, and the Establishment of King William and Queen Mary)* 3 vols (London: 1707-1708).

grandson, Dr Prideaux, the learned Dean of Norwich, from whom Eachard received it (*Commentaries*, 1828, II, p. 270).

According to D'Israeli, Eliot appealed to the Duke of Buckingham to reclaim the ensuing fines which he had unfairly been charged. Since these were unavailable, he could only settle for a knighthood. Eliot and Buckingham, then George Villiers, had become friends while travelling in Europe, prior to Eliot's parliamentary career, and D'Israeli saw this appeal, as well as a series of satirical verses about Buckingham which D'Israeli attributed to Eliot, as further evidence of the treachery in Eliot's later campaign to impeach Buckingham.

Writing in 1831, Forster quoted Eliot's note of apology to Moyle from D'Israeli ('Sir John Eliot', p. 625), and since he also quoted Eachard as his main source, it is not unlikely that the whole account was taken from the *Commentaries*. Forster's construal of the event was somewhat different, however. D'Israeli had explained the stabbing as an 'attempted assassination', and an example of a 'temper hot and irascible' (*Commentaries*, 1828, II, 269). Unable at this stage to produce any evidence which would vindicate his hero, Forster could only admit that as a youth Eliot was unable to control the 'strong passions and ardent temper' which urged him to rebellion during his parliamentary career. Forster also ignored Eliot's alleged appeal to Buckingham, arguing instead that his knighthood and Vice-Admiralty arose naturally from the youthful friendship which was broken when Buckingham began to influence Charles for personal gain ('Our Early Patriots - Sir John Eliot', pp. 625-626).

The following year, Nugent published *Some Memorials of Hampden, His Party and His Times*.³⁵ The prominent reformist was at the height of his career, as a Lord of the Treasury in Grey's reform ministry before serious financial strain caused him to resign in 1832. Nugent complained that D'Israeli had misquoted and erroneously referenced sources, failed to consider

³⁵ *Some Memorials of Hampden, His Party and His Times*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1832).

material vital to a full understanding of the period, and ignored source material where it contradicted his own views. Regarding the stabbing, D'Israeli had confessed to relying solely on a third-hand testimony. Although both Nugent and D'Israeli had been given use of the Port Eliot papers, D'Israeli had failed to account for two friendly letters written by Eliot to his victim, years after the event; he had also omitted a letter written by Moyle's daughter, quoted in 1823 by Lucy Aikin,³⁶ which shed fresh light on the story. The charges in *Commentaries*, Nugent wrote, were unsubstantiated, being 'equally void of foundation and probability' (*Memorials of Hampden*, p. 65).

A battle for authority ensued. In August 1832, Robert Southey, whose own retellings of the Civil War had been vehemently anti-Cromwellian, wrote in defence of D'Israeli, reviewing Nugent's history unfavourably in the *Quarterly Review*. D'Israeli was, he wrote, 'an "impartial [and] benevolent" historian, who put "the most charitable construction" upon the actions of all men, an "accurate" as well as "a most agreeable and instructive one"'.³⁷ Nugent's reply to this was published by John Murray, defending his scholarship, and reminding Southey that, unlike D'Israeli, he had concluded against the treachery of the Moyle stabbing on the basis of the testimony of Moyle's own daughter.³⁸ Forster shared Nugent's noble view of Eliot, and this debate gave him the opportunity to vindicate the name of his hero, and to construct his own reputation as an authority by discrediting the work of the conservative historians on whose work he had previously relied.

The St Germans family had loaned Eliot's papers to Forster in the five years between 'Our Early Patriots' and *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen*, when the debate took place. In order to make this clear to the reader, Forster opened the work by reporting a conversation with Lord Eliot

³⁶ *Memoirs of the Court of King James the First*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1823).

³⁷ D.J. Trela, 'Sir Walter Scott on Oliver Cromwell: An evenhanded royalist evaluates a usurper', *CLIO*, 2 (1998) pp. 195 - 220. Trela quotes Southey in the *Quarterly Review* 25 (July 1821), pp. 279-347, esp. p. 310, p. 321, p. 347; and *Sir Thomas More*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1829).

³⁸ Lord Nugent, *A Letter to John Murray, Esq, From Lord Nugent, Touching an Article in the Last Quarterly Review, On a Book Entitled 'Some Memorials of Hampden, His Party and His Times'* (London: Murray, 1832).

himself, in which he established details about how Sir John Eliot's father had obtained the family seat, the former priory of St Germans in Cornwall and how its name was changed to Port Eliot (' "I do not know," says an accomplished living descendant of the patriot, "the exact year in which the exchange took place ..."' *Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II p. 2n). Having shown that he was working from the same material as his predecessors, Forster elevated himself above them by discrediting their scholarship. D'Israeli suffered most from this, with a continual stream of attacks on his scholarship, his 'violent political tendencies, and his most musing professions of philosophical impartiality' (*Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II, p. 8). Forster's criticism of the *Commentaries* is so prolonged that it would not be constructive or relevant to examine all of it here. I shall instead confine my view to responses to the Moyle stabbing.

Forster's view was in line with Nugent's; that D'Israeli's account was constructed on the basis of a third-hand testimony, 'received at fifth or sixth hand from gossiping relations'. Although Eachard had given the first *public* account of the stabbing, he was, in Forster's opinion, a 'notorious advocate of the Stuarts, and a most inaccurate historical writer'. Neither was he, as D'Israeli had claimed, Eliot's contemporary. In order to prove his point, Forster reprinted Eachard's account of the stabbing:

'Within his own parish there lived one Mr. John Moyle, a gentleman of very good note and character in his country, who, together with his son, had the honour to serve in parliament. Whether out of rivalry or otherwise, Mr. Eliot, having, upon a very slight occasion, entertained a bitter grudge against the other, went to his house under the show of a friendly visit, and there treacherously stabbed him while he was turning on one side to take a glass of wine to drink to him.' He states further: 'Mr. Moyle outlived this base attempt about forty years, who, with some other members of his family, often told the particulars to his grandson, Dr. Prideaux, and *other relations, from whom* I had this particular account.' We are here left uncertain, it will be seen, whether the account was received at fifth or sixth hand from gossiping relations, or from the respected and learned dean of Norwich. A late writer, however, has thought fit to assume the latter, and has insisted, with considerable and very obstinate vehemence, on the probable truth of the statement. With the help of materials in a lately published work by Lord Nugent, and guided by a fact I have discovered respecting Sir

John Eliot's father, I now present this singular incident in a new, and, it may be hoped, a final aspect. (*Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II, p. 3)

Although Forster was appreciative of Nugent's *Memoirs*, and wrote the biographical preface to the third edition (1851), he remained critical: 'Wood is seldom to be relied on in any date, except those which are furnished by the Oxford books: - Lord Nugent has inaccurately adopted his statement that Eliot sat in the parliament of 1621', (*Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II p.17n). The 'materials' lately provided by Nugent were, as we have seen, the letter quoted by Aikin, and the two letters written from Eliot to Moyle during his final imprisonment in the Tower:

Mr D'Israeli has said, in his fourth volume, p. 513 (in reference to the 'apologie' quoted in a preceding page), 'I perfectly agree that this extraordinary apology was not written by a man who had stabbed his companion in the back; *nor can I imagine, that after such a revolting incident, any approximation at a renewal of intercourse would have been possible.*' He then proceeds, with very amusing pertinacity, to shift the grounds of the charge. His argument, however, on his own admission, is wholly exploded by the letters above cited. No malignity, however desperate or reckless, can again revive it. I cannot leave the subject of this *first* calumny, in the promotion of which Mr D'Israeli has joined with such painful and mistaken bitterness, without expressing my regret, that political passion, and preconceived notions of character, should so bewilder an ingenious mind. Mr D'Israeli, though in all cases too fond of suggesting events from rumours, has rendered many services to history, and notwithstanding his various misstatements respecting Eliot, which I shall have occasion to refute, has never scrupled to pay a not unwilling tribute to the greatness of his intellect. (*Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II, p. 6n)

The fervent rhetoric of the above passage shows Forster's transition from a grateful young journalist in 1831 to fault-finding and condescension.

Unable to deny that the event actually happened, and that it reflected badly on his hero, Forster attempted an early psychoanalysis of his character in order to discover his motives, and thus pardon him in the eyes of the reader. He attributed the temper which led to the 'painful incident' of Moyle's stabbing to the open house which Eliot's father kept, 'flung open to every sort of visitor, and never, it is to be presumed, troubled himself to consider the effect of such a course upon the controlled disposition and manners of his son' (*Eminent British Statesmen*, p. 2). That Eliot should have earned for himself the epithet of 'wilful' was to be expected as a result of such domestic

arrangements. Secondly, Forster established that the event must have taken place in Eliot's seventeenth or eighteenth year. This disproved Eliot's appeal to Buckingham, since it could not be known whether the two were yet acquainted, and Buckingham was still young and limited in influence. Forster excused Eliot's actions to some degree as youthful passion, and argued that they were not to be seen as testimony to his treacherous nature, but rather as a formative experience:

Taken in connection with the statements I have given, this incident assumes, in my mind, a more than ordinary interest, and becomes, indeed, an important feature in the life of Eliot. It is the line drawn between his passing youth and coming manhood. Whatever may have been the turbulence of his boyhood, whatever the struggle of its uncurbed passions, this event startled him into a perfect and sober self-control. His 'private deportment,' says Mr Moyle's daughter, was as remarkable ever after, as that of his public conduct.

(*Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II, p. 6)

The importance which Forster placed on 'personal and private motives' was less indicative of psychoanalysis and more concerned with general constitutional history. Domestic background, for example, plays such a relatively small part in *Sir John Eliot* that the first time we are given the number and names of Eliot's children is in a footnote to p. 493 of the second volume. In the earlier sketches and *Eminent British Statesmen* it plays no part at all. Eliot's marriage was cited in the former merely as an illustration of the 'despotism' of Eliot's passions over him, D'Israeli claiming that before Eliot received his knighthood, he was fined £4,000 for running away with the daughter of Sir Daniel Norton, but that the two were much in love and remained happily married. This was a misstatement which Forster corrected in *Eminent British Statesmen*; Eliot in fact quite legally married the daughter of a Cornish gentleman. As Forster proved from an entry in the Earl of Leicester's journal, the scandal was actually caused by Eliot's 'elder' son (*Sir John Eliot, Lives*, II, p. 9), whom Forster later suggested to be Eliot's rather headstrong, second son Richard (*Sir John Eliot*, I, pp. 19-20). Forster, of course, pointed out that he could find no foundation for D'Israeli's belief that his hero was fined. The published dispute with Nugent, attacks such as Bolton Corney's

on *Curiosities of Literature*, in his 1837 edition,³⁹ for its mistakes and passages where D'Israeli 'had become an authority only by not giving his authorities' (Ogden, p. 106), and Forster's quite devastating attacks on the *Commentaries* led to a revised edition of D'Israeli's work, published posthumously in 1851.⁴⁰ *The Arrest of the Five Members* and the *Debates on the Grand Remonstrance* were works in the more general historical line.

D'Israeli replied to the complaints made against his scholarship in various ways. He corrected the historical inaccuracies, such as Eliot's illegal marriage and writing of satirical verses against Buckingham. Moreover, following Forster's precedent, he quoted his correspondence with Lord Eliot, now the Earl of St Germans, in order to re-establish his authority:

I will not omit in this, the last preface that I shall ever write, the acknowledgement of the obliging confidence of the present Earl of St Germans, in entrusting me with the manuscripts of Sir John Eliot. His lordship called my attention to the notice, which I had taken of his memorable ancestor, in a communication alike distinguished for its elegance, its courtesousness, and its information. By the aid of these papers, I was enabled to throw some fresh light upon the character of a very eminent personage, whose career had hitherto baffled the researches of our historians. (*Commentaries*, 1851, I, viii-ix)

By acknowledging his debt to St Germans, D'Israeli reminded the reader that his research was drawn from Eliot's own family papers and that it was endorsed by his descendants, and that being so it is highly unlikely to be an unfair attack on Eliot's memory. He was also forced not only to moderate his criticism, but to present a more sympathetic view of Eliot. For example, there was somewhat of a volte-face on D'Israeli's opinion of the treatise, entitled *The Monarchy of Man*, which Eliot wrote during his final imprisonment, and which was also contained in the Eliot papers.

³⁹ Isaac D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, by Isaac D'Israeli, Illustrated by Bolton Corney (A Critical Study) (Greenwich: Printed by special command, 1837).

⁴⁰ Isaac D'Israeli, *Commentaries on the Life and Reign of Charles the First, King of England*, 2 vols (London: Colburn, 1851).

In 1828, D'Israeli was content to use the *Monarchy of Man* as an example of the confidence placed in him by the Earl of St Germans:

I said in the second volume of these Commentaries, p. 283, 'During his long imprisonment in the Tower, Sir John Eliot found, as other impetuous spirits have, that wisdom and philosophy have hidden themselves behind the bars of a prison window; there, his passions weaker, and his contemplation more profound, he nobly employed himself on an elaborate treatise on the Monarchy of Man.'

When this was written, I was unacquainted with that series of correspondence, chiefly from the Tower, which Lord Eliot has since confided to my care. Nothing less than the abundant zeal which we mutually felt, for a very memorable character imperfectly known in our history, could have induced his Lordship to have exerted no ordinary pains, and me to undergo a slight martyrdom of patience, in conning the alphabet of Sir John.

Sir John Eliot, who loved the labours of the pen, preserved copies of his own letters, and many of those of his correspondents have been bound in the same volume; among these are the illustrious names of Hampden and Selden, and Hollis; the name of Pym does not appear.

The Correspondence will not throw any light on public affairs, or on the political life of Eliot ... (*Commentaries*, 1828, IV, p.515; 1851, I, p. 534)

The following passage is taken from an appendix describing the *Monarchy of Man*, added in the 1851 edition:

The treatise discovers all the tedious scholastic learning of that period, perpetual references to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Plutarch, and Bodin. The freest thinkers had not yet emancipated themselves from plodding in the tracks of authority, and Eliot, who was so bold a speaker in the English senate, when warmed by English feelings, with his classical pen, dares not write a page without what he calls- 'the strength and assistance of authority.' Did he imagine that the English Constitution was to originate among the dreamers of the ancient philosophers? (*Commentaries*, 1851, I, p. 337)

The tone has soured severely since 1828. In both works, D'Israeli answered the challenges to his scholarship by claiming that not all of the letters to which Nugent and Forster had access were available to him when he undertook to write his original history. However, he not only acknowledged his debt to St Germans, but made him complicit in the writing process ('Nothing less than the abundant zeal which we mutually felt ...'). While he did not entirely rescind the criticism

that the *Monarchy of Man* is too dependent on classical allusion, his accusations of ‘tedious scholastic learning’ are altered to ‘scholastic erudition’ (p. 534) injured by genius. I have argued above that, in aiming to bring forth the ‘revelations of private history’, D’Israeli’s historiography approached biography. As a biographer rather than a historiographer, however, D’Israeli faced the challenge of acknowledging his debt to his source while remaining impartial. Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes have described how a culture of equating original source material with historical authority led the Victorian biographer into the family archive, and caused him to face ‘an increased pressure to be complimentary’.⁴¹ In acknowledging his debt to those descendants who had given him access to family papers, D’Israeli paradoxically sought to enhance his claim to ‘philosophical impartiality’ by asserting his scholarly link with his subject’s family and their archives; by retaining his essentially Tory view, but not by moderating his criticism of his subjects.

D’Israeli’s personal responses to *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen*, and *Statesmen of the Commonwealth* show that the 1851 *Commentaries* was written with Forster in mind. Forster had criticised the letters cited by D’Israeli as a poor representation of the correspondence kept in the Port Eliot family papers; D’Israeli now reprinted these in full as an appendix to the first volume. He also referred the reader to Forster for the full text of Eliot’s apology to Moyle. D’Israeli continued to disagree, however, with Forster’s view that the friendship between Eliot and Buckingham was transitory, repeating his interpretation of a letter written in 1623 from Eliot to Buckingham, and reiterating that Eliot was a deferential ‘suppliant’ to Buckingham at this time, as he:

Mr Forster, in his *Life of Sir John Eliot*, written with considerable care, has noticed the silence of Eliot respecting the Duke of Buckingham in the Parliament of February, 1623, ‘when the lauded name of the Duke was frequently on the lips of other popular members,’ as evidence that Eliot was not a subserver to the Duke; I regard it as evidence that the mind of Eliot was then

⁴¹ ‘“And what have you done?” Victorian biography today’, Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes, in *Biographical Passages: Essays in Victorian and Modernist Biography*, ed. Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 3.

ranking on the supposed injury which he complains of in the November before.
(*Commentaries*, 1851, I, p. 321n)

Forster's own copy of the 1851 *Commentaries* is missing from the Forster archive. However, an unbound copy of the 'Monarchy of Man' from the 1851 edition, with Forster's corrections, can be found in the boxes containing the manuscript for *Sir John Eliot*. It would appear that Forster annotated his 1828 copy of the *Commentaries* as part of his research for *Sir John Eliot*, although the annotations may have been made in preparation for *Eminent British Statesmen*, or *Statesmen of the Commonwealth*. Predictably, the annotations are mainly underlined passages with which Forster disagreed, and which we have discussed above. However, they do occasionally offer interesting insight into the differences between their methodologies.

Ogden has described how in researching the literary 'anecdote' of his earlier career, D'Israeli would pore over the manuscripts of the British Museum. He gradually compiled his own 'well-stocked library' (Ogden, p. 207), and in 1829 he established this in what he considered a fitting location: Bradenham House, near High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, which had formerly belonged to the parliamentarian Sir Edmund Pye, 'described by the "Nourisse of Antiquities," venerable Camden, as built by the Lord Windsor and in the reign of Henry VIII, for the salubrity of the soil and air' (Ogden, p. 155). D'Israeli was a somewhat reclusive historian, who at Bradenham 'was able to carry on his research in his new surroundings. His son pictures him occasionally strolling in the garden, to muse over a chapter or polish up a sentence' (Ogden, p. 162). Indeed, 'often he would retire altogether, to pursue his studies of the literary character in his well-stocked library. Hence his acquaintance with contemporary authors was limited, and his comments on their work are hard to find' (Ogden, p. 207). This last is illustrated in the 1828 *Commentaries*, as he writes 'the history of Cromwell has furnished ... a voluminous drama to a Monsieur Victor Hugo' (*Commentaries*, 1828, I, pp. xxiv). D'Israeli refers to Hugo's verse drama *Cromwell* (1827), which was never performed on stage on account of its immense length. Although Hugo had published

several volumes of poetry by this time, his literary reputation was not to be cemented until the early 1830s – however, Forster was still so surprised on reading this that he underlined the words and drew attention to it in the margin with a large exclamation mark.

Isaac D’Israeli’s father was a naturalised Italian merchant, who became a successful importer of Italian goods and one of the founder members of the London stock exchange. Although Ogden makes no association between D’Israeli’s family background in trade and his search for ‘literary fame and associated material reward’, it is interesting that both D’Israeli and Forster are so aggressive in their attempts to establish themselves as historiographical authorities, and that their libraries, in a physical sense, played such an important role in the literary personas of both.

Methodology, 1864

By 1864, Forster’s historiography had shifted from the patriotic appraisal of Sir John Eliot’s struggle for liberty of parliament, which had dominated ‘Our Early Patriots’, to a studious documentation of the Eliot papers which would finally dismiss beyond all doubt the aspersions which the Tory historians had cast; ‘under Carlyle’s influence, and so from a political stance far less radical than that of the 1830s, he began to recast and reinterpret the *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen*’ (Davies, p.119). In the ‘Early Patriots’ sketches and in the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* profiles, the conditions of publication had limited Forster to paraphrasing sources, and to presenting a dramatised narrative of them to his audience. In a full length biography of Sir John Eliot, he was now free to quote at length from the letters and manuscripts which he could before only summarise, and thus prove his historiographical expertise, and establish himself as the definitive authority. D’Israeli had already admitted his weakness in ‘conning the alphabet’ of Sir John Eliot, and Forster now resumed for the final time his attacks on D’Israeli’s faults of transcription and unsubstantiated

interpretation of sources. Once again, authority is established via a struggle for the most intimate connection with the Eliot family, as Forster trumps D'Israeli's support from Lord Eliot:

The Earl of St. Germans entrusted to my unreserved use, two years ago, the whole of these priceless family papers; and I can only hope that this book, which owes its existence to the confidence so placed in me, may be found to justify it ... From this the reader of the present volumes may probably infer that the martyrdom of their writer has been somewhat more severe, when I inform him that they include, either textually or in substance, the entire contents of that book of manuscripts of which the very imperfect mastery of less than a tenth part so severely taxed the patience and sight of an experienced historical enquirer; that, in aid of their subject, the contents of seven other volumes of equal bulk have been deciphered, sifted, and used; and, finally, that from three additional packets of detached papers, the majority in rough draft too often almost illegible, some in pencil nearly faded, and all apparently untouched since Sir John Eliot's death, some of the most important discoveries in this biography have been made.

Such are my obligations, for which it would indeed be difficult to find fitting language of acknowledgement, to the Earl of St. Germans; who also entrusted to me, for the purpose of being engraved, two original paintings of his ancestor at Port Eliot, one of them of surpassing interest.

(*Sir John Eliot*, I, pp. viii-ix)

While D'Israeli admitted his failure to work through the original correspondence, Forster argues that he has been able to get through ten times that amount, as well as State Papers, the manuscripts from the Public Record Office and the printed materials which refer to the period. He not only includes extracts from *Negotium Posterorum* and *The Monarchie of Man*, but also lengthy extracts from Eliot's correspondence with his sons, new forms of documentation such as a bill of expenses from his sons' tutor, and what appears to be a love letter from Eliot to an unknown Mrs Blount. Davies has noted that by 1863, Forster was wealthy enough (largely through his marriage with Eliza Colburn in 1856, from whom he may also have obtained the valuable books left to Eliza on her father's death in 1855) to buy manuscript material at auction (Davies, p. 114), and the fact that Forster was able to add to the information he gleaned from the Eliot papers with 'some manuscript collections of my own' only added to his impressiveness as a prolific and well-equipped historiographer.

Reviews

It seems that Forster's expectations for *Sir John Eliot* were somewhat disappointed. He wrote to Murray in May 1864, suggesting that the book 'specially claims notice from the larger reviews – where alone any attempt can be made to give account of its contents in any detail'.⁴² These reviews were mixed; the praise of *The Times*, for example, was somewhat tempered:

There is no man living who is so well entitled to be heard on any preliminary or incident of the great struggle between the English Monarchy and the English Parliament than Mr. John Forster, who has made it the honourable pleasure, pride and labour of his life to illustrate the construction of our present English liberties. He occupies this position very naturally and fairly, because, more than almost any of his studious contemporaries, he has resolutely devoted himself to one object of great compass, but of which the particulars have a very close connexion as cause or effect. It is a felicitous application of a man's energies to accomplish this concentration, especially as the opportunities of applying them are rare. Moreover, Mr Forster has been lucky in the lie of the game in the particular manor of which he has so exclusively sported. For his earlier biographies of the Statesmen of the Commonwealth, for his histories of the Grand Remonstrance and the Arrest of the Five Members, of a later date, he has obtained access to certain stores of information which were practically unknown to any of his predecessors, if we except only Mr Sanford, as to certain portions of them. In the present instance Mr Forster has set the crown on his former good fortune by deciphering among other papers at Port Eliot (Lord St. Germans) a memoir of the first Parliament of Charles I by Eliot himself, of which the historical importance is great and the personal interest unrivalled ... Mr Forster has performed his office very faithfully, though he certainly pants a little in the process, like a stout man who is tramping over a heavy soil. (*Times*, 25 March 1864, p. 4)

Ignoring the previous use of the Port Eliot manuscripts by writers such as D'Israeli and Nugent, *The Times* acknowledged Forster's rule in this domain, won by his effort and good fortune in the 'exclusivity' of his source material. Forster's concern that the book be noticed by the larger reviews indicates that his pride was tinged by a certain amount of anxiety. In June, he scolded Bulwer for leaving his volume on the table with the second volume 'in a virgin state – *uncut altogether*', a little hurt that Bulwer had not made more headway with it and worried that 'strangers,

⁴² Forster to John Murray, 15 May 1864, Derby. Murray Archive MSS 41912, NLS.

friends of yours should measure the attractiveness of my Big book by the progress you have been able to make in it'.⁴³

Forster's correspondence with Murray, now in the National Library of Scotland, is peppered with the biographer's explosions of temper. Forster's professional relationship with the publisher of *Sir John Eliot*, John Murray III, began in 1854, with *Quarterly* articles on Samuel Foote and Richard Steele. They quickly formed what was to become the twenty-year project of Forster's *Life of Swift*, and their close friendship is discussed in chapter four.

Even in letters marked 'confidential', the causes of these disagreements are rarely revealed, though they are often linked to professional disagreements and seem strongly to suggest that Forster's overambitious ideas of the success of his works, and his close friendship with Murray, led him to be vocal on how they should be published and advertised. During one of these disputes, he mentioned the idea of a new edition:

This is a matter of which I must indeed in any case have written to you, in connection with the life of Eliot. Having still faith in the vitality of that book, I am at this moment, at my own expense, printing a cheap, and in some [?], by removal of all matter superfluous or that could possibly be spared, abridged edition; and, but for the occurrence which has led to this letter, it was my intention to ask if you would care to issue it from your house. I cannot however now think that you would be disposed to do this, and I feel that I ought not to ask you. I will, therefore, if it be your wish (though it is but fair to myself to say that it has not been mine), take that book altogether away, and, with it, such of the remaining copies of the rest of my publications as you may wish me at the same time to remove ...

Nor should I thus separate from you in business matters, my dear Murray, if such separation is to be, with anything but gratitude to Cooke and yourself for all the pains you have taken with my books, and regret that they should not have paid you better ... (Forster to Murray, 19 Mar. 1870)⁴⁴

⁴³ Forster to Edward Bulwer Lytton, 2 June 1864. Lytton Papers, Hertfordshire County Record Office, vol. 15. Quoted Davies p. 119.

⁴⁴ Murray Archive MSS 41912, NLS.

Forster's tone seems to indicate some embarrassment that his 'Big book' had not been as successful as anticipated. The first printing of the book had not sold out (344 copies remained unsold, but there is no evidence to show how many were originally printed).⁴⁵ Murray's patient reply is characteristic of his responses to Forster's behaviour:

If I thought I could do more for the condensed Life of Eliot than any other publisher I would ask to publish it. No doubt in the multitude of publishers there is [?] & I cannot therefore oppose your proposal to transfer your works still in my hands to another, though I should not have made it myself. One difficulty is removed by the fact that at this time there is no charge whatever against you on account of these books, but I hope you will allow me to make over to you my ½ share of the copies in token of my good will towards you.' (Murray to Forster, March 23, 1870)⁴⁶

The 'popular edition' was in fact issued by Chapman and Hall in 1872. Chapman bought up the remaining copies of *Sir John Eliot*, the *Grand Remonstrance* (361 copies) and *Biographical Essays* (368 copies). The following letter to Forster sets out the terms of publication:

My dear Mr Forster

Mr Trollope and myself agree to purchase from you a popular edition of your biography of Sir John Eliot on the following terms:

You are to instruct [Mrrs.] Robson Sons to deliver to us an edition of one thousand copies in 2 vols crown 8o [?], for which we agree to pay as follows;

Our acceptance due 13 Feb next for £200 (which we now enclose)

When 750 copies are sold we are to pay for a further sum of £50

and a further sum of £50 when an additional 100 copies are sold making 850 in all

The cost of binding, advertising and all other charges incidental to the publication are to be borne by us.

The work is to be published not later than December 15th next at fourteen shillings a copy; and we undertake to pay to Mrrs. Robson the sum of £25 still remaining due to them by you for printing of the Indexes. This sum of £25 to be considered part payment for the £50 that will be payable when 750 copies are sold.⁴⁷

While these details are interesting, it is difficult to place them within a wider economic context.

⁴⁵ Frederick Chapman to Forster, 12 December 1873. Forster and Dyce Auxiliary, FD.5 Box.

⁴⁶ Murray Archive MSS 41912, NLS.

⁴⁷ Frederick Chapman to Forster, 8 November 1871, Forster and Dyce Auxiliary, FD.5 Box. 'Trollope' is Henry Trollope, whose £10,000 share of the firm was bought by his father Anthony in 1869. Henry was a partner in the firm for three years (*ODNB*).

Although individual case studies of publishing deals exist within the histories of publishing houses or other authors, I have so far been unable to find any statistics which would allow me to determine, for example, whether this was a larger than usual outright payment, or whether it is a standard publishing agreement. The financial documentation of Forster's contractual agreements with his publishers is very sparse, and this renders comparison even with his other works extremely difficult.

While D'Israeli had sought to provide a unified vision by claiming 'philosophical impartiality', Forster's unashamed adherence to the Parliamentary cause at all costs was now becoming anachronistic. Anthony Burton, in his introduction to a Commemorative Forster edition of the *Dickensian*,⁴⁸ noted that much of Forster's achievement lies forgotten since the events in question were soon to be more thoroughly excavated by Samuel Gardiner. He also, however, quotes Gardiner's *Academy* tribute to Forster:

The merits and defects of his work sprang from the same source. He was an advocate, not a judge. He was deficient in that judicious scepticism with which an historian is bound to test his assertions, and he therefore frequently, in spite of his love of hard work and his constant reference to original authorities, made assertions which will not bear the test of serious investigation. Hence, too, his preference of biography to history. He had almost a feminine need for a personal attachment in his literary work; of some hero with whose cause he could thoroughly identify himself, and whose faults and mistakes could, if they were acknowledged at all, be covered with loving tenderness. He never attached himself to unworthy objects ...
(Gardiner, from Burton, p. 144)

Forster's transcriptions and lengthy quotations from Eliot's political treatises were also quickly left redundant by Alexander Grosart's privately commissioned reprinting of Eliot's manuscripts.⁴⁹

These paid tribute to Forster's research, referring the reader to *Sir John Eliot* in biographical matters and quoting from it at great length:

⁴⁸ *Dickensian*, Commemorative Forster Edition, 70 (1974).

⁴⁹ Sir John Eliot, *The Monarchie of Man (1590-1632)*, ed. A. B. Grosart, 2 vols (Printed for private circulation only, 1879); Sir John Eliot, *An Apology for Socrates (Being a Vindication of Sir John Eliot by Himself) and Negotium Posterorum*, ed. Grosart, 2 vols (Printed for the Earl St Germans and Private Circulation only, 1881); Sir John Eliot, *De Jure Majestatis, or, Political Treatise of Government (1628-30) and The Letter-Book of Sir John Eliot (1625-1632)*, ed. Grosart, 2 vols (Printed for the Earl St Germans and private circulation only, 1882).

In the Introduction, I have limited myself almost wholly to an account of the TREATISE now reproduced. That is to say, I have not attempted the superfluous task of anything like a full Memoir of its Author. The main facts alone in the Life are briefly told, after Mr. Forster. Those at all interested in the Book will know that among his varied services to historic-biographic literature, MR. JOHN FORSTER has earned undying gratitude from lovers of 'this England' by his 'Sir John Eliot: A Biography.' Than this and related works (*e.g.* 'Grand Remonstrance' and 'Arrest of the Five Members') there are no more substantive, truthful, judicial, or fresh contributions to the study of these great but tragical periods. As with Carlyle's Cromwell and J. L. Sandford's 'Studies and Illustrations of the Great Rebellion' (1858) and Goldwin Smith's historical Essay-Studies, and Samuel R. Gardiner's 'Histories' and 'First Two Stuarts and the Puritan Revolution,' the labours of JOHN FORSTER have made it thenceforward an *anachronism* to go on accepting traditional Royalist and Cavalier falsities and caricatures for the truth of the matter. At this late day surely men may be agreed to render justice to great memories on both sides? (*The Monarchie of Man*, I, 17-18)

Grosart did not criticise Forster for the party nature of his history, which had been brought in to question even during Forster's own lifetime. He brought into question only traditionally accepted accounts of the Royalist party. He instead censured Forster's scholarship quite severely in the kinds of typographical errors for which Forster had previously criticised D'Israeli, which were so severe that the Earl St Germans required a new edition of Sir John Eliot's works.

Conclusion

Forster and D'Israeli's research has been superseded, and their voluminous works are now 'of more interest to the historiographer than to the historian' (Ogden, p. 160). Despite this, the aggressive nature of their struggle against one another to establish themselves as historical authorities is particularly interesting, as it not only sheds light on the standard methodologies of the Victorian historiographer, but can also be interpreted on a more personal level as the wish to compensate for 'relatively humble origins'. Their choice to seek out the 'personal histories and private motives', and the active shift on John Forster's part from traditional historiography to biography, also has interesting connotations for the development of the genre. These will be further examined in the next chapter, in which the interplay between Forster and Carlyle, both ideologically and in the archive, is exposed in Forster's biographical sketch of Oliver Cromwell.

Chapter Two: *Oliver Cromwell*

Introduction

His association with Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* had allowed Forster to take advantage of the series format to bring his biography before a wider public. The expansion of the publishing industry, with new printing technologies and cheaper paper production costs, made books more widely available than ever before. With literacy spreading, and a newly enfranchised middle class in need of practical wisdom, national history emerged as a popular feature of this new literary market. This chapter is concerned with the popular history, the journalistic history which was beginning to dominate the marketplace, as it relates to Forster's sketch of Oliver Cromwell, first published in 1839-40 and revised in both 1856 and 1858. Cromwell's central position in nineteenth-century historiography was shaped by the creators and disseminators of the kinds of historic mythologies already seen in the previous chapter, by writers, and archive-compilers, such as Forster. These history writers used linguistic techniques borrowed from fiction in order to strengthen these myths by eliciting sympathy for or identification with the 'hero'. The biography has a much more standard publishing history than *Sir John Eliot*, or *Goldsmith*, but both textually and in the physical archive, is demonstrative of Carlyle's influence on Forster's biographical views and methodology.

The seventeenth-century struggles between King and Parliament, which Forster found so fascinating, were a common source of inspiration to the Victorians. Between 1820 and 1900, roughly one hundred and seventy-five paintings on the struggle between Cavalier and Roundhead were displayed by the Royal Academy, outnumbering any other period of British History.¹ As Forster and Carlyle's friendship began, the publication of Forster's own sketches of Stuart and

¹ Roy Strong, *Painting the Past: The Victorian Painter and British History* (London: Pimlico, 2004), p. 141 and p. 148.

Commonwealth statesmen was drawing to its conclusion. They were written as ‘job work’; Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, in his biography of Forster, dismisses them as ‘a conscientious bit of work ... rather dry reading, something after the pattern of Dr Lingard, who was then in fashion’.²

The comparison of Forster’s biographies with John Lingard’s is surprising, though pertinent, as we shall see later, in terms of the historians’ common use of emerging, modern techniques of source criticism. However, it was Forster’s story-telling, rather than his scholarship, which Carlyle chiefly found to be admirable in the *Lives*. Carlyle held that good history does not merely present information, but brings historical documents to life.³ This was what Carlyle admired in Forster’s work – his ability to construct a novelistic and relatively balanced narrative from the glut of often overwhelmingly Royalist sources.

Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches, by Thomas Carlyle, was first published in 1845, and has proved to be a most significant agent in constructing a ‘historic mythology’ of Cromwell. However, as discussed, historiographical practice in the early nineteenth century meant that the validity of sources, as well as their origins, were coming to be questioned – historiographers were becoming increasingly interested in the prejudices of their sources and seeking to claim authority by collating all the material available to them, and presenting it to the reader in such a way that he might make up his own mind.

Oliver Cromwell (1839-40); Forster’s methodology

While the study of the seventeenth century was a passion for Forster, his work was restricted by his commitments to the *Examiner*, to Chapman and Hall, for whom he worked as a literary adviser for

²Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, *John Forster, by One of His Friends* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1903), p. 16.

³Thomas Carlyle, ‘On Biography’ (*Edinburgh Review*, 1832) and ‘Boswell’s Johnson’ (*Edinburgh Review*, 1832) *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vols (London: Fraser, 1840), vol. II.

almost twenty-five years, and, from 1855, to the Lunacy Commission. At the time Forster wrote the *Statesmen*, he was ‘one the busiest of London journalists’.⁴ Indeed, he was so busy that it was Robert Browning who ghost-wrote, to a degree which has not been determined, Forster’s *Life of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford*, which became an irremediable strain on their friendship (Davies, pp. 133-34). The work also strained Forster’s health, and taking these factors into consideration, it seems likely that the *Statesmen*, with their compact format of roughly a hundred pages each, were produced fairly quickly; although Espinasse’s claim that they were written in eight months does not explain the publication period of four years from 1836-40.⁵

Unlike many of his counterpart historians, this left Forster with no time to spend in the British Museum reading room, and he thus collected an impressive amount of source materials for perusal in his own library. It has been seen in the previous chapter that later in his career his income and professional relations with John Murray allowed him to collect manuscript material, and this will become clearer in my work on the *Life of Swift*. At this time, however, his acquisitions seem to have consisted mostly of printed collections of material, such as *Cromwelliana*, which Forster and Carlyle appear to have collaboratively Grangerised with various printed portraits.⁶ Forster’s library also contains the standard histories of the period to which he often refers, but with no purchase documents or indications apart from marginalia as to when these may have been bought or used in the writing of his sketches. His research notes and correspondence relating to the sketches have been preserved in the folio volumes of correspondence in the Forster Collection, showing how he occasionally obtained autograph letters, or the loan of a manuscript such as the family papers lent by the St Germans family.

⁴ Francis Espinasse, *Literary Recollections and Sketches* (London: Hodder, 1893), p. 113.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶ Machell Stace, *Cromwelliana; A chronological detail of events in which Oliver Cromwell was engaged, from the year 1642 to his death, 1658: with a continuation of other transactions to the restoration* (London: Westminster, 1810). Forster’s copy, Forster Collection Fol. 8330, NAL.

Although there is no very clear logic to the way the Forster manuscripts were ordered by the donation's first curators, they do appear to have been roughly grouped according to correspondent, or to the biography with which they were associated. His notes for the uncompleted full-length biography of Strafford, for example, are mostly contained in volume thirty-five, with a pencil comment on the flyleaf which reads 'N.B. These cuttings (1-97) on the following 25 leaves are probably not in the exact order of the Life of Strafford in Mr Forster's "Statesmen of the Commonwealth". [RH]. Cuttings from British Statesmen'. It is unclear when this was written, or whether the annotator was an archivist, or a helpful reader.⁷

The same volume contains a number of letters to Forster from various correspondents, with corrections, suggestions for additional sources, and a request from an unknown correspondent that if he should bring out a new edition, he should include an index, since the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia's* is 'useless'. The volume contains annotated cuttings from printed books and newspapers, unidentifiable descriptions of the desecration of Cromwell's body and disputes from *The Times* on his lineage. Also included are requests from other historiographers and antiquarians, wishing to add Forster to subscription lists, some too poor to buy books and wishing to consult his.

In July 1858 Anna Maria Pinney offered a view of her 'strictly family' papers. The volume's four letters from Pinney show that Forster consulted the papers at her family home in Berkeley Square, and that she made transcriptions of his selections. Forster enlisted the help of antiquarians such as John Bruce, who wrote in January 1863 that he had been able to make out the handwriting of Robert Cotton on a fragile slip which Forster had been unable to decipher. There the coherence of this volume ends, with a selection of letters from Garrick and Charles Churchill, and a piece of scrap paper listing 'letters to be kept'. Forster's own manuscripts contain cuttings of transcriptions

⁷ It is possibly R. F. Sketchley who was, at that time, Assistant Keeper of the Library, and compiled the first index to the Collection on its arrival at the South Kensington Museum.

in a hand other than his, and it therefore seems likely that he employed an amanuensis; he certainly employed a secretary to keep the library at Palace Gate House in order.⁸ Forster's notes for *Statesmen* or the life of Strafford are scattered throughout the manuscript collection – original letters written by Strafford can be found in at least three other non-consecutive manuscript volumes. Now that these volumes have been inventoried on both microfiche and the NAL's digital catalogue, locating material is a relatively simple process. Since many individual documents were not recorded in the 1893 Catalogue, readers until very recently must have had to traverse the patchwork of documents in each volume in order to locate a fragment they may have had no guarantee of finding.

Forster and Carlyle

John Forster's friendship with Thomas and Jane Carlyle has been well documented by Carlyle's many biographers, and those interested in Carlyle's historiography have already noted the extensive use which Carlyle made of Forster's library. The Forster Collection is littered with Thomas Carlyle's marginalia, many of which have been examined by the research of historians such as D. J. Trela.⁹ Although Forster and Carlyle were initially brought together by their mutual enthusiasm for the London Library scheme, their common passion for seventeenth-century history proved a driving force in the early period of their friendship.

In his own *Cromwell*, Carlyle acclaimed Forster's as the only commendable biography of the Protector:

As a crown to all the modern Biographies of Cromwell, let us note Mr. Forster's late one, full of interesting original excerpts, and indications of what is notablest in the old Books; gathered and set forth with real merit, with *energy* in abundance and superabundance; amounting in result, we may say, to a vigorous decisive tearing up of all the old hypotheses on the subject,

⁸ Hetherington, p. 54. Hetherington does not give further details.

⁹ D.J. Trela, *A History of Carlyle's Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

and an opening of the general mind for new.¹⁰

Trela suggested that Carlyle may have moderated his criticism because of their friendship, and that there were, more importantly, embryonic aspects of Forster's work which appealed to Carlyle.¹¹

Carlyle admired Forster's selection of original, anecdotal source material, the openness of mind and the energy with which he sought to bring to life the 'waste rubbish-continent of Rushworth-Nelson State-papers, of Philosophical Scepticisms, Dilettantisms, Dryasdust Torpedoisms' (Carlyle, *Cromwell*, I, p. 118). In turn, Forster's perception of Cromwell was greatly influenced by his friendship with Carlyle, as he demonstrated in his re-writing of *Cromwell* for the *Edinburgh Review*, and Jane wrote that Carlyle 'finds [Forster] here and there taking up a notion of [Carlyle's] own'.¹²

In January 1839, Carlyle was in the course of shapeless research on the history of the Commonwealth. Forster's *Statesmen*, borrowed from John Sterling, had been included in his preparatory reading.¹³ Requesting Forster's support for the Lending Library scheme on 17 January, he mentioned that he had just finished *Cromwell* and that he was in 'zealous search of the foregoing *Lives*'. Shortly after this, he received the typically Forsterian gift of the four volumes, bound in calf:

Your messenger found me engaged, with people about me; so that, for the moment, I made out only part of what he meant. A few minutes after he was gone, I discovered that the four beautiful volumes were not a loan but a gift! If the former would have been a favour, right welcome to me at present, the latter may well be a thing to be proud of, to be grateful for. Accept my best thanks for so handsome a gift, so handsomely bestowed. Surely I will keep these Books in a place of honour, and value them both for their own sake, and as a distinguished mark of your kindness to me. And now in these Russia coats, brushed of all Lardnerism, ye Hampdens and Eliots, have at you!- I will not criticise *Cromwell* at present;

¹⁰Thomas Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches: With Elucidations*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845), I, pp. 28-29.

¹¹D.J. Trela, *The Writing of Thomas Carlyle's Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1984), p. 283.

¹²Jane Carlyle to John Sterling, 19 January 1842. *Collected Letters*, XIV, pp. 18-19.

¹³Carlyle to John Sterling, 12 April 1836. *Collected Letters*, VIII, p. 333.

but say only, what I can well do, that I think I have got more insight out of it than out of all the other Lives of Cromwell. You surely take the right plan with those things;- faithfully endeavour to *body forth* the matter, and *see* it before speaking of it. Far other than the common plan; the results of which we see daily!¹⁴

The polite deferral of criticism hints that *Cromwell* had not entirely satisfied him – after all, their views on Cromwell’s character were fundamentally different, as we shall see. It seems that the expensive binding, rather than the craftsmanship of the biographer, primarily rendered them ‘brushed of all Lardnerism’, and distinguished them from the run-of-the-mill trade biographies and histories published in that series. Carlyle did, however, acknowledge the challenge of writing on figures such as Hampden and Eliot, and congratulated Forster on his scholarship and imagination.

History, biography, fiction: cross-pollination of genres

Samuel Johnson’s famous *Rambler* essay on biography (1750) placed the genre in the thick of a cross-pollination of ideas and stylistic techniques between historical writing and the novel. This mutual exchange has continued to generate a rich and complex discussion on generic boundaries, empiricism and formal realism; a self-reflective discussion in the writings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists and historians, and more recently in a number of critical fields. In his structuralist/ poststructuralist essay ‘The Reality Effect’, Roland Barthes contrasted Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and ‘A Simple History’ with Michelet’s history of the French Revolution to describe the collapse in the mid-nineteenth century of the distinction between realism and verisimilitude. Jonathan Culler showed that ‘cultural *vraisemblance*’, a process of invoking a store of shared cultural knowledge, was used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as a test of narrative’s truth, and seems applicable to historical as well as fictional narratives; Hayden White’s *Metahistory* identified the common linguistic conventions between realist fiction and nineteenth-

¹⁴ Carlyle to Forster, 25 [?] January 1839, *Collected Letters*, XI, pp. 7-9.

century historical writing.¹⁵

In a recent article, Karen O'Brien explored the development of a British consciousness of history in the eighteenth century by charting the parallel developments of novelistic and historical writing. Johnson's view that contemporary history writing had little power to move ('Histories of the downfalls of kingdoms, and the revolutions of empires are read with great tranquility')¹⁶ was symptomatic of a widespread perception that Britain had failed for decades to produce a genuinely compelling narrative that could capture the imagination, while conveying at the same time a deeper unity of events. Historians responded to this antipathy by borrowing strategies from novels in order to enable readers to identify with 'characters'; Hume's essay 'Of the Study of History' was published in the same decade in which the novel enjoyed a 'rebirth' as a realist genre, self-consciously distanced from its previous incarnations as romance, politics *à clef*, and feminised erotic fantasy.

The 'externality' of history was seen as an insulating force by Enlightenment scholars, and equated with impartiality. As we have seen in the work of D'Israeli, scholars later became more aware of the limitations of impartiality, and history writing turned to the rise of civil society in Britain, including the legal regimes, political and religious identities and social customs that formed the public framework for individual lives.¹⁷ This synthesis resulted in the work of David Hume and Edward Gibbon, whose long narrative style continued to dominate public esteem until well into the nineteenth century.

¹⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: This Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

¹⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and E. D. Strauss, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. I, p. 320.

¹⁷ Karen O'Brien, 'History and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68 (2005), pp. 397-413.

Forster's own style owes much to this tradition, fitting easily alongside the Whig histories of his *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* co-author Sir James Mackintosh, and a precursor to the work of Macaulay. The problem with narrating the history of the Protectorate ostensibly through the documents of the period was in making these accessible and appealing to Forster's audience. For both Forster and Carlyle, it was the duty of the historian and biographer to bring his material to life. Biography, concentrating on a single life and the examination of 'personal and private motives', could bring a subjective, often moving, focus to the infuriating search through endless documents.

Cross-pollination between fiction and history: Forster's techniques

It is far easier to situate Forster's writing within this tradition than, for example, the more imaginative and sermonish writings of Carlyle.¹⁸ Forster's answer was to apply his imagination to the material through which he waded, using aesthetic techniques now associated with the realist novel. In 1839 and 1840, Forster's friends and co-writers were engaging with historical writing in a number of genres; Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*, edited by Forster; Browning in the *Statesmen* life of Strafford (he would later reflect on his own historiography in *The Ring and the Book*); Carlyle in his fiction-prose. The notion of Victorian realism is a complex one, and there is not sufficient room here to discuss all of the subtleties of how each genre may have influenced Forster's style. Even if there were, Forster does not engage in the kind of self-conscious reflection which Carlyle frequently casts on his own prose, and would probably not stand up to any attempt to read into his work an intentional participation in the dialogue about the metaphorical nature of language.

I would like to take some time to consider, however, the way in which Forster won Carlyle's approbation through his ability to breathe life into the 'Dryasdust' materials; as Carlyle wrote, he

¹⁸ David Amigoni's *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) gives consideration to this as part of a wider study of the development of history as a discipline.

‘faithfully endeavour[s] to body forth the matter, and see it before speaking of it’. Using two episodes from *Cromwell*, I would like to demonstrate how Forster uses techniques associated with nineteenth-century realism; the external, but referenced, narrator; the assumption of a homogeneous readership; metaphorical language; and individual psychology. Forster diverges from Carlyle by finding significant value in the physical material, as other than ‘dust’, which he needs to possess in order to validate and add authenticity to his work. Cromwell’s consultation with Whitelocke, his Lord Commissioner, in St James’s Park, on 7 November 1652, is one such example. In brief, Whitelocke recounts that he came across Cromwell in the evening, and Cromwell consulted him on his chances of becoming King.¹⁹ Carlyle, making a passing mention of the episode, highlights that Whitelocke’s testimony is questionable for two reasons. Whitelocke’s diary was released for publication after the Restoration, when its author, a ‘secret-royalist in the worst of times’ (Carlyle, *Cromwell*, II, p. 176) had been pardoned by Charles II and was in his service. His testimony is also ‘much dimmed by just suspicion of dramaturgy on his part’.

Whitelocke recorded his testimony in the form of a dialogue (a format to which Forster reverted as he continued to retell the episode).

Cromwell. My Lord, there is little hopes of a good settlement to be made by them, really there is not; but a great deal of fear, that they will destroy again, what the Lord hath done graciously for them and us; we all forget God, and God will forget us, and give us up to confusion; and these men will help it on, if they be suffered to proceed in their wayes; some course must be thought on to curb and restrain them, or we shall be ruined by them.

Whitelocke. We our selves have acknowledged them the Supream power, and taken our Commissions and Authority in the highest concernments from them, and how to restrain and curb them after this, it will be hard to find out a way for it.

Cromwell. What if a man should take upon him to be King?

Whitelocke. I think that remedy would be worse than the disease.

(Whitelocke, p. 524)

¹⁹ Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs...* (London: Printed for Nathaniel Ponder, 1682), p. 524.

Forster, on the other hand, presented the episode in reported speech:

Cromwell upon this, with well painted passion, made the show of an earnest appeal to his lawyer friend. ‘My lord, my lord, there is little hopes of a settlement to be made by them, really there is not; but a great deal of fear, that they will destroy again what the Lord hath done graciously for them and us; we all forget God, and God will forget us, and give us up to confusion; and these men will help it on, if they be suffered to proceed in their ways; *some course must be thought on, to curb and restrain them, or we shall be ruined by them.*’ Whitelocke quietly remarked to this: ‘We ourselves have acknowledged them the supreme power, and taken our commissions and authority in the highest concernments from them; and how to curb them, after this, *it will be hard to find out a way for it.*’

This was the very point to which the energetic captain desired to bring his learned and most meditative associate. Flinging off all further reserve, he frankly, boldly, and abruptly asked, ‘WHAT IF A MAN SHOULD TAKE UPON HIM TO BE KING?’

This question, be it observed, was addressed to one who stood high in the confidence of the leaders of the republic, and who himself, indeed, was one of its chief administrators. But no shadow of anger or remonstrance fell upon the treasonable thought. Most quiet and civil was the lord commissioner's reply. ‘*I think that remedy would be worse than the disease.*’
(*Cromwell, Lives*, VII, pp. 33-34)

The passage as found in Whitelocke's diary is not framed by any sort of information that might lead one to visualize Cromwell's ‘well painted passion’ or Whitelocke's quiet, thoughtful character in these terms. Introducing the dialogue, he writes simply:

It was about this time, that the Lord-General *Cromwell* meeting with *Whitelock*, saluted him with more than ordinary courtesie, and desired him to walk aside with him, that they might have some private discourse together, *Whitelock* waited on him, and he began the discourse betwixt them, which was to this effect ... (Whitelock, p. 523).

The omniscient narrator oversees the psychological movements of the ‘characters’, and assumes that the world which the narrator/ Forster (the writer who signs his preface never steps down from his narratorial persona) describes is knowable. The language is accessible; while the ‘authentic’ wording has been retained, punctuation has been subtly altered to guide one's reading. Forster reminds the reader of his presence (‘be it observed’) in order to draw his or her complicity and assuming, and eliciting, his or her trust. Small capitals and italics alert the reader that the narrator is present. Italics have been used to pick out passages for emphasis since the mid-sixteenth century,

when Robert Granjon first designed italics to sit comfortably alongside Garamond's roman.²⁰ The intrusiveness of this, familiar in an age of SMS and social media in which caps are widely associated with 'SHOUTING', is not new. In 1814, a correspondent of the *Belfast Observer* wrote to complain of the many uses and abuses of italics and capitals in newspaper prose. To use these so freely implied a lack of trust in the reader's 'GOOD SENSE' to pick out a clever turn of phrase or new idea and constantly distracted from the matter in hand.²¹ In one article, George Eliot similarly ridiculed the overuse of small caps and italics, suggesting that they merely highlighted the writer's failure to express his or her intention.²² Throughout his career, Forster's forthright voice characterises his journalistic and biographical writing in this way.

Forster's extensive footnotes, after the fashion of Lingard, sought not only to give an insight into 'the process by which the clear textual narrative above emerges from the extraordinary wealth of footnotes below'²³, but to prolong the drama of that textual narrative. This was often performed, however, at the expense of historiographical accuracy. Like many of his contemporaries, he often failed to name his sources, modernised spelling and punctuation and occasionally changed syntax in order to make his sources more readable. The following is an extract from a letter by Robert Baillie, written on 18 November 1640:

The Lower House closed their doors, the Speaker kepted the keyes till his accusation was concluded. Thereafter Mr. Pym went up, with a number at his back, to the higher house; and, in a pretty short speech, did, in name of the lower house, and in name of the commons of all England, accuse Thomas Earl of Strafford, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; of high treason; and required his person to be arrested till probation might be heard: so Pym and his back were removed. The Lords began to consult on that strange and unexpected motion. The word goes in haste to the Lord Lieutenant, where he was with the King: with speed he comes to the

²⁰ Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll, 1995), p. 25.

²¹ 'On the Use of Italics, Capitals &c in Composition', *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 31 October 1814, pp. 273-277.

²² George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Selected Essays*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 148. First published in the *Westminster Review*, October 1856.

²³ Edwin Jones, *John Lingard and the Pursuit of Historical Truth* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), p.16.

House; he calls rudely at the door; James Maxwell, keeper of the black rod, opens; his Lordship, with a proud glooming countenance, makes towards his place at the board head: but at once many bid him void the House; so he is forced, in confusion, to go the door till he was called. After consultation, being called in, he stands, but is commanded to kneel; and, on his knees to hear the sentence. Being on his knees, he is delivered to the keeper of the black rod, to be prisoner till he was cleared of these crimes the House of Commons had charged him with. He offered to speak, but was commanded to be gone, without a word. In the outer room James Maxwell required him, as prisoner, to deliver his sword. When he had got it, he cries, with a loud voice, for his man to carry my Lord Lieutenant's sword. This done, he makes through a number of people towards his coach, all gazing, no man capping to him, before whom that morning the greatest of England would have stood discovered ...²⁴

Baillie (1602-1662) was a presbyterian clergyman, who had been sent to London with several Scottish commissioners in order to negotiate the Treaty of London, following civil unrest over Charles's attempts to reform the Kirk. Baillie's letter was written to his wife, a week after the Commons accused Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, of high treason.

Compare this with Forster's representation of the same scene:

The members are now all within the house, and upon the crowd outside an anxious silence has fallen, such as anticipates great events. Hour passes after hour, yet the door of the commons is still locked, and within may be heard, by such as stand in the adjoining lobby, not the confused and wrangling noise of a various debate, but the single continuous sound of one ominous voice, interrupted at intervals, not by a broken cheer, but by a tremendous shout of universal sympathy. Suddenly, a stir is seen outside, the crowd grows light with uncovered heads, and the carriage of the great lord lieutenant of Ireland dashes up to the house of lords.

Ten minutes more have passed – the door of the commons house is abruptly thrown wide open – and forth issues Pym, followed by upwards of three hundred representatives of the English people; in that day the first men of the world, in birth, wealth, in talents. Their great leader crosses to the house of lords, and the bar is in an instant filled with that immortal crowd.

What, meanwhile, was the suspense lately endured by the meaner masses outside, to the agitation which now heaved them to and fro, like the sullen waves of an advancing storm. But the interval is happily shorter. It is closed by the appearance of Maxwell, the usher of the house of lords, at whose side staggers Strafford himself, *a prisoner!* The storm which had threatened, fell into a frightful stillness. They make 'through a world of staring people,' as old Baillie the covenanter wrote to his friends in Scotland, towards the carriage of the earl, 'all

²⁴ *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Creech and Gray, 1775), I, p. 217.

gazing, no man capping to him before whom that morning the greatest of England would have stood discovered.’ (*Cromwell, Lives*, VI, p.64-65)

I do not presume that Baillie’s was the only record of Strafford’s arrest consulted by Forster in order to write this scene. Baillie’s, however, is the only authority given. The depiction uses similar techniques to those of the first passage. The reader is situated outside the House of Lords, among a ‘threatening storm’ of people. Storms, real and metaphorical, appear frequently in Forster’s work, conveying the divine reflection of civil unrest. This leitmotif was later picked up by Carlyle, who used the ‘terrible storm’ (*Cromwell, Lives*, VII, p. 390) which dawned on the day of Cromwell’s death as the crux of his account of the same event. Nowhere in Baillie’s account is the mob of ‘meaner masses’ described. Forster’s mob is considerably more threatening than Baillie’s, although its menace is unfulfilled in the un-revolutionary act of the lifting of caps for Strafford before his arrest, and the refusal to lift them afterwards.

Finally, common to both writers was the technique of describing portraits, such as the following passage on Cromwell’s mother:

There is a portrait of her at Hinchinbrook, which, if that were possible, would increase the interest she inspires, and the respect she claims. The mouth, so small and sweet, yet full and firm as the mouth of a hero - the large melancholy eyes - the light pretty hair - the expression of quiet affectionateness suffused over the face, which is so modestly enveloped in a white satin hood - the simple beauty of the velvet cardinal she wears, and the richness of the small jewel that clasps it - seem to present before the gazer her living and breathing character.
(*Cromwell, Lives*, VI, p. 9)

In describing Cromwell's mother from her portrait, Forster sought to bring her firmly before the reader’s eye. He identified her physiology with moral uprightness, in a way similar to Carlyle’s perception of the heroic in images such as Giotto’s portrait of Dante, or Cranach’s of Luther.²⁵ This, to Forster, was the business of a successful biography. In 1836, reviewing the work of G. P. R. James (a fellow author in the Lardner series of statesmen and author of almost a hundred historical novels), Forster wrote, ‘History may satisfy herself with the dry dignity of public details,

²⁵ *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1840), p. 86.

but it is the business of Biography to deal with more intimately personal things'.²⁶ The relationship between Forster's biographies and the use of images in a style more usually associated with fiction is explored further in the following chapter.

The *Statesmen* sketches are primarily composed of long but carefully chosen extracts from both seventeenth-century writers and contemporary historians. Forster's aim for 'philosophical impartiality' in his writing and through the assembling of a documentary library is restated in *Cromwell*:

The writer of these pages has no favourite theory to establish out of his records of the life of Cromwell – it is simply his aim to attempt to arrive at as fair and impartial a ground for judgement, as the circumstances will enable him to attain. Therefore, standing at the threshold of that astonishing person's political greatness, he has thought it advisable to present to the reader thus, from every various quarter, the possible means and resources by the use of which he achieved it in the end.

(*Cromwell, Lives*, VI, p. 190)

The *Cromwell* presented by Forster, he implied, could only be as complete a representation of the man as was possible with the documents available. He sought to guide the reader in the position of judge, allowing a more balanced view than previous interpreters of the past by widening the variety of source material available to the reader. He took delight in exposing new pamphlets, letters, and unreported testimonies: ' "All that night," says the officer I have just quoted, in a fine description which appears in none of the histories and therefore may be welcomed by the reader here ...' (*Cromwell, Lives*, VI, p. 112). Forster contextualised his sources, presented conflicting Royalist and Republican views, and sought to warn the reader of the potential agendas of each writer. To the modern historian, these techniques are so commonplace that any historical work not employing them would be immediately discredited. I noted above the comparison of Forster's work to that of the Catholic historian John Lingard; if we are to believe recent claims that Lingard's scientific rules of source criticism were as innovative as Edwin Jones (Lingard's biographer) suggests, Forster's

²⁶ *Examiner*, 18 September 1836, p. 598.

adoption of them so successfully in the *Lives* is to his credit.

Carlyle's hero-worship

It would be anachronistic to apply Carlyle's conception of the Heroic to Forster's *Lives*. Indeed, Carlyle proclaimed in his series of lectures 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History' that he had vainly sought the heroic in the subjects of Forster's biographies:

For my own share, far be it from me to say or insinuate a word of disparagement against such characters as Hampden, Eliot, Pym; whom I believe to have been right worthy and useful men. I have read diligently what books and documents about them I could come at; with the honestest wish to admire, to love and worship them like Heroes; but I am sorry to say, if the real truth must be told, with very indifferent success! At bottom, I found that it would not do. They are very noble men, these; step along in their stately way, with their measured euphemisms, philosophies, parliamentary eloquences, Ship-Moneys, *Monarchies of Man*; a most constitutional, unblameable, dignified set of men. But the heart remains cold before them; the fancy alone endeavours to get-up some worship of them. What man's heart does, in reality, break-forth into any fire of brotherly love for these men? They are become dreadfully dull men!

(*Heroes*, pp. 192-193)

However, embryonic aspects of Carlyle's thinking in Forster's work can be seen as seeds of the heroic ideal. Certainly, Forster and Carlyle admired similar qualities in their central figures - their succinctness of language, for example, their lack of dissimulation and earnestness of religion. Believing in Cromwell's greatness, Forster's difficulty in *Cromwell* lay in reconciling very different accounts of his subject's religious sincerity. Although Cromwell was seen as a political dissembler, he exonerated himself by the earnestness of his 'household religion':

'... Oliver St John declared that Cromwell being one day at table with his friends, and looking for the cork of a bottle of champaign which he had opened, on being informed, that some person attended for admittance to see him, Tell him, says Cromwell, we are in search of the Holy spirit.'

If this was really said it must have been in an incautious moment indeed, or for some such hysterical relief from irritating or painful thought as the cushion supplied which he flung at Ludlow. In the general affairs of his household, in so far as religion and religious observances were concerned, he was strict and even in some cases exacting.

(*Cromwell*, I, p. 182)

While Carlyle certainly admired aspects of Forster's *Lives*, his own *Cromwell* ultimately rejected Forster's standpoint. 'Why do you make poor Noll such a Knave?' he wrote to Forster,

having read the second volume of *Cromwell*, 'I cannot believe him to have been at bottom dishonest, or *false* at all. Poor fellow, he was swimming as in a dim sea of wrecks and troubles'.²⁷ Carlyle's own *Cromwell* succeeded in transforming the public perception of Cromwell; given his close friendship with the author of such an influential work, it is natural that Forster would reconsider his view, and in 1856 he took the opportunity to clarify his position.

Carlyle marginalia in the Forster Collection

It is not only textually that the cooperative view of Cromwell is inscribed in Forster's work. The preparatory reading for the published works of both men and the years between the revisions discussed in this chapter, are scribbled into the editions of Baillie, Whitelocke, D'Israeli which were passed between Lincoln's Inn Fields and Cheyne Row in wicker hampers. Carlyle was an avid borrower and annotator of printed sources, drawing on his acquaintance with men such as Browning, F. D. Maurice, David Laing, John Sterling, J. G. Lockhart and Thomas Murray to raid libraries. Forster's gift to Carlyle of the handsomely bound *Statesmen* was shortly followed by the offer of unrestrained access to the working materials which Forster had gathered. He had already made use of Forster as a source of anecdotes, ravaging his store of books on Puritanism and Cromwell, writing in June 1839 that he thought of 'calling some day, to make a new forage among your Book-shelves ... I am a Rob Roy in Books; and levy "black-mail" on all my friends'.²⁸

As the year progressed, Carlyle's *Cromwell* seems to have been eclipsed by other work, including the following year's series of lectures. In September 1840, however, Carlyle acknowledged receipt of a hamper of Forster's books, and requested a further eighteen volumes of material. These were delivered on 6 October, 'unpacked, the Contents all set on shelves, and duly registered', and Carlyle prepared for a winter of sifting through the 'shot-rubbish', expecting no

²⁷ 19 February 1840. *Collected Letters*, XII, pp. 51-52.

²⁸ 10 June 1839. *Collected Letters*, XI, p. 127.

clear insight, yet finding the search ‘more and more entertaining’. Jane unwittingly shows us how firmly Carlyle relied upon this haul of books, when the hamper resurfaces in a letter to Forster, two years later:

In the course of my domestic *earthquake* among the various things that emerged out of the deep was *your* hamper - which I should surely, on my own authority *return*- seeing that there is no definite prospect of you ever getting back your books! and that, should such unexpected piece of good luck be in store for you, other more suitable conveyance than a *hamper* may be found for them.²⁹

At the time of Jane’s letter, Carlyle’s research was moving from the general to the specific. He had first mentioned his desire to write ‘A “kind of Essay on the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth of England” ’ more than twenty years before.³⁰ As Trela’s work shows, Carlyle’s notebooks from the intervening period are full of the history in various forms, and Carlyle claimed to have burned at least one draft. However, in the eighteen months leading up to the publication of *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches*, Carlyle finally conceived the history as it was to appear - not as separate volumes of biography and edited text, but as the annotated edition, in which his own commentary filled more than half the printed space.

During these eighteen months, Carlyle’s requests for material became both more frantic and more specific. On 4 May 1844, he wrote to Forster

I cannot anywhere rake up that unfortunate Document you gave me about the last hours of Cromwell; and I cannot do without it! From what Book could it come? I have six or seven accounts of the Protector’s exit, and no one of these is it. If you cannot, from the depths of your memory, fish up some trace of it, what is to become of me! Do make me a haul or two with the likeliest implements you have.³¹

While Carlyle was, in comparison to his contemporaries (Forster included) remarkably fastidious and scholarly in his references, Trela has suggested that his record-keeping system was often chaotic, and that his haphazard way of keeping notes meant that he frequently lost references and

²⁹ Jane Carlyle to John Forster, 1 September 1843. *Collected Letters*, XVII, pp. 106-107.

³⁰ Thomas to Alexander Carlyle, 21 November, 1821. *Collected Letters*, I, p. 399.

³¹ *Collected Letters*, XVIII, p. 36.

spent a great deal of time looking for them. When looking through the printed books which Forster lent to Carlyle, we find newspaper cuttings and scraps of articles on the Commonwealth occasionally stuck between the leaves and one cannot help wondering if these are Carlyle's own markers.

As we have seen, Carlyle was shameless about annotating the books he borrowed. In a letter to the Rev. Alexander Scott, Carlyle commented on his method for taking notes, replying 'I universally ... rather avoid writing beyond the very minimum; mark in pencil the very smallest indication that will direct me to the thing again'.³² Glancing through some of the sources which Carlyle has annotated, we see that this is not strictly true. While in *Cromwelliana*, Carlyle makes notes with reference to date and is obviously compiling and collating his material, in D'Israeli's *Commentaries*, which Carlyle borrowed in the winter of 1840-1841, his marginalia are long and caustic.³³ To a line of D'Israeli, 'Such is the anatomy of the mind and genius of the accomplished Statesman and warrior, his actions only exhibit him in the motion of life', Carlyle writes 'a singular mixture of intelligence and inanity in this D'Israeli. The man has a word or two in him, but will not speak except as thro' a trombone, blurting and blaring!' Carlyle evidently read pencil in hand, and is quite cavalier about sending his books back with 'useful' annotations; returning one volume, Carlyle wrote 'Here is Cary; in the first volume of which you will find some saucy annotations here and there; in the second volume I ceased tracing out the *reduplications* of the poor Editor, tho' probably they are as abundant as in the first...'³⁴

'The Civil Wars and Cromwell', 1856 and 1858

³² Carlyle to Alexander Scott, 5 December 1845, *Collected Letters*, XX, pp. 72-74.

³³ Isaac D'Israeli, *Commentaries on the Life and Reign of Charles the First, King of England*, 5 vols (London: Colburn, 1828-1831), vol IV, p. 440. Forster Collection copy L8vo 2484. Many of Carlyle's marginalia on this copy have reference to D'Israeli's Jewish background; Carlyle's reputation was brought into disrepute following the Second World War since it was (sadly) so easy to associate such writings with fascism. For more on this, see John Gross's *The Rise and Fall of the English Man of Letters* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 41-43.

³⁴ Carlyle to Forster, 6 September or 18 January 1842. *Collected Letters*, XV, pp. 69-70.

Forster's revised sketch of Oliver Cromwell was published in the January 1856 *Edinburgh Review*,³⁵ and again with lengthy additions in *Historical and Biographical Essays*, two years later. As contemporary reviewers noted, *The Civil Wars and Cromwell* was primarily a restatement of Carlyle's views, following the publication of Guizot's *Histoire de la République d'Angleterre et de Cromwell* (1854).³⁶ By adopting this new perspective, Forster (who had previously expressed admiration for Guizot's works)³⁷ was forced to disclaim the opinions he had expressed in the *Lives*, and avow his conversion to the 'Carlylese theory of Cromwell' (*Saturday Review*, p. 617). This has been noted by other literary historians,³⁸ but it is an important development in Forster's career as biographer, and symptomatic of the influence which Carlyle had on his biographical writings. I would therefore like to summarise briefly how, and why, Forster modified his opinion.

'The Civil Wars and Cromwell' reviewed Guizot's *Histoire*, as well as George Banks's *Richard Cromwell* (1856), and *The Story of Corfe Castle* (1855). In the process, Forster restated some of the reasons for the Victorian preoccupation with Commonwealth history:

Mr Banks so speaks of the civil wars of the seventeenth century, and speaks truly. They have an interest which still concerns not particular neighbourhoods, but every particular family and fireside in the kingdom, for under Heaven we owe it mainly to them that all English homes are now protected and secure. They were at war without an enemy, as one of their leaders said. They began in no sordid encounter of selfishness or faction, they involved no vulgar disputes of family or territory, and personal enmities formed no necessary part of them. In the principles they put to issue we continue ourselves to be not less interested than were our forefathers; and hardly a question of government has arisen since, affecting liberty or the national welfare, which has not included a reference to this great conflict, and some appeal to the precedents it established. Nothing can be unimportant that relates to it, therefore, nor any service small that may clear up a doubt of the motives and conduct of its leaders; and if these, as the evenings of winter have again arrived, should again be discussed in the Corfe Castle or any other improvement society, such hints as we are now about to offer will not be without their use. (*Civil Wars and Cromwell*, p. 2)

³⁵ *Edinburgh Review*, January 1856, pp. 1-54. There is a proof copy of this with marginal notes by Forster and Carlyle in the Forster Collection, National Art Library (FP. 580); *Historical and Biographical Essays*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1858).

³⁶ *Saturday Review*, 12 June 1858, pp. 616-617.

³⁷ *Sir John Eliot, Lives*, I, p. 35.

³⁸ For more on this see Ashton, p. 264.

In the seventeenth century, Forster argued, the Victorian scholar could find the roots of the modern political questions which divided society to that day; problems such as constitutional and electoral reform, national education and the relation between Church and State. The French Revolution was a living memory to many; the French search for answers to their own violent problems in the annals of English history came to a height in the 1820s and 1830s. Guizot's *Histoire de la Révolution d'Angleterre* was published in 1826-7, and translated by William Hazlitt junior in 1845. Roy Strong, explaining the significant popularity of Paul Delaroche's mass-produced prints, *Cromwell Gazing at the Body of Charles I* (1831), *The Mocking of Charles I* (1837) and *Strafford on his Way to Execution* (1837), aptly describes Guizot's work as 'a historical autopsy on the French Revolution'.³⁹

In *The Civil Wars and Cromwell*, Forster outlined Guizot's career and his reasons for writing a history of the English Commonwealth. The Protestant François Guizot (1787-1874) was born in Nîmes; his father was hanged in 1795 for professing a dislike of the Republic, and this determined Guizot's position, as Forster writes, 'as a calm antagonist of whatever he believed to be anarchy' (p. 25). Following the Revolution of 1830, Guizot occupied a number of governmental positions under Louis Philippe, including Minister of the Interior, Minister of Public Instruction, French Ambassador to England, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and in September 1847, Prime Minister of France. Forster expressed admiration for the system of national education which Guizot implemented in France, 'far better than anything of a similar kind hitherto attempted in England'.

Guizot's position as a Liberal Frenchman who had experienced at first hand the terrors of civil war, and whose views on the French Constitution directly influenced national policy, made his historical work doubly interesting to Forster. Carlyle was evidently less impressed; in Forster's copy of the 1856 *Edinburgh Review* article, Carlyle has pencilled a number of acerbities. Alongside

³⁹ Strong, p. 146

Forster's text:

This great fact, therefore, accomplished on the ruins of the ancient Monarchy, and in the name of necessity, by the genius of a great man sustained by God, it became the duty of all men to recognise and accept; and, from the uniform tone of his reasoning, it is manifest that the historian himself so accepts it, though he sees that it carried with it also the seeds of failure inseparable from its revolutionary origin. ('The Civil Wars and Cromwell, p. 36)

Carlyle commented 'makes a dirty French Pamphlet of the great Oliver's life, then?', and wrote that Guizot was a 'galvanised dead dog'.

Although he did not share Carlyle's disdain, Forster dismissed Guizot's *Histoire* as too coloured by his experience of revolution. Forster warned those who wished to attempt direct comparisons between the English civil war and the French:

... the points of similarity are all in one direction, and serve only to throw into startling contrast the more extraordinary points of difference. Not more surely did those advisers of poor Louis XVI. who precipitated his doom, resemble the men whose councils had driven Charles I. to the scaffold, than the frenzied wretches who bore aloft the mangled body of the Princesse de Lamballe, were unlike the calm, self-resolute men who fought at Marston Moor ... Mr Banks asserts that our civil wars began in organised riots, in democratic excesses, and in scenes such as inaugurated Robespierre's Reign of Terror. We say that they began in high and honourable good faith, and in an utter absence of personal animosities.

(*The Civil Wars and Cromwell*, pp. 10-11)

Not only were Guizot's qualifications to write such a history questionable, but he failed to unite the political and religious elements of Cromwell's character as entirely co-dependent. This seemed somewhat at odds with the insincere Cromwell portrayed in the *Lives*. In order to clarify this, Forster identified three standpoints which scholars of the Commonwealth had taken; the first being the view that Cromwell was purely ambitious and self-serving, and that his professions of religion were entirely hypocritical. The second standpoint, which Forster had taken in *Statesmen*, was the conventional Whig's view; the Protector's rule ultimately failed since, despite a devotion to 'deep and sincere religion' and 'loving liberty', he was tragically unable to conquer personal ambition and fulfilled the role of a monarch rather than a monarchomach. The third position vindicated Cromwell entirely:

and may be taken as the expression of certain absolute results, to which a study of the entire of Cromwell's letters and speeches, brought into succinct arrangement and connexion, has been able to bring an earnest enquirer. We may thus describe them. That in the harsh untuneable voice which rose in protest against popery in the third parliament, was heard at once the complete type and the noblest development of what was meant by the Puritan Rebellion. That there then broke forth the utterance of a true man, of a consistency of character perfect to a heroic degree, and whose figure has heretofore been completely distorted by the mists of time and prepossession through which we had looked back at it into the past ... *this* Cromwell was no hypocrite or actor of plays, had no vanity or pride in the prodigious intellect he possessed, was no theorist in politics or government, was no victim of ambition, was no seeker after sovereignty or temporal power.
(*Civil Wars and Cromwell*, p.15)

Forster's opinion had clearly shifted to a more heroic view, and any hint of knavery was expunged in deference to Carlyle:

We certainly cannot but regard as extremely remarkable the grave indifference with which the historian is thus able to set aside, as only one of many reasons towards a worldly end, the fervent vein of scriptural thought and feeling which runs not alone through every deliberate work of Cromwell's, but which tinges also his every lightest act, and, in his private as in his public utterances, is that which makes still most impressive appeal to all who would investigate his character.

For this we hold to have been finally established by Mr. Carlyle, and to constitute the peculiar value of his labours in connexion with the subject. To collect and arrange in chronological succession, and with elucidatory comment, every authentic letter and speech left by Cromwell, was to subject him to a test from which falsehood could hardly escape; and the result has been to show, we think conclusively and beyond further dispute, that through all these speeches and letters one mind runs consistently.

(*The Civil Wars and Cromwell*, pp. 36-37)

In case the reader missed the shift of opinion, Forster also added a footnote to the 1858 reprint:

'Such was the view I attempted to present of the character of this great man in my *Statesmen of the Commonwealth*. As the reader may probably infer from the tone of the present essay, I should now be disposed very greatly to modify it' (*Civil Wars and Cromwell, Historical and Biographical Essays*, I, 1858, p. 282).

It should be noted that Carlyle's contribution to this article was greater than writers such as Espinasse, who claimed that 'Forster avowed his conversion to Carlyle's view, who was not a little pleased by it' (Espinasse, p. 118), have known. Forster's own emendations to the Forster Collection's bound *Edinburgh Review* copy, suggest that it is a corrected proof for the 1858 version.

We see from Carlyle's corrections that he oversaw, to some degree, the additions and changes which were made to it prior to its publication in *Historical and Biographical Sketches*. 'Very well indeed!' Carlyle writes on the final sheet, in a schoolmasterly fashion; 'Send me (please) a copy of these sheets, so soon as they are printed off, - that I may keep it, in a disengaged [state?]'.

The Forster Collection bound copy does not, however, contain Forster's notes for the substantial additions he made to the 1856 article. These were mainly the revision of his view of Strafford, and the addition of a life of Lucius Cary, 2nd Viscount Falkland, drawn mainly from Macaulay's 1831 *Edinburgh Review* essay on John Hampden. However, republishing in 1858 also allowed Forster further to expound his newly modified view of Cromwell. Contrary to the *Lives*, Forster now argued that Cromwell's dissolution of the Long Parliament was less of a despotic attempt to gain supreme power than 'an interruption to the temperate wisdom which generally guided him'. *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, Forster argued, vindicated Cromwell from the extreme claims made against him of fanaticism or hypocrisy:

Over and over again he [Cromwell] insists and enlarges on these views. He started life with them, and they remained with him to its close. Over and over again he used the noble language which was among the last he addressed to the last parliament that assembled in his name. He would have freedom for the spirits and souls of men, he said, because the spirits of men *are* the men. The mind was the man. If that were kept pure and free, the man signified somewhat; but if not, he would fain see what difference there was betwixt a man and a beast. Nay he had only some activity to do some more mischief. Upon these principles, he would have established, and connected, inseparably, government and religion.

(*Civil Wars and Cromwell, Historical and Biographical Essays*, I, pp. 315-616)

One reviewer noted that not only had Forster been converted to Carlyle's view of Cromwell as heroic, but his 'language occasionally shows traces of the influence of its author's style' (*Saturday Review*, p. 617). Outside this, however, Forster's apparent about-face of opinion was ignored as reviews were devoted almost entirely to praise of the two accompanying essays.⁴⁰ In defending

⁴⁰ 'The Debates on the Grand Remonstrance' and 'The Plantagenets and the Tudors'. Reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 15 May 1858, pp. 620-622, *Examiner*, 15 May 1858, pp. 308-309.

Carlyle, Forster had necessarily to admit that his scholarship had been superseded by one who had managed to change public opinion toward Cromwell on a monumental scale.

Although Nonconformist histories had long sought to champion Cromwell, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* truly redefined the nineteenth-century image of the Protector. Visual representations of Cromwell in paintings such as Augustus Egg's *Cromwell on the Eve of the Battle of Naseby* are very different from the despotic egotist of the eighteenth century.⁴¹ David Wilkie Wynfield's *Oliver Cromwell on the Night before his Death* (which Forster bought in 1868 for £100)⁴² was based on Carlyle's account of Cromwell's death:

Look also at the following; dark hues and bright; immortal light-beams struggling amid the black vapours of Death. Look; and conceive a great sacred scene, the sacredest this world sees; - and think of it, do not speak of it, in these mean days which have no sacred word. 'Is there none that says, Who will deliver me from the peril?' moaned he once. Many hearts are praying, O wearied one! 'Man can do nothing,' rejoins he; 'God can do what he will.'

(Carlyle, *Cromwell*, II, p. 664)

Wynfield's painting treats Cromwell with almost religious veneration, expressing the genuine piety which Forster feels to have come to Cromwell on his death-bed:

Still must some portion of the reality of that enthusiasm with which he wrought his unworthiest aims, be permitted to remain with him. On his death-bed, we shall see, it shone suddenly forth, when all the insincerity and the *trick* of life and its designs had passed forever.

(*Cromwell, Lives*, VI, p. 192)

Carlyle's 'historic mythology' of Cromwell had truly pervaded Victorian culture. The mythology was disseminated by Forster, whose own scholarship had been superseded, despite the fact that Carlyle had exploited his library in order to create it.

Conclusion

In terms of methodology, *Cromwell* extends the understanding offered in chapter one of the ways in which Forster was able to borrow his source materials (those not transcribed by amanuenses). The

⁴¹ Strong, p. 157.

⁴² Correspondence regarding the purchase can be found in the Forster Collection, National Art Library.

marginalia in Forster's library, and the letters between himself and the Carlyles, illustrate the way in which Carlyle's influence on Forster's biographical thinking played itself out in his biographies of Cromwell. The qualities which Carlyle admired in Forster's historical biographies - his energetic, novelistic style, and his search for the heroic - may be equally applicable to his literary biographies. Forster's exploitation of novelistic techniques extended itself to visual representations of his subjects, and I would like to begin my examination of Forster's literary biographies by looking at the evolution of his next work, the *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* (1848).

Chapter Three: *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*

Introduction

The curators of the National Art Library's Word and Image Department continue to build up an impressive body of collections and research, illustrating the history of the art, craft and design of the book. A wide range of chronological periods and aspects of book design are represented, and the V&A describes its holdings of illuminated manuscripts, calligraphy, comics and graphic novels, illustrated books, fine printing and book bindings as 'of national significance'.¹ The interest of the Forster Collection, however, lies less in its examples of innovative design and bibliographical rarity than in its embodiment of the cultural interplay between journalism and books, ideas of literacy, education and taste, and the ways in which these were reflected in mainstream publishing. *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* is perhaps the least represented in the Forster Collection in terms of source material, contributing relatively poorly, at least overtly, to the direction of the archive's construction. However, its fluid and relatively complex bibliographical history forms an interesting example of the interplay between developments in technology, design and the ideology of biography.

Compared to his historiographies, Forster's biography of Goldsmith found instant sales success. There is currently no way of determining how many copies were printed or sold; Chapman and Hall's records have been either lost or destroyed, and there is no reference to the work in the surviving archives of Bradbury and Evans. It was, however, the only work of Forster's which remained in print throughout his life. From 1848 to 1876, at least five different versions were advertised (excluding the Tauchnitz editions of 1848, 1874 and 1875) in the lists of 'new books and new editions' by its co-publishers, Chapman and Hall, and Bradbury and Evans. The editions of

¹ 'V&A Collecting Plan', 1 August 2004, p.30. http://www.vam.ac.uk/files/file_upload/26983_file.pdf; last accessed 16 March 2010.

Goldsmith can be divided roughly into three groups; the ‘popular edition’ (1848, 1855, 1868); the ‘library edition’ (1854); and an amalgamation of the two (1871). Each new edition, as the advertisements convey, was priced to appeal to different social and economic reading groups, and fed the reputations of the others.

The first edition was entitled *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, and published as a single volume on 15 April 1848, bound in green cloth and stamped with an image of Goldsmith on the upper cover.² It was a decorative work which went beyond the ‘fine portrait’ traditionally used as a frontispiece, with forty original woodcut illustrations by Stanfield, Maclise, Leech, Doyle and R.J. Hamerton. Forster utilised illustrative techniques and formats deployed by novelist friends such as Dickens and Thackeray, the text being interpreted by the artist and wrapped on the page around the wood engravings.

The narrative was made easier and more continuous than Forster’s earlier biographies by the exclusion of footnotes (at the expense of the scholarly acknowledgement of sources, leading to charges of plagiarism). By Christmas 1849, the book had secured a place in the holiday listings; it was advertised with extracts from the *Edinburgh Review*, *North British Review*, *Times*, *Morning Chronicle*, *Athenaeum*, *Spectator*, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, *Quarterly Review* and Washington Irving’s preface to his own biography of Goldsmith, published earlier that year, in which he paid tribute to the ‘spirit’, ‘feeling’, ‘grace’ and ‘eloquence’ of the *Life and Adventures*, ‘that leave nothing to be desired’.³

² *Examiner*, 1 April 1848, p. 224.

³ *Examiner*, 15 December 1849, p. 800. Washington Irving, *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (New York: Hovendon, 1849); this was a re-impression of the sketch included in *The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith, with an Account of his Life and Writings*, 4 vols (Paris: Didot, 1825). It did not include any material unknown to Forster, and referred the reader to Forster or to James Prior (see below) for a full account of Goldsmith’s life.

At 21s., the cost of the *Life and Adventures* was the average price of a gift book, and far more expensive than the *Statesmen* had been.⁴ It is difficult to establish its cost in relation to other biographies; data from the *Publisher's Circular* can only be used as a rough indicator of price trends in biography since it was classified in a single sales band with books on geography, travel and history. Simon Eliot's 2001 sample survey of book prices showed that by the 1850s book structure had been simplified by focusing on a small group of prices to the virtual exclusion of others. The closest price analysis which Eliot obtained to both the first and second editions of *Goldsmith* was taken for 1853. Although books were largely speaking priced below 10s., 21s., seems to be one of these significant prices; represented by a high-end peak of 2.4% of book prices (Eliot, 2001, p. 166).

Forster commanded greater prices for his books later in his biographical career; *Goldsmith* was considerably cheaper than *Sir John Eliot* (2 vols, Longmans, 1864; 30s.)⁵ and *Walter Savage Landor* (2 vols, Chapman and Hall, 1869; 28s.).⁶ The first edition of *Dickens* retailed at 12s., 14s. and 16s. per volume (Chapman and Hall, 1871; 12s.);⁷ the first collected edition cost 28s.⁸ These works, according to Eliot's price index, are priced firmly in the middle class bracket. In chapter one, I compared the prices of Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* and the two volume *Sir John Eliot* with Eliot's statistics in order to establish a target readership, and argued that this market may well have been out-priced by the cost of the works. A lawyer who brought in a net income of 385s. per week (£1000 per year) would be able to lay out 21s. with not too much trouble; to a man with a 'comfortable' middle-class salary of £400, *Goldsmith* would represent around 14% of weekly income, close, according to Eliot, to a family's disposable income (at this point in 1848, Forster's position as editor of the *Examiner*, incidentally, paid him £500 annually).

⁴ Ruari Maclean, *Victorian Book Design and Colour Printing* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 18.

⁵ *Examiner*, 19 March 1864, p. 192.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 May 1869, p. 319.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1872, p. 1142; *ibid.*, *ibid.* 4 January 1873, p. 21; 31 January 1874, p. 123.

⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 February 1876, p. 15.

Second edition

The design of the 1854 edition differed significantly from its predecessor. The biography was expanded into two volumes, ‘containing many facts not hitherto included in any Life of Goldsmith; and all the original authorities’; footnotes were introduced, and the illustrations were excluded. In demi-octavo (printed on a standard printing sheet of 22½ inches by 17½ inches, folded three times to form a section of eight leaves), it was slightly larger than the crown octavo 1848 edition (which used a standard printing sheet of 20 inches by 15 inches). *The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, as the new edition was more soberly titled, was published on 11 March 1854.⁹ *The Life and Times* was designed to accompany Goldsmith’s *Works*, edited by Peter Cunningham for John Murray’s series of ‘British Classics’. The *Works* was reviewed in the *Literary Examiner* as ‘a handsome, well-printed library volume, published at little more than half the price of a book of such appearance and pretensions’. At 25s. (12s. 6d. per volume), the cost of the *Life and Times* was in fact almost double per volume that of the *Works*, which was sold at 7s. 6d. per volume.¹⁰

This was considered extremely cheap. In 1854, *The Times* published an article which claimed that ‘the great houses do not go along with us in our advocacy of cheap literature and in the conviction we entertain of the soundness of the principle which advocates the publication of the best books at the lowest price for the largest number of readers’.¹¹ The publisher’s argument was quoted that it was impossible to sell a large enough quantity of books at such low prices to be able to remunerate the publisher, bookseller and author. Cunningham’s edition of Goldsmith’s works was held up, along with the home library serials, as an example that this was not the case, although, sadly, the writer did not give sales figures for *Goldsmith*.

⁹ *Publisher’s Circular*, 1 March 1854, p. 125.

¹⁰ *Examiner*, 25 February 1854, p. 128.

¹¹ ‘Literature for the people’, *The Times*, 9 February 1854, p. 10.

Third edition

A more affordable option was made available in November 1855 when the ‘Popular edition of *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*’ appeared.¹² This edition returned to the more compact format of the *Life and Adventures*, in one crown octavo volume (reduced even further to post octavo in 1868), but reduced the price from 21s. to 7s. 6d., to ‘bring it within the reach of a wider number of readers’. Forster wrote in his preface:

THIS Edition is not meant to displace its immediate predecessor, in two octavo volumes, of which it is an abridgement. But the favour extended to the book has suggested its publication in a form that may bring it within the reach of a larger number of readers, and qualify it to accompany the many popular collections of the delightful writings to which its principal attraction is due. The chief omission in the present volume is of matter not immediately relating to Goldsmith himself, and of that large body of illustrative notes and authorities which may be referred to in the library edition.¹³

The text was not a re-impression of the *Life and Adventures*, perhaps due to the number of mistakes highlighted during Prior’s accusation of plagiarism (see below), but a new setting, as the preface states, abridged from the 1854 edition. The omission of ‘Notes and Authorities’ was intended to revive the uninterrupted dynamism of the *Life and Adventures*. The original illustrations were restored to the text, to oblige Carlyle who ‘has always blamed me for suppressing the woodcuts given in the first edition’.

As the reviewer notes, it was intended to complement rather than displace the library edition. By linking the two editions (they were often marketed together in a single advertisement, for example), Forster could retain his scholarly reputation, while appealing to a wider market. He appeared to be successful; Mudie’s lending library acquired a copy in the winter of 1855,¹⁴ and *Goldsmith* appeared six times in or alongside the annual December recommendations for ‘gift

¹² *Examiner*, 3 November 1855, p. 703.

¹³ John Forster, *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith* (London, Bradbury and Evans, 1855), preface.

¹⁴ *Examiner*, 29 December 1855, p. 830.

books for the season' (in 1849, 1854, 1855, 1866, 1868, 1871).¹⁵ The 1871 edition listed was the fifth and final edition published in Forster's lifetime.¹⁶ It was advertised alongside the *Life of Dickens* (1871-73), and was the edition included in the lists of Forster's works for sale which Chapman and Hall published following Forster's death, in February 1876.¹⁷

Goldsmith's reputation in the nineteenth century

In 1974, G. S. Rousseau wrote that the dislike of Goldsmith's times loomed over the writings of his Victorian biographers, Prior, Forster and Macaulay: 'after the 1820s, his renown slowly began to decline ... proceeding downhill throughout the Victorian era with but a few exceptions'.¹⁸ He based his assertion that 'most Victorian critics were disparaging' on the opinions of commentators such as George Lillie Craik, a favourite contributor to Charles Knight's publications, who complained in 1845 that 'there was never a story put together in such an artificial, thoughtless, blundering way' as the *Vicar of Wakefield*.¹⁹ Other 'terse but dispraising' critics listed by Rousseau included William Spalding, Thomas Arnold, William Rushton, Charles Duke Young, Henry Morley and W. J. Courthope; in Forster's day, Goldsmith was by no means universally popular.

In spite of his complaints, Craik's criticism was directed at Goldsmith's style, and in no respect diminished his deep fondness and admiration for the writer. Despite its structural faults, Craik saw in the *Vicar of Wakefield* 'that ... which makes all this comparatively of little consequence; the inspiration and vital power of original genius, the charm of true feeling, some portion of the music of the great hymn of nature made audible to all hearts'. At the fin-de-siècle,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1849, p. 800; *ibid.*, 9 December 1854, p. 792; *ibid.*, 8 December 1855, p. 783; *ibid.*, 8 December 1866, p. 784; *ibid.*, 19 December 1868, p. 816; *ibid.*, 9 December 1871, p. 1232.

¹⁶ Two editions have been published since Forster's death; *Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. G. T. Bettany (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1890 and 1895); *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Ingpen (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1903 and 1905).

¹⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 February 1876, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Oliver Goldsmith: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. S. Rousseau (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 7.

¹⁹ George Lillie Craik, *Sketches of the History of Literature and Learning in England*, 5 vols (London: Knight, 1844), vol. V, p. 306.

Goldsmith's popularity gave way to the more polished satire of Pope and Swift (in 1892 Craik's nephew, Henry Craik, wrote the biography of Swift which replaced Forster's unfinished work). Goethe's autobiography published (posthumously) in 1846 told how he was influenced by the *Vicar of Wakefield* throughout his life;²⁰ Forster's friend Leigh Hunt praised Goldsmith's imagination in *Wit and Humour, Selected from the English Poets*;²¹ and one street-seller informed Henry Mayhew that 'nothing sold better than eighteenth-century prose classics, from Addison to Goldsmith'.²² Craik contended that Goldsmith's skill was in his universal appeal; in the expression of a vivacity and sentimentality which was 'audible to *all* hearts'.

Criticism since Rousseau has begun to reassess the question of how the Victorians acknowledged their debt to their literary predecessors. This criticism has resituated Goldsmith's life and work, particularly *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in our understanding of how readers, writers and artists engaged with eighteenth-century literature in the mid-nineteenth century. In 2004, David Fairer argued that the *Vicar of Wakefield* was *the* eighteenth-century text for the 1850s, as 'Goldsmith's warm-hearted picture of the Primrose family triumphing over malice and misadventure suited the tastes of Dickens's readers at mid-century'.²³ In 1844, the public imagination was so saturated with images from Goldsmith that Thackeray refused to review one more picture inspired by the *Vicar* (or by Alain Le Sage's picaresque novel of 1713-35, *Gil Blas*, which was equally ubiquitous).²⁴ His antipathy was affectionate, nonetheless; he went on in 1851

²⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Auto-biography of Goethe: Truth and Poetry, from My Own Life*, trans. Parke Godwin and J. H. Hopkins (New York; Wiley & Putnam, 1846), pp. 208-11.

²¹ Leigh Hunt, 'Goldsmith', *Wit and Humour; Selected from the English Poets* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1846) pp. 338-349.

²² Quoted in Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 253.

²³ Preface, *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century: Reassessing the Tradition*, ed. Francis O'Gorman and Katherine Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. xv.

²⁴ 'May Gambols, or, Titmarsh in the Picture Galleries', *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1844. Quoted from *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1908), vol. II, pp. 627-628.

to endorse Sir Walter Scott's opinion, that the worthy Goldsmith was 'the most beloved of all English writers'.²⁵

Forster and Dickens shared a fondness for '*Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas and Robinson Crusoe*', to quote Dickens's list of books read by the young David Copperfield.²⁶ Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* recalled that Dickens had even thought of naming his sixth child 'Oliver Goldsmith', though he eventually decided in favour of 'Henry Fielding' (although this was only one year after Forster's publication, it may have been a precursory mark in the shift of taste from the sentiment of Goldsmith to the satire of Fielding).²⁷ Recommending *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The Good-Natured Man* to a friend, Dickens wrote to W. W. F. de Cerjat on 3 January 1855:

Both are so admirable, and so delightfully written, that they read wonderfully. A friend of mine, Forster who wrote the life of Goldsmith, was very ill a year or so ago, and begged me to read to him one night as he lay in bed – 'something of Goldsmith's'. I fell upon *She Stoops to Conquer*, and we enjoyed it with that wonderful intensity, that I believe he began to get better in the first scene, and was all right again in the Fifth Act.²⁸

This nostalgic regard was, for Dickens at least, rooted in the author's recollections of his childhood reading. In 1963, Harry Stone described the visual nature of Dickens's childhood imagination; the tactile, sensual memories of his alphabet primer; in alluding to nursery rhymes, the 'objectification not of the poem's words, but of the early nineteenth-century illustrations which accompanied the words'; the minute detail in which he accurately recalled Cruikshank's illustrations from *The Dandies' Ball; or, High Life in the City*, a book which Dickens had read at about the age of seven.²⁹

²⁵ W. M. Thackeray, 'The English Humourists', *ibid.*, vol. XIII, p. 671.

²⁶ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), p. 42.

²⁷ John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. By J. W. T. Ley (London: Palmer, 1928), p. 524.

²⁸ *Letters*, VII, p. 496.

²⁹ Harry Stone, 'Dark Corners of the Mind: Dickens's Childhood Reading', *Horn Book Magazine*, 39 (1963), pp. 313-15.

For this reason, it is easy to imagine that Hamerton's illustration of the infant Goldsmith at the feet of his first teacher, Elizabeth Delap (*Goldsmith*, 1848, p. 3; plate 3) may have created a warm, shared experience with the Victorian middle-class reader. Elizabeth, a 'trusted dependant' in the Goldsmith household, has laid aside her sewing to put her charge's first book into his chubby hands. Her expression is patient and her posture encouraging in the face of Oliver's half-lidded impassivity; ' "[There] never was so dull a boy: he seemed impenetrably stupid" ', Elizabeth, in her dotage, would sigh to her friends (*Goldsmith*, 1848, p. 3). The eulogy which frames the vignette fondly plants the seeds of Goldsmith's prowess in his childhood reading: 'She taught him his letters; lived till it was a matter of pride to remember; and at the ripe age of ninety, when the great writer had been thirteen years in his grave, boasted of it with "her last breath" '. Faced with the image of his hero as a slow-witted, doltish child, who seems to show little enthusiasm for the book in front of him, Forster concludes this paragraph over the page with a quotation from Johnson that Goldsmith ' "was a plant which flowered late ...there was nothing remarkable about him when young" ', and admits that 'this was probably true. It is said that the richer a nature is, the harder and more slow its development is like to be' (*Goldsmith*, 1848, p.4). In order to gloss this particular 'fault' (typical of the 'heroicising' processes which we have seen in *Cromwell* and *Sir John Eliot*), Forster downplays the significance of Goldsmith's childhood education; at the same time the maternal visual image, fringed with text which speaks simply and nostalgically of shared early reading, tells another story.

Jane Cohen, taking David Copperfield's childhood reading into consideration, established that Dickens was influenced by the illustrated classics of his youth when choosing to have his books illustrated. *The Vicar of Wakefield* was popular enough, even by 1766, to be illustrated with several designs,³⁰ but it was not until the early 1800s that illustrated editions became more widely

³⁰ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (London: Newbery, 1766).

available, and the images became ‘ineffaceable in the memories’ of nineteenth-century writers and their public.³¹ Fairer’s argument that Goldsmith was perfectly suited to Dickens’s 1840-50s readership implies that there was a pre-existing market for sentimental literature. It does not acknowledge that this market, created by Dickens, would already be pre-disposed by the formative influence which Goldsmith had exerted on the writer’s imagination (as well as by their own childhood reading).

Text and image in the nineteenth century

By the mid-nineteenth century, illustration was seen as profitable both to reader and writer. Sir Walter Scott was a painstaking supervisor of his illustrated prose, observing in 1831 that ‘without plates 5000 less of the Waverley novels would have been sold at a difference on the whole work of £13,000’.³² Writers who were keen to take advantage of this included Harrison Ainsworth, Lever, Trollope and Thackeray, all of whom issued the majority of their novels in illustrated parts. George Eliot, initially enthusiastic, issued *Romola* (1863) with woodcuts by Frederick Leighton, but grew to resent the expectations of the market for illustrated fiction; perceiving language to be a superior tool for creating realism, she wrote to Leighton that ‘illustrations can only form a sort of overture to the text’.³³

Much has already been written on the power of illustrated literature as a market force, and on the possible reasons for this. In his recent work *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England*, Gerard Curtis explores graphic illustration as one strand in a tissue of

³¹ Jane Cohen, *Charles Dickens and his Original Illustrators* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1980), p. 4.

³² Sir Walter Scott to Robert Cadell, 26 March 1831. For a full account of Scott’s supervision of his editors, see Catherine Gordon, ‘The Illustration of Sir Walter Scott: Nineteenth-Century Enthusiasm and Adaptation’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34 (1971), pp. 297-317.

³³ *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1978), vol IV, p. 55. Quoted by John M. Picker in ‘George Eliot and the Sequel Question’, *New Literary History*, 37 (Spring 2006), pp. 361-388.

correlations and inter-correlations between the textual and the visual.³⁴ His vision of this tissue of literary culture is also constituted by portraits of authors, paintings of contemporary life, graphic text (such as advertising), typography and calligraphy, bookbinding and accounts of the book as a cultural artefact. The following is quoted from the *Art Journal* in 1849:

There can be no stronger evidence of the almost universal thirst for Illustrated Literature than the number and variety of works which are constantly placed before the public ... put forth to supply a demand which the spread of knowledge has rendered absolutely essential.³⁵

The *Art Journal* (1839-1912) celebrated the union of Art and Literature, running open competitions to illustrate scenes from British Literature, and making its exhibitions unrestricted with the aim of welcoming children and the working classes. This innovation was a canny response to a market demand, a new draught for the ‘almost universal thirst for Illustrated Literature’.

The language of Forster’s critics, particularly the friends who admired his book, expresses the cross-pollination of descriptive terms between biography and art; ‘charming’, Carlyle wrote, ‘... an artistic Picture of the 18th century, and a moral Discourse on it, both in one’;³⁶ Lewes thought that it would ‘go far towards raising biography into something like the position due to it as an Art’.³⁷ ‘Sketch’, ‘portrait’, ‘illustration’, ‘profile’; these are words which often arise in the titles of biographies (in all cases acquiring their verbal meaning after their pictorial meaning; *OED*). Portraiture and biography were natural companions; indeed, Forster ascribed ‘the greatest importance ... to a fine portrait’.³⁸ Preparing the *Life of Jonathan Swift* for publication in 1875, Forster wrote to his publisher, John Murray, of the need to find a ‘first rate engraver’.³⁹

³⁴ Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

³⁵ ‘Illustrated Lexicography’, *Art Journal*, 11 (1849), p. 89.

³⁶ Carlyle to Forster, 18 November 1847, *Letters*, vol XXII, pp. 160-161.

³⁷ G.H. Lewes, reviewing *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, *British Quarterly*, 1 August 1848, p. 25.

³⁸ Forster to Murray, 15 February 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc. 12604.

³⁹ Forster to Murray, 27 January 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc. 12604.

Title page portraits were featured in all of the historiographical biographies discussed in the previous chapters, as well as *Swift*, *Dickens* and *Landor*. Forster borrowed the likeness which embellished the cover and title page of his *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* from an edition of Goldsmith's *Poetical Works*, published by Longmans in 1845, and edited by Bolton Corney. Commending the work as 'by far the most correct and careful of the existing editions of Goldsmith's poetry', he also admired the 'grace and beauty of the illustrations contributed to it by the Etching Club ...' (*Goldsmith*, 'Advertisements, Notes, and Corrections', p. 699). Although Corney's edition contains a 'biographical memoir', the illustrations (the title page portrait aside) do not depict either Goldsmith or his life; they are situated in the text of, and refer to, the author's poetry.

Despite this natural proximity, biography had traditionally avoided the kind of interpretative sketches which can commonly be found in the Victorian novel. Having performed call-up searches of nineteenth-century illustrated biographies (including 'illustrated works' series prefaced by a biography) in the British Library catalogue, as well as sifting histories of Victorian illustration and book design, I have been unable to find another biographical text which uses illustration in quite this way.

Clarkson Stanfield had previously produced four illustrations to Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, but these are inserted between the title page and the table of contents, and portray landscapes and architecture rather than scenes from the biography itself.⁴⁰ The two most similar examples of illustrated biography can be found in the home library serials. Charles Knight, who, as we have seen, reached a wider audience than ever before with his cheap publications, also recognised the value of illustration; he made an unsuccessful attempt, for example, to provide

⁴⁰ James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. J. W. Croker, 10 vols (London: Murray, 1831).

colour plates cheaply for the masses with his 'Patent Illuminated Printing' (Maclean, p. 35).

However, the biographies in his illustrated works, such as his *Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakspeare* (1839) did not contain interpretative images, such as can be found in *Goldsmith*, but engravings of significant places and people (such as Stratford Grammar School, for example, or Queen Elizabeth I).

The case is similar with Henry Bohn's 'Illustrated Library' series, in which only Robert Carruthers's *Life of Pope* (1853, rev. 1857) was produced with anything more than a frontispiece portrait. The engravings, produced by the Dalziel brothers firm of engravers, are mainly vistas and portraits, slotted into the text but with no reference to them in the text itself. There are six interpretative illustrations of scenes from Pope's life, but these are printed on individual pages, facing the copy, rather than incorporated into the text.

Forster's illustrations seem, therefore, to be an additional method of exploiting novelistic traditions. Five artists contributed to *Goldsmith*; R. J. Hamerton, about whom relatively little is known, provided the majority (33 of 39 designs). The remainder were presented by Daniel Maclise, Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867), John Leech (1817-1864) and Richard Doyle (1824-1883),⁴¹ all of whom Forster had superintended in their illustration of Dickens's Christmas Books:

Do you think it worth while, in the illustrations, to throw the period back at all for the sake of anything good in the costume? The story may have happened at any time within a hundred years. Is it worth having coats and gowns of dear old Goldsmith's day? or thereabouts? I really don't know what to say. The probability is, if it has not occurred to you or to the artists, that it is hardly worth considering; but I ease myself of it by throwing it out to you. It may already be too late ... Whatever you think best, in this as in all other things, is best, I am sure. (Dickens to Forster, 26-29 October 1846)⁴²

⁴¹ 'Advertisement, notes and corrections', *Goldsmith* (1848), p. 699.

⁴² *Letters*, vol. IV, pp. 648-649.

This refers to *The Battle of Life*, Dickens's Christmas story from that year. Forster embraced Dickens's proposal, and enlisted Maclise (who would later be consulted on the costumes for *Not So Bad as We Seem*, also set in Goldsmith's day)⁴³ to produce generic designs, intended to arouse the reader's sense of nostalgia. This loose approach (again, a form of verisimilitudinous storytelling) was criticised by Thackeray, who protested that the choice of costumes in 'Mr Maclise's charming designs' merely 'prettified' the female characters.⁴⁴ The project was to prove ill-fated for Dickens and Maclise; Maclise took offence at being asked by Forster, rather than Dickens, writing to the former that he continued only for Forster's sake, since 'it is clear to me that Dickens does not care one damn whether I make a little sketch for the book or not'.⁴⁵ Maclise complained bitterly of the meagre blocks which Bradbury and Evans provided for his designs; he was outraged that his choice of engraver was not respected, and wrote that he was 'mortified' by the 'dirty little scratches' which his designs had become.⁴⁶

Dickens's letter shows how much faith he placed in Forster's opinion at this time, not just in editorial matters, but in terms of the way his text was to be visually interpreted and presented to the reader. *Goldsmith* seems in many ways to have been an extension of his work on the *Christmas Books*, employing both novelistic illustrative techniques and a variety of artists whose experience in different graphic media brought kudos and variety to the work.

It is rather frustrating that neither Hamerton nor Maclise signed their designs, and so Maclise's cannot be identified. Of all *Goldsmith*'s illustrators, Maclise was foremost in Forster's friendship. His frank, warm-hearted letters to Forster, over five-hundred sheets which fill one folio

⁴³ Maclise to Forster, n.d.; Forster Collection, National Art Library, 48.E.19.

⁴⁴ 'A Grumble about the Christmas Books', as M. A. Titmarsh, *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908), vol. II, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁵ Maclise to Forster, n.d.; Forster Collection, National Art Library, 48.E.19. Many of Maclise's letters are undated; Nancy Weston has dated this to 1846; *Daniel Maclise: Irish Artist in Victorian London* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p. 123.

⁴⁶ Maclise to Forster, n.d.; Forster Collection, National Art Library, 48.E.19.

volume in his manuscript collection, testify to a healthy, lifelong amity. The *ODNB* dates the first meeting between Forster and Maclise at Harrison Ainsworth's house, around 1834. The two must, however, have met at an earlier date; Maclise painted Forster's portrait in 1830, while he was still a law student at London University. Maclise claimed to have executed a thousand portrait drawings during his first three years in London. Sketches for these were done quickly and roughly, such as his portrait of Carlyle, which was done 'from life in Fraser's back parlour in about twenty minutes';⁴⁷ the portrait appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in June 1833, and made Carlyle look 'something of a dandy' (Ashton, p. 29).

It is likely that the acquaintance did not kindle until the meeting at Harrison Ainsworth's house, after which it became a lifelong friendship; in 1839 Maclise took the place of Ainsworth in the trio of Ainsworth, Dickens and Forster,⁴⁸ although the attachment between Dickens and Maclise grew looser after 1850. This was possibly precipitated by the disputes over the Christmas Book illustrations; even though Dickens and Maclise were on good enough terms to travel to Paris together in 1850, *The Battle of Life* was the last of Dickens's works to be illustrated by Maclise.

Whilst Maclise and Stanfield (below) were members of the Royal Academy, whose historical and narrative paintings were celebrated, they were also accustomed through their works with the Dickens literary circle to taking into account the text with which they were working. Maclise illustrated Milton's 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' in S. C. Hall's *Book of Gems* (1836). He also illustrated the books of his contemporaries, including Bulwer Lytton (*Pilgrims of the Rhine*, 1834; *Lelia, or the Siege of Grenada*, 1839) and Tennyson ('Morte d'Arthur' in *Poems*, 1857; *The Princess*, 1860). As well as his contributions to three of the Christmas Books (*The Chimes*, 1844;

⁴⁷ William Allingham, *A Diary*, eds. H. Allingham and D. Radford (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 203.

⁴⁸ Nancy Weston, *Daniel Maclise: Irish Artist in Victorian London* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p. 112.

The Cricket on the Hearth, 1845; *The Battle of Life*, 1846), Maclise also provided the portrait used as a frontispiece to *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), and a single illustration for *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840).

From early in his career, Maclise's paintings influenced the staging of theatrical and operatic productions. In 1839, *The Times* reported that the English Opera House's production of 'Snap-Apple Night' seemed based on Maclise's painting of that name (private collection; 1833). His *Vicar of Wakefield* paintings also fed into contemporary theatrical productions; in one staging, written by Joseph Stirling Coyne and staged at the New Strand Theatre in 1850, opened Act II, scene i with a tableau entitled 'DRESSING MOSES FOR THE FAIR', with the stage directions indicating that this was to be based 'after Maclise's picture'.⁴⁹ The picture to which Coyne referred was *Hunt the Slipper at Neighbour Flamborough's*, which was 'a very happy illustration' still in the author's recollection from its exhibition in the Royal Academy.⁵⁰

Two months later, Maclise was to exhibit the *Return of Moses to the Vicar of Wakefield with the Gross of Green Spectacles*, at the Royal Academy, executed, according to *The Times*, with 'uncommon drollery, life and expression'.⁵¹ The exhibition critics applauded his return from the 'allegories and plaster' of *The Spirit of Justice*, a fresco also exhibited that year, to 'The Vicar of Wakefield and the living expression of English Faces'. One of the Goldsmith pictures, presumably this one, given the date, was exhibited in the British Institution; this was a private gentlemen's club, at 43, Pall Mall, open from 1805 to 1867, which staged the first well-attended exhibitions of old masters and modern British paintings on loan from private collections, and fostered new talent by

⁴⁹ *The Vicar of Wakefield: An original Drama in Three Acts* (London: T. H. Lacy, 1850). Script available via the Victorian Plays Project, victorian.worc.ac.uk, last accessed 4 September 2009.

⁵⁰ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 53, June 1853, p. 102.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 4 May 1850, p. 4.

running copying schools.⁵² A memorandum in the archives of the Royal Academy orders ‘*The Vicar of Wakefield*’ to be collected and sent there.⁵³

The archive is useful in exploring this network because of its diversity. Forster’s interest in the theatre was not restricted to his *Examiner* column, and appears throughout the collection in the playbills, scripts, sketches and other paraphernalia which he kept from the amateur theatricals which were staged at Tavistock House. This theatrical connection united Forster with three of his artists – Leech, Maclise and Stanfield. In the eyes of his contemporaries, Maclise’s most successful paintings were his Shakesperian scenes; while many of Forster’s paintings and prints are in storage, the V&A display Maclise’s representations of Forster as Kitley, in *Every Man in his Humour* (1847-48; plate 4), or his portraits of Macready in costume. Clarkson Stanfield, also a member of the Dickens circle at this time, made a successful career as a scenery painter at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, taking up membership of the Royal Academy in 1835. Stanfield continued to provide sets and scenery for the amateur theatricals, however, including an ingenious portable stage for the Guild’s *Not So Bad as We Seem*.

‘If the young Maclise was, for Dickens,’ Jane Cohen wrote, ‘the perfect bachelor comrade and Forster the enduring confidant, with remarkably fewer complications Clarkson Stanfield filled the role of genial older companion’ (Cohen, p. 179). Maclise’s sketch *At 58, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Monday the 2nd of December 1844* (plate 5) shows a haloed Dickens, reading *The Chimes* to a group of men including Carlyle, Blanchard, Jerrold, Forster, Maclise and Stanfield in Forster’s home. The reaction of each listener is individualised. Stanfield is leaning back on a table, watching Dickens read. On the same table rests William Harness, whose eight-volume edition of Shakespeare had been published in 1825. Beside Harness is Alexander Dyce; both Harness and Dyce are hiding their

⁵² Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 256.

⁵³ Royal Academy of Arts Archive, AND/22/196.

faces in their hands, in delighted agitation. Maclise, on the other hand, is edging forward with the most visible eagerness of all the audience members.

As well as his illustrations to Dickens's Christmas Books, Stanfield also illustrated Frederick Marryat's *The Pirate and the Three Cutters* (1836) and *Poor Jack* (1840), the works of George Crabbe (1834) and Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1835). He was primarily, however, a landscape painter, who 'created, and afterwards painted out with his own brush, more scenic masterpieces than any other man'.⁵⁴ Several of his landscapes appeared in travel books, such as Leith Ritchie's *Travelling Sketches on the Rhine, and in Belgium and Holland* (1833). Stanfield's contributions to *Goldsmith* were engraved by Thomas Williams, who also engraved eleven of the illustrations in Dickens's Christmas Books (Cohen, p. 137).

John Leech was a member of Dickens's amateur theatre company, acting in *Every Man in His Humour* in 1845. 'The Leech and Dickens families, and John Forster were very intimate, for several years passing their seaside holidays together; the two first, that is, though Forster frequently joined them' (Renton, pp. 218-219). Leech was also a contributor to *Punch*, his caricatures first appearing in the magazine in August 1841, although he did not become a regular contributor until 1842. In July 1843, Leech coined the term 'cartoon' to describe a satirical drawing, using the term for his lampoons of the exhibition preparatory to the decoration of Westminster Hall (*OED*). Although he never became an academician, perhaps because the active, stylised quality of his drawings was greater than their technical skill, he was highly praised by Ruskin and suggested as an R. A. by Millais. Nonetheless, it was through his artistic journalism for *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*, and as an illustrator of books, that Leech made his name.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 22 May 1867, p. 9.

By the time *Goldsmith* was published, Leech had already illustrated Douglas Jerrold's *Story of a Feather* (1846) and Gilbert A'Beckett's *Comic History of England* (1847). He had also worked with Dickens on the Christmas Books (1843-8), including *A Christmas Carol* (1844). Renton estimated that he produced three or four thousand *Punch* sketches alone, netting £40,000.

Richard Doyle was introduced to Mark Lemon in 1843 by his uncle, Michael Conan, and became a regular contributor to *Punch* the following year. It was with John Leech that Doyle illustrated his first book, completing five etched plates for W.H. Maxwell's *The Fortunes of Hector O'Halloran* (1843). Along with Maclise, Doyle was a pioneer of the new genre of 'fairy paintings' exhibited at the Royal Academy, as well as co-illustrator of Dickens's Christmas Books. Doyle went on to illustrate many books including Lemon's *The Enchanted Doll* (1850), Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1851), Leigh Hunt's *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* (1848) and Thackeray's *Rebecca and Rowena* (1851) and *The Newcomes* (1854). Like Leech, Doyle parodied the Westminster Hall artists in his *Selections from the Rejected Cartoons* (1848).

Relatively little is known about Robert Hamerton, who furnished the majority of the *Goldsmith* images. He was an early contributor to *Punch*, his submissions first appearing in 1842, a year after the periodical's inception. He was introduced into the periodical's creative team by Douglas Jerrold and Joseph Allen, an artist friend of Mark Lemon (editor at that time) and for several weeks after his arrival, he signed his drawings as 'Shallaballa'. M.H. Spielmann wrote in 1895 that the word, called out by 'the itinerant Punch ... on his jumping up before the public in his show', seemed at first a suitable pseudonym for Hamerton.⁵⁵ The word was in fact spoken by the only black characters in Punch and Judy shows, sometimes slaves, sometimes foreigners, and was intended to parody African languages. According to Spielmann, when Lemon reminded Hamerton

⁵⁵M.H. Spielmann, *The History of Punch* (London: Cassell, 1895), p. 452.

of ‘the real significance of the objectionable word’, he abandoned it for the picture-rebus of a Hammer on the side of a Tun.

Spielmann’s statement that Hamerton was Irish seems to be incorrect (census records show that Robert Jacob Hamerton was in fact born in Birmingham, in 1809). He wrote that Hamerton had begun to teach drawing at a school in County Longford at the age of fourteen, and came to London to study lithography under Charles Hullmandel (1789-1850), who had established himself by the early 1820s as the finest lithographic printer in the country (*ODNB*). Hamerton worked mainly via the lithograph, ‘“till 1891, when the drawing on the huge stones became too much for my old back”’ (quoted by Spielmann, possibly *ad verbatim*, p. 452). He remained rather on the outskirts of the vivacious *Punch* circle at this time, and was counted as staff for only two years, with ‘fitful contributions’ up to 1848. During this time he had, however, completed a number of ‘striking’ wood engravings on Irish subjects. His illustrations to *Goldsmith*, called by Spielmann ‘his masterpiece in wood-draughtsmanship’, were also completed at this time.

Outside *Punch*, Hamerton made a living as a successful and accomplished illustrator of sheet music covers. Popular music found a public arena in the clubs, saloons and music halls and saloons which sprang forth in the 1830s and 1840s. The piano was rapidly becoming a popular instrument; Liszt made his first London appearance in 1827, and in 1832 Mendelssohn first published *Songs Without Words*, the best-selling piano music of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ In the domestic sphere, the development of the upright piano by the Stodart family in 1795, and the advent of the cottage piano in 1840, meant that cheap (if shoddy) instruments were now available to the lower-middle classes. The combination of this growth in popular music, the invention of lithography and the lithographic press, and an increased interest in typography, all led to the creation of a market for popular, highly decorated sheet music. Hamerton was quick to recognise the advantages of lithography, and quick

⁵⁶ Ronald Pearsall, *Victorian Sheet Music Covers* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), p. 22.

to become accomplished at the art. He thus gained a reputation as one of the most important artists in this format in the nineteenth century (Pearsall, p. 86).

This handful of illustrators brought to *Goldsmith* a wealth of experience with different media and genres. Whether interpreting historiography to historical narrative painting, illustrating novels and poetry or penning political cartoons, each artist engaged with the text and sought to capture the public imagination with his characters. In their advertising for the illustrated editions, Bradbury and Evans enthusiastically exploited the contributors' established reputations as R. A.s and/or as novel illustrators and graphic journalists.

As I have said, it is impossible to determine which of the illustrations to *Goldsmith* is Maclise's; neither Maclise nor Hamerton signed their designs for *Goldsmith*, and I have not been able to find the sketches in the Forster Collection or any other archive. Stanfield contributed two designs; firstly, a group of French porters tussling for the task of carrying Goldsmith's 'two little trunks' (*Life and Adventures*, p. 550; plate 6); and secondly, the first Royal Academy dinner. In this second picture (*Life and Adventures*, p. 565; plate 7), the reader's eye is cleverly led from the text, up the stairs of the Royal Academy and into the dining room, through the crowd of 'the most distinguished men of the day' and past the monumental sketches which dwarf the academicians, to Sir Joshua Reynolds who addresses the room. Despite this ingenious layout, in which the text appears to form the darkness beneath the Academy stairs, there is no explicit reference to the image within the text.

In many cases, however, a more direct allusion seems apparent. The last tableau, by John Leech (*Life and Adventures*, p. 675; plate 8), shows Goldsmith and Johnson strolling through the festivities of Vauxhall Gardens, distracted from their conversation by a pretty and demure young lady. Above the illustration, Forster describes the garden as a 'torrent of fashion, [where] floated all

the beauty of the time; and through its lighted avenue of trees, glided cabinet ministers and their daughters, royal dukes and their wives'. On the page facing, the illustration is introduced as 'the last gay picture in Goldsmith's life' (*Goldsmith*, 1848, p. 674). Likewise, Hamerton's picture of Johnson reading the manuscript of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (*Life and Adventures*, p. 309; plate 9), while a distressed and somewhat inebriated Goldsmith stands by, is situated within a textual 'illustration' of Johnson's generosity towards the victims of 'that Grub Street world of struggle and disaster' (*Goldsmith*, 1848, p. 308).

The minutiae of the illustrative detail suggest that the artists had seen the manuscript before publication. Of Goldsmith's garret, for example, Forster writes 'here were the tall faded houses, with heads out of window at every story; the dirty neglected children; the bawling slipshod women; in one corner, clothes hanging out to dry, and in another, the cure of smoky chimneys announced'; Hamerton reproduces the scene exactly, with Goldsmith playing a tune upon his flute for the benefit of the ragamuffin children (*Life and Adventures*, p. 137; plate 10). These embodiments of Forster's vivid descriptions give the pictures an anecdotal quality of their own, and combine with Forster's prose to create (in Carlyle's words) an 'artistic picture of the eighteenth century'.

Although unusual, Forster's work cannot really be considered innovative, since this kind of interpretative illustration has not been taken up by subsequent biographers. Despite the popularity of this biography, which, as I have shown, outstripped Forster's other biographies in terms of sales and audience, Forster rejected the 'aesthetic principles' which G. H. Lewes, as we shall see, felt to be so vital and returned to a more scholarly format for his subsequent writing.

Forster's working process and acquisition of material

According to James Davies, Forster began work on his life of Goldsmith in the 1830s, returning continually to it over the following two decades (Davies, p. 106). In the autumn of 1843, Dickens invited Forster to dinner with the entreaty ‘I leave Betsey Prig as you know, so why don’t you scruple about leaving Mrs. Harris.’⁵⁷ The editors of Dickens’s letters attribute this to Dickens’s insinuation that any excuse Forster gave would be a fabrication, or that he may have been referring to Forster’s projected biography of Goldsmith. Mrs Harris is the make-believe friend of Sairey Gamp, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which was serialised from 1843 to 1844. In the same way that Betsey Prig, in chapter XLIX, accuses Mrs Gamp of inventing her friend, Dickens’s gentle teasing suggests that Forster’s progress with *Goldsmith* was slow and difficult enough for him to delay bringing the manuscript before his friends.

Nonetheless, Forster kept Dickens informed of his progress and aims during the writing of the book. On *Goldsmith*’s publication, Dickens wrote of his admiration for:

the admirable manner in which the case of the Literary Man is stated throughout this book. It is splendid. I don’t believe that any book was ever written, or anything ever done and said, half so conducive to the dignity and honor of literature, as the life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith by J.F. of the Inner Temple. The gratitude of every man who is content to rest his station and claims quietly on Literature, and to make no feint of living by anything else, is your due for evermore. I have often said, here and there, when you have been at work upon the book, that I was sure it would be. (22 April 1848, *Letters*, v, p. 289)

Those aims were a defence of writing as a profession, a stating of the ‘case of the Literary Man’. *Goldsmith* was largely a manifesto of the Dignity of Literature Movement, through which Forster explored the origins of writing as a profession. Descriptions of Goldsmith’s ‘times’ concentrated not on political history, as the historical biographies had done, but on the history of literary criticism as it emerged through journalism, and the history of the stage at this time.

The Dignity of Literature Movement, and the Guild of Literature and Art

⁵⁷ 14 September 1843. *Letters*, III, p. 561.

By 1847 (one year before the publication of *Goldsmith*), Dickens had become so dissatisfied with the provision of the Royal Literary Fund for struggling writers, that he produced a 'Proposed Prospectus for the Provident Union of Literature, Science, & Art'.⁵⁸ Dickens and a group of friends proposed to raise money, to be used for the alleviation of hardship of impoverished writers and their families. This was to be achieved by amateur theatrical performances by the Union. Regarding the allocation of the awards, the Committee was to be solely responsible and answerable to no-one, and was to receive no applications, since 'the practice of canvassing for relief from public bodies, appears to them, in the monstrous extent to which it has risen, to be one of the disgraces of the time ...'.⁵⁹ They would instead endeavour to inform themselves of worthy cases.

The scheme prefigured the 'Prospectus for the Guild of Literature and Art', created in 1851.⁶⁰ The Guild prospectus, drawn up in the main by Forster and Bulwer Lytton, developed the scheme further, whereby the theatricals would fund a number of endowments; writers and artists would be given lodgings (land was offered for this purpose by Bulwer-Lytton on his Knebworth estate) and a salary, in return for a number of lectures which would 'usually relate to Letters or Art, and will avoid all debateable ground of Politics or Theology'. The setting of the debate on the writer's 'want of proper dignity' in the eighteenth century was echoed throughout the work of the Guild. Bulwer-Lytton's *Not so Bad as we Seem*, the first play to be performed by the Guild on 6 May 1851, was set in the years immediately preceding Goldsmith's life, and also gives pride of moral place to a Grub Street Hack named David Fallen.

Central to the Guild was the belief that:

There are few men professionally engaged in Art or Letters, even though their labours may have raised them into comparative wealth, who cannot look back to some period of struggle in

⁵⁸ November 1847, *Letters*, V, pp. 700-702.

⁵⁹ 'Proposed Prospectus', *Letters*, V, p. 702

⁶⁰ *Letters*, VI, p. 852-858.

which an income so humble would have saved them from many a pang, and, perhaps, from the necessity of stooping their ambition to occupations at variance with the higher aims of their career. (*Letters*, VI, p. 854)

Goldsmith was intended to provide stirring, irrefutable evidence of such a struggle. In the preface, Forster related this as the basis of Goldsmith's heroism:

The world did not ask him to write, but he wrote and paid the penalty. His existence was a continued privation. The days were few, in which he had resources for the night, or dared to look forward to the morrow. There was not any miserable want, in the long and sordid catalogue, which in its turn and in all its bitterness he did not feel. The experience of those to whom he makes affecting reference in his *Animated Nature*, 'people who die really of hunger, in common language of a broken heart,' was his own ... And when he succeeded at the last, success was but a feeble sunshine on a rapidly approaching decay, which was to lead him, by its flickering and uncertain light, to an early grave. (*Goldsmith*, 1848, p. viii)

Forster made clear his intention to question whether the talented, disadvantaged writer should be left to the whims of the market alone. Lewes noted that:

From this *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, we not only carry away with us much valuable information, but we also carry with us the conviction that literature is a great and sacred thing, and that men of letters have a calling in this world which nothing but the want of proper dignity in themselves can prevent the world from acknowledging. This is no small gain. If, as we said, the great and perhaps only practical remedy for the ills now affecting literature is to spring from respect, such books as this now before us are the heralds of a new era. (Lewes, p. 25)

Lewes, it should be noted, was a fellow proponent of the Guild; other reviewers, as we shall see, were more disapproving of Forster's views on 'the ills now affecting literature', and his dogmatic expression of them in what they had expected to be a scholarly biography.

As the century progressed, the reception of *Goldsmith* reflected Goldsmith's decline in popularity as the attitude of the Victorians towards the eighteenth century gradually transmuted. The biography, however, was still (reservedly) praised. In G. S. Rousseau's view, three biographies of Goldsmith typify Victorian representations of 'Goldy' (Rousseau, p. 7). The first was by Austin Dobson, the Editor of Goldsmith's *Works* for Dent and the Oxford University Press, who

superintended and wrote introductions for all reissues for eighteenth-century works from 1902 to his death in 1921 (*ODNB*).⁶¹ Macaulay's entry on Goldsmith for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1856), the second of Rousseau's key texts, refers to his sources only with the closing words: 'the diligence of Mr. Prior deserves great praise; the style of Mr Washington Irving is always pleasing; but the highest place must, in justice, be assigned to the eminently interesting work of Mr. Forster'.⁶² Finally, the Glaswegian novelist William Black (1878) made no reference to Prior and praised Forster's erudition. He was, however, critical of Forster's using the medium of biography to discuss the plight of the author:

Mr. Forster seems to have been haunted throughout his life by the idea that Providence had some especial spite against literary persons; and that, in a measure to compensate them for their sad lot, society should be very kind to them, while the Government of the day might make them Companions of the Bath or give them posts in the Civil Service.⁶³

Unlike the seventeenth-century biographies, for which Forster purchased large amounts of original source material, *Goldsmith* was a compilatory work, in which the narrative and the moral message took precedence over demonstrations of scholarship. Where text on Forster's previous pages had vied for space with vitriolic endnotes, the only interruptions to the text of *Goldsmith* were its illustrations, and Forster more subtly established confidence in his authority by sustaining a narrative of Goldsmith's life and times.

Goldsmith is unique to Forster's career in several ways; it is his only illustrated biography; it is the only biography published in a popular as well as a scholarly format; and it is the only biography in this case study whose source material cannot be traced in the Forster Collection. The Forster collection cannot, therefore, substantiate Davies's claim that the *Life and Adventures* was written over the two decades prior to its publication. Forster's articles in the 1845 *Edinburgh*

⁶¹ Austin Dobson, *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (London: Walter Scott, 1888).

⁶² T. B. Macaulay, 'Oliver Goldsmith', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1856), Vol X.

⁶³ William Black, *Goldsmith*, in 'English Men of Letters' series (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 2. Black quotes from the 1854 edition of Forster's work.

Review, on Charles Churchill and Daniel Defoe,⁶⁴ show his interest at this time in the development of writing as a profession through the eighteenth century. Had it not been for the outcry of Prior, a previous biographer of *Goldsmith*, the lack of references in the *Life and Adventures* would make it extremely difficult to discover Forster's sources.

Prior's accusation of plagiarism

The *Life and Adventures* (1848) was widely acclaimed. In private, friends expressed their unreserved enjoyment. It was admired by Bulwer Lytton in the *Edinburgh Review*,⁶⁵ De Quincey in the *North British Review*,⁶⁶ and an anonymous reviewer in the *Athenaeum*.⁶⁷ In his *British Quarterly Review*, G. H. Lewes wrote that it would 'not only throw fresh light upon Goldsmith and Goldsmith's age, but will go far towards raising biography into something like the position due to it as an Art ... Forster does not dissertate, he narrates'' (Lewes, p. 1).

Once again, Forster's writing was praised for its vivacity and engaging narrative, rather than its scholarship. According to Lewes, Forster's 'raising [of] biography towards something like an Art' was achieved through his development of its aesthetic principles; biography was to be considered as one of the liberal arts based on these principles. Despite his decision to eschew traditional scholarly practice, ie. including references in footnotes or endnotes, Forster was applauded for his ability to position a living, breathing Goldsmith against the backdrop of the political and economic changes which were affecting the birth of writing as a profession.

It may be relevant to note here that *Goldsmith* continued to utilise techniques developed by novel-writers, and found much critical success in doing so. Literary biography made a number of

⁶⁴ 'Charles Churchill', *Edinburgh Review*, 81(Jan 1845), pp. 181-189; 'Daniel Defoe', *Edinburgh Review*, 82 (October 1845), pp. 480-532.

⁶⁵ *Edinburgh Review* 88 (July 1848).

⁶⁶ *North British Review* 9 (May 1848).

⁶⁷ *Athenaeum*, 22 April 1848, pp. 405.

new narrative techniques available to Forster, techniques which constituted Lewes's 'aesthetic principles'. The identification of Goldsmith's life with his works was one such method; he continued, as he had in the historiographies, to quote letters in their entirety or reproduced them in facsimile; he also invoked, for example, the Man in Black of the *Citizen of the World*, the Preacher of *The Deserted Village* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*'s Doctor Primrose and made these synonymous with Goldsmith's own father, the Reverend Charles Goldsmith (*Life and Adventures*, p.2). Long passages from Goldsmith's work were also quoted in lieu of description, representing, for example, Goldsmith's first introduction to Grub Street work through 'the pleasant talk of George Primrose ...' (*Life and Adventures*, pp. 67-68). In this way, the energy of Forster's narrative was complemented by careful selection of equally dynamic passages from Goldsmith.

Where factual details fail to maintain the energy and drive of the narrative, Forster resorts to conjecture. 'Perhaps one half the day he was with Steele or Addison in parliament; perhaps the other half in prison, with Collins or with Fielding ...' (*Life and Adventures*, p. 26). In the intervening periods of Goldsmith's life, where little of consequence takes place but Forster wishes to portray a formative influence, the narrative is picturesque, depicting scenes: 'Thus the two years passed. In the daytime occupied, as I have said, at Conway's; in the evenings of summer, strolling up by the Inny's banks to fish or play the flute, otter-hunting by the course of the Shannon, learning French from the Irish priests, or winning a prize for throwing the sledge-hammer at the fair of Ballymahon' (*Life and Adventures*, p. 28).

Descriptions of the parts of London through which the story ventured brought Goldsmith closer to metropolitan Victorian readers. Additionally, Forster employed a technique made popular by writers of fiction, that of describing a place in a transitional London, and its state in an earlier time. Forster's description of Islington, for example, is as follows:

There were still green fields and lanes in Islington. Glimpses were discernible yet, even of the old time when the Tower was Elizabeth's hunting seat, and the country all about was woodland. There were walks where houses were not, nor terraces, nor taverns; and where stolen hours might be given to precarious thought, in the intervals of toilsome labour. (*Life and Adventures*, p. 260)

This image of the suburb in a previous time, when it was rural and distinct from the city, can be compared to Dickens's treatment of the neighbouring countryside in *Barnaby Rudge*:

At the time of which it treats, though only six-and-sixty years ago, a very large part of what is London now had no existence. Even in the brains of the wildest speculators, there had sprung up no long rows of streets connecting Highgate with Whitechapel, no assemblages of palaces in the swampy levels, nor little cities in the open fields. Although this part of town was then, as now, parcelled out in streets and plentifully peopled, it wore a different aspect. There were gardens to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement side; with an air of freshness breathing up and down, which in these days would be sought in vain. Fields were nigh at hand...⁶⁸

In both descriptions, the naming of suburbs allows the reader (the London reader, at least) to locate himself physically within the narrative. Through the evocation of the cleanliness and greenness of the historical suburban village, the sprawl and pollution of the Victorian city is made to seem even more uncondusive to art.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that Dickens praised not only the future message of the Guild in *Goldsmith*, but its narrative energy and vivid characterisation.⁶⁹ The failure to reference his sources, however, left Forster open to frustrated criticism and accusations of plagiarism. On the heels of *Goldsmith*'s favourable reviews, Sir James Prior published an allegation that Forster had shamelessly plagiarised his *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, published a decade earlier.⁷⁰ The quarrel was first reported in the *Literary Gazette*'s review of *Goldsmith*, where Forster's style was praised, but his reliance on Prior's factual basis was criticised. The *Gazette* writer claimed, in the interim between publication and the publishing of his review, to have been furnished with an account of

⁶⁸ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840-1841), II, p. 253.

⁶⁹ Dickens to Forster, 22 April 1848, *Letters*, V, p. 288.

⁷⁰ Sir James Prior, *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (London: John Murray, 1837).

Prior's great expense and labour in compiling the biography, fifteen or sixteen years previously. Prior reportedly travelled throughout England and Ireland, relentlessly turning up a voluminous host of facts which constituted the most thorough biography in nearly forty years, and which 'left but scanty gleanings for any future biographer' (*Literary Gazette*, 20 May 1848, p. 342).

Prior published his accusation seven weeks later, in the 'Letters to the Editor' column of the *Gazette*.⁷¹ On receiving Forster's gift of the *Life and Adventures*, he was outraged, he wrote, to discover that the book was an 'unscrupulous pillage' of his work. Original contributions to the facts of Goldsmith's life amounted to one and a half pages, and all this with minimal acknowledgement of Prior. The extent to which he had gone in compiling his biography only eleven years before allowed him to lay claim to these facts, and the use of them to such a degree by Forster was, he argued, 'wholesale piracy'.

Although the *Literary Gazette* reviewer effectively remained neutral, he also failed to say anything about *Goldsmith* other than that it was a beautifully embellished version of Prior's work. The *Athenaeum*, on the other hand, featured, only a week after *Goldsmith's* publication (under the editorship of Charles Wentworth Dilke, also a founder of the Guild) a considerably more complimentary review, which acclaimed Forster's reworking of and additions to the 'raw materials collected by Mr Prior'. Unsurprisingly, Forster sent his defence to Dilke (the disgruntled *Literary Gazette* also published Forster's reply on 17th June, likening their obligation to report the dispute to having a tooth pulled).⁷²

The *Literary Gazette* was published by Henry Colburn, whose widow Forster married in 1856; it was edited by William Jerdan, the 'discoverer' of Forster's old flame, Laetitia Elizabeth

⁷¹ *Literary Gazette*, 3 June 1848, pp. 375-376.

⁷² *Athenaeum*, 10 June 1848, pp. 577-579; *Literary Gazette*, 17 June 1848, pp. 407-408.

Landon, who had in fact been romantically entangled with Jerdan at the time of her ruptured engagement to Forster in 1831. There is no evidence that Forster was aware of this; as Davies writes, it has never been established what is true, or what Forster discovered to be true. Although Davies cites rumours linking L.E.L. to William Maginn, Daniel Maclise and Edward Bulwer Lytton (Davies, p. 78), of which Forster was almost certainly aware, it is relatively recently that Cynthia Lawford uncovered evidence of Jerdan's liaison with his protégée, which she suggested lasted from 1822 until at least 1834, and produced three children.⁷³ If he was aware of the relationship, however, his close friendships with Maclise and Bulwer Lytton are testimony to the fact that he bore no grudge, as is the fact that Forster was a member of the 'testimonial committee' who raised a retirement fund for Jerdan in 1851.⁷⁴

Forster's self-mitigation refuted Prior's claim to ownership of the facts he had gathered:

As to the claim which you put forth to an absolute property and possession in such 'dates, facts and innumerable personal matters' of Goldsmith's life as you may have discovered, I have only to say that it is based on an assumption which, if only admitted or sanctioned to the smallest extent, would be the most serious invasion of the rights of literature that has been practised or attempted in any country. (*Athenaeum*, 10 June 1848, p. 579)

The *Athenaeum* supported Forster's premise. Prior had a right to feel hard done by, since his work had unarguably been exploited in *Goldsmith*. However, Forster had 'amply' acknowledged his literary debt to Prior, and Prior's claim, the reviewer argued, was largely motivated by the fact that his biography had been 'substituted by a better, or a newer'. Most importantly, Prior had no claim to the 'dates, facts and innumerable personal matters' which he had uncovered, since by publishing them, he had put them in the public domain.

The reviewer draws an interesting distinction between fiction and non-fiction:

⁷³ C. Lawford, 'Diary', *London Review of Books*, 21 September 2000, pp. 36-7.

⁷⁴ *Letters*, III, 246n; *Times*, 16 April 1851, p. 6.

There is a curious confusion in Mr Prior's mind between the right to works of imagination and the right to works of fact. The first are the product of a man's own mind – the last a mere conversion to his use of what all the world may use as well as he. No labour bestowed on a series of facts can make them any man's private property. (*Athenaeum*, p. 579)

While the copyright to fiction should remain with the author, the objective facts of a subject's life, once published, are public property. Biography, then, is seen as operating on a different level from fiction. The reviewer sees biography as an assimilation of facts, appearing to involve less creativity, less 'imagination', than fiction. P. N. Furbank's article 'The Craftlike Nature of Biography' (2000), more recently offered a similar view. Furbank argued that owing to the restrictive nature of the facts which must be assimilated, and the limits imposed by reader's expectations which must be fulfilled, the biographer is an artisan, not an artist (the only exception is Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, since Boswell created his own material by, for example 'engaging Johnson in conversations which he knew would produce some intense reaction in order to document them').⁷⁵

The words 'mere conversion' signify the inferiority of biography to fiction; imagination is valued above research, in both artistic and monetary terms. Furbank, despite wishing to avoid biographers' 'resentment', also revived the contention between biography and fiction. Like fiction, a biography is 'deeply personal' and its success 'inheres on the story that the biographer has made out of the subject's life' (Furbank, p. 22). Furbank's motivation for writing the article, however, seems to be defensively triggered by the phenomenal success of biography in today's market, the fact that 'indeed, people tend to say it is getting the edge over fiction' (Furbank, p. 18). Lewes's premise, then, that by making use of novelistic techniques, by breathing life into the 'bare bones' of a subject, by avoiding 'the wearisome pomp of academic eulogy', biography could be elevated to an 'Art', was and is not universal.

⁷⁵ P. N. Furbank, 'The Craftlike Nature of Biography', in *Biographical Passages in Victorian and Modernist Biography*, eds. Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 21.

Forster therefore found himself in a vulnerable position. Narrative skill alone did not render his biography an art, and since he himself had argued that the facts were in the public domain, his historical authority was transitory; his work was likely to be superseded (as soon as the following year, Washington Irving's *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* was published,⁷⁶ although subsequent biographers such as Macaulay, Dobson and Black (see above) tended to refer less to Irving than to Forster);⁷⁷ and his prospects of revenue were thus potentially more limited than a novelist's (by establishing an archive, however, his prospects of revenue might not be heightened but the chance of being challenged in terms of authority would be considerably lower).

Forster reprinted his letter to the *Athenaeum* in each subsequent edition of *Goldsmith*. In defence of his scholarship, Forster listed the 'principal books which were before [him] when [he] first began his narrative', namely:

... the memoir sanctioned by Bishop Percy (ed. 1801); the Memoir reprinted, with additions, by Evans the bookseller (1794) from that written in 'The Annual Register' by Glover, and revised by Malone in the Dublin edition of the 'Poems' (1777, one volume, not two, as you state); the Memoir by Dr. Anderson (1794); the Life by Isaac Reed prefixed to Bulmer's quarto of 1795; a Memoir by the late Dr. Mudford, prefixed to 'The Vicar of Wakefield'; the somewhat elaborate Memoir prefixed to the Glasgow edition of the Miscellaneous Works (1816); the Life by Sir Walter Scott in Ballantyne's 'Novelists'; a Memoir containing some original research prefixed to a duodecimo edition of the Works (in four volumes) since republished by Mr. Bohn; Mr Mitford's Life in the Aldine Poets, the Rev. Edward Mangin's information contained in his Essay (1808); some account of Peckham, I think, but the book, which was lent to me by Mr. Jerrold, I have not now at hand); and your Memoir, published in two volumes in 1836, and itself so deeply indebted (of course) to such preceding publications, *that if the facts contained in them had been prohibited to your use, your work could never have been undertaken.* (*Athenaeum*, 10 June 1848, p. 578)

Much of the material listed by Forster appears to be borrowed; in the *Athenaeum*, Forster claimed to have been obliged to defer his reply to Prior's original letter while he tried to obtain 'certain books which are not now in my possession, and which it will take me a few days to obtain.' Of all the

⁷⁶ Washington Irving, *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (New York: Hovendon, 1849).

⁷⁷ A. Lytton Sells, *Oliver Goldsmith, his Life and Works* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974).

works listed, the only two to be found in the Forster Collection are Mangin's *Essay on Light Reading*⁷⁸ and, ironically, Prior. Forster also collected a huge amount of David Garrick's correspondence, reprinted in *Goldsmith* (1848), which may have been inherited from Henry Colburn via Eliza (the bulk of the collection was published by Colburn in 1835).⁷⁹ Forster would not have come into possession of the letters, however, until his marriage in 1856.

The above list is not exhaustive. We know that Forster had read Bolton Corney's 1846 illustrated poetical works, with a biographical memoir, as he borrows the title vignette from that work.⁸⁰ Peter Cunningham, the editor of the companion *Works* published by Murray, also gave Forster access to his material. The endnotes to *Goldsmith* contain the transcription of a letter 'in the possession of my friend Mr. Peter Cunningham, whose success in matters of literary research is as undoubted as the ability with which he communicates his discoveries' (*Life and Adventures*, 1848, p. 703). Cunningham also presented a copy of Goldsmith's *Essays* (1765) to Forster – the Forster Collection copy is inscribed 'To John Forster from his old and obliged friend Peter Cunningham'.⁸¹

Conclusion

Chapters one and two established the importance of narrative technique to Forster's success as a biographer. As his career moved forward, the choice to experiment with illustration reconfirmed this importance, extending these storytelling devices from language to image. This seems to have been an effective tool in the re-mythologising process; it allowed Forster to more easily remould Goldsmith as the impoverished hero whose story represented the need for a better system of provision for struggling authors.

⁷⁸ Edward Mangin, *An essay on light reading: as it may be supposed to influence moral conduct and literary taste* (London: 1808). Forster's copy: FC 12mo 5772.

⁷⁹ *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick, Illustrated with notes and a new biographical Memoir of Garrick*, ed. James Boaden, 2 vols (London: Colburn, 1835).

⁸⁰ *The Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Bolton Corney (London: Longman, Green, Brown & Longmans, 1845). Forster Collection, L8vo 3507.

⁸¹ Forster Collection, 12mo 3516.

There is very little of Forster's source material in the Forster Collection. However, through his response to James Prior's accusation of plagiarism, we can see that it was a compilatory work. This is far from the case with his *Life of Swift*, which was not published until almost three decades later. By examining its roots in the Forster Collection, roots which are absent in the case of *Goldsmith*, it becomes clear that Forster's interest in his eighteenth-century antecedents had been a life-long (or at least a career-long) obsession.

Plate 1. Portrait of John Forster in his library at 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields (ca. 1850)

Plate 2. John Forster's library at Palace Gate House, 1864

Plate 3. Goldsmith with his nurse, *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* (1848), p. 3

Plate 4. Maclise's portrait of Forster as Kitely in *Every Man in his Humour* (1847-8)

Plate 5. Daniel Maclise, *Dickens reading 'The Chimes' at 58, Lincoln's Inn Fields, Monday 2 December 1844*

Plate 6. Stanfield illustration for *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* (1848), p. 550

Plate 7. *Ibid.* Stanfield illustration, p. 565

Plate 8. *Ibid.* Leech illustration, p. 675

Plate 9. *Ibid.* Hamerton illustration, p.
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Plate 10. *Ibid.* Hamerton illustration, p. 137

Chapter Four: *Life of Jonathan Swift*

Introduction

John Forster's biographers tend to see the value of his work in terms of his collections, rather than his texts. 'By a man's books, as much as by his friends, may he be known', wrote a *Daily News* journalist, reporting on the publication of the first Forster Collection Catalogue, written thirteen years after Forster's death.¹ Forster's reputation has survived, and been cemented by James A. Davies's scholarly biography, as a friend to the 'great' heroes of nineteenth-century literature. His library, however, has received more scant attention. In the catalogue's preface, Whitwell Elwin had unfavourably compared Forster as a collector of fine bindings and first editions to the more fastidiously bibliophilic Alexander Dyce (Forster's friend and co-donor to the South Kensington Museum). Echoing this, the *Daily News* wrote derisively that 'if Mr Forster had any [bibliographic curiosities], it was by a kind of gracious accident'. The *Daily News* denied that the collection had any value to the 'bibliophile, to him who has a cabinet full of precious rarities'. However, it did make particular mention (beside expressing admiration for the First Folio, presentation copies and enviable editions of Collins and Goldsmith) that the bequest had allowed Henry Craik, who published his own biography of Swift in 1892, to make use of Forster's trove of Swiftiana.

The *Life of Jonathan Swift* was published on 15 November 1875, three months before Forster's death. His obituarists lamented that Forster had been unable to fulfil his plans for the biography; plans which, the *Times* claimed, he had been formulating for much of his career:

for years he had stored up materials for this difficult undertaking. At last his wishes seemed about to be accomplished. It is but a few weeks since that we noticed the first volume of 'Forster's Life of Swift,' which contained the Prolegomena of a biography perhaps the most hazardous to write. The materials for the whole work are in store, but we have yet to learn whether the first volume of 'Forster's Life of Swift' will not be the last.²

¹ 'John Forster's Books', *Daily News*, 1 January, 1889, p. 5.

² *The Times*, 2 February 1876, p. 10.

It is regrettable that Forster's death prevented him from completing the biography; not least since this prevents us from hearing in detail Forster's views on *Gulliver*, which he declared, with the *Tale of a Tub*, one of the two greatest English prose satires (Swift, p. 144). Some of Swift's later publications also showed a similarity of interests between the two; in the pecuniary and social fate of the author, for example. 'A Libel on the Reverend Dr Delany and a Certain Great Lord' (1729) expressed Swift's dismay at the way in which his contemporaries, including Addison, Congreve, Steele and Gay, had suffered neglect, and were forced to take up other professions, find work as hack writers, or were left to starve by capricious patrons.

Forster, as a Lunacy Commissioner, may have been drawn to Swift through his interest in the physiological and palliative implications of the writer's madness. Swift's lifetime saw the beginning of institutional care for the mentally ill; as Michel Foucault has described in *Madness and Civilisation* (1961; trans. 1967), in the eighteenth century, madness moved from being a part of everyday life to a scandal behind the closed doors of the home or the asylum.³ Private madhouses proliferated (the 1774 Madhouses Act was the first regulation of licences for these establishments). The English public had begun to object to the indignity and ineffectiveness of Bethlem, or Bedlam, Hospital where Londoners could make trips to regard the inmates as though they were visiting a zoo. Thomas Tryon, for example, wrote in 1695 that

It is a very undecent, inhuman thing to make ... a show ... by exposing them, and naked too perhaps of either sexes, to the idle curiosity of every vain boy, petulant wench, or drunken companion, going along from one apartment to the other, and crying out; this woman is in for love, that man for jealousy. He has over-studied himself, and the like.⁴

³ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965) pp. 38-64.

⁴Philoptheus Physiologus (pseud.) *A Treatise of Dreams and Visions, wherein the causes natures and uses of nocturnal representations, and the communications both of good and evil angels, as also departed souls, to mankind, are theosophically unfolded... To which is added, a discourse of the causes, natures and cure of phrenesie, madness or distraction* (London: Sowle, 1695).

Bethlem was, from the thirteenth century to the eighteenth, the only public institution for the care of the mentally ill; in 1713 the first of eight public mental health hospitals to be opened over the next hundred years was established in Norwich. Swift's own estate was left for the founding of the first Irish asylum in 1746, originally known as St Patrick's Hospital for Imbeciles, and still functioning today. Swift's mental illness fascinated his nineteenth-century biographers, and continues to do so today (as we shall see). Considering the nature of Forster's own work in the Lunacy Commission, however, this aspect of Swift's life may also have held particular interest for him; certainly, Forster, in his preface to *Swift*, valued the annotations to his manuscripts by Swift's physician, Dr Lyon (below), several of which came from Mrs Whiteway (Swift's nurse and housekeeper in his final years) via Edmund Lenthal Swifte. Forster also acquired at some stage the Lunacy Commission certificate which declared Swift to be insane.⁵

The obituarists' speculations that the remaining biography lay in manuscript were echoed across the Atlantic in the *New York Times*, which printed that *Swift* was

undoubtedly the best work that the author had yet done. He not only thoroughly comprehended Swift's true character, but having fortunately gained access to sources of information which previous biographers of the great Dean had not discovered, he was able to give to his work a unique value. His death is a very serious loss to English literature, since it prevents the completion of the first worthy biography of Swift which has ever been undertaken. It is probable that the best part of the second volume is completed, but the intended third volume must be supplied by some other hand.⁶

It is impossible to determine from the Forster Collection whether this rumour had any foundation.

While there are notes and planning in Forster's hand for the years 1712-1713, the manuscript is of the first volume only and like the *Sir John Eliot* manuscript, is in the form of a cleanly annotated draft (plate 11a), as well as cut-and-pasted notes (plate 11b). It seems unlikely that he completed more than the first volume, given his illness in the months before his death. Rather than conclude Forster's work, as the *New York Times* had suggested, Forster's publisher, John Murray, published

⁵ 12 August 1742. Forster Coll. 48.G.6.

⁶ *New York Times*, 2 February 1876, p. 4.

Craik's *Swift* twelve years later, a biography which reassessed Swift's entire life. Craik also relied on Forster not as a biographer, but as a collector; or not on Forster's text, but on the documents which he had rediscovered.

The obituary speaks of Forster's success at representing the 'true' Swift. The aims of biography in the mid 1870s seem therefore to have changed little since Forster began his biographical career, 45 years earlier. In D'Israeli's words, impartiality was impossible in the interpretation of historical documents or the retelling of historical events, and yet it was still believed possible for the biographer to access and encapsulate the 'essence' of his subject. He or she was not, as yet, living under the limitations perceived by a modern biographer of only, at best, recreating the subject in one's own image. As we have seen, historical work which arduously uncovered fresh sources was perceived as the most authoritative and balanced, and ownership of documents (or at least physical contact with them, granted by an often impressive acquaintance with their owners) implied an ownership of the information they contained. It is natural that a biographer or historian with this world view might wish to augment their authority by gathering these sources in his own archive. Particularly since *Swift* spanned only half of Swift's life, the huge archive of material which Forster gathered in order to create his biography, is as important to subsequent biographers, both of Swift and of Forster, as the text itself.

Swiftian myths: the public and private faces of Swift

Jonathan Swift has, since his death, continued to capture the public imagination in a variety of ways; materially, bibliographically and scientifically. In 1913, *The Times* reported that a lock of Swift's hair had been sold for 35s.⁷ A first edition *Gulliver*, annotated by Swift, was stolen from

⁷30 April 1913, p. 12.

Armagh Public Library (and later recovered) in December 1999;⁸ neurologists have debated the biographical accounts of Swift's final mental state for two centuries. Swift was exhumed twice in the nineteenth century; once when Swift's and Stella's coffins were among those exposed during repairs to St Patrick's Cathedral in 1835, when Sir William Wilde took advantage of the impromptu exhumation to conduct a second post mortem on Swift's corpse.⁹ In 1882, Swift was disinterred a second time in order that his skull and brain cast might be re-examined in the light of developing cognitive theories.¹⁰ Only in 2006 did one neurolinguist reach the conclusion that there was insufficient evidence for the retrospective diagnosis of 'cognitive changes, memory impairment, personality alterations, language disorder and facial paralysis'.¹¹

Victoria Glendinning, in her 1998 biography of Swift, wrote with reverence of being 'transfixed' by the Swiftiana which she encountered:

I am sitting in the Manuscripts Room of Trinity College Library in Dublin, transfixed by a fragment of autobiography written by the author of *Gulliver's Travels* – the Dean of St Patrick's, Dr Jonathan Swift [...] the autobiographical fragment has been scrutinized by scores of Swift scholars and biographers before me. It has been transcribed, edited, glossed, expanded, discussed, deconstructed, and sometimes just paraphrased as if it were the gospel truth.

There is one other known manuscript version of it in existence – a contemporary copy, made for one of Swift's younger clerical friends, Dr Charles Cobbe, who became Archbishop of Dublin. John Forster saw this copy and used it for his Swift biography of 1875, after which it was apparently lost. Over a hundred years on, it has reappeared.¹²

Glendinning's writing luxuriates in the awe and the sensual delight of seeing and touching a note created by Swift. Through listing the ways in which other biographers have handled the fragment, Glendinning is able to sweep away the encumbrance of their complications and misinterpretations, giving the impression that by returning to Swift's own first-hand productions, she can give a 'true'

⁸ *Irish Times*, 3 August 2001, p. 29.

⁹ W. R. Wilde, *The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life* (Dublin: Hodges & Co, 1849).

¹⁰ J. C. Bucknill, 'Dean Swift's Disease', *Brain*, 4 (1882), pp. 493-506.

¹¹ Marjorie Lorch, 'Language and Memory disorder in the case of Jonathan Swift: considerations on retrospective diagnosis.' *Brain*, 129 (2006), pp. 3127-37.

¹² Victoria Glendinning, *Jonathan Swift* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), p. 1.

representation of the writer. Like Forster, she is able to build a sense of historical authority on the re-discovered, the relational, the rare fragment.

Both Glendinning and Forster felt their biographical authority to be enhanced by this bodily proximity to one's subject. This is the basis of Forster's archive of Swift material, which contains not only texts but artefacts, such as a laurel leaf from Esther Vanhomrigh's bower at Celbridge and two Woods ha'pennies (the copper coinage for Ireland which was the cause of Swift's *Drapier's Letters*) sent to him, along with a number of watercolour sketches of Marsh's Library, Swift's Hospital and Vanessa's bower, by Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald.¹³ It may at this point be useful to examine the myths which have become so widespread, which shaped the archive, and which continue to determine its use.

Swift's elusiveness lies in the many paradoxes and apparently contradictory elements of his biography. In the preface to *Swift*, Forster wrote 'few men who have been talked about so much are known so little' (*Swift*, iii). Ann Cline Kelly's recent *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture: Myth, Media and the Man*¹⁴ appraised Swift's canny hand at self-mythologising, and his ability to manipulate the emerging media and publishing world; in order to do so, Kelly conveniently summarised the manifold oppositional images of Swift with which critics and biographers have wrestled, Swift as clergyman, as patriot, as comic/satirist, as tortured lover, and as lunatic. In terms of his nineteenth-century reputation, Kelly seems to present a bipolar image. In order to be canonised and heroicised as an Augustan, Swift needed to be stripped of associations with, on the one hand, his jestbook reputation, and, on the other, biographical imputations of cruelty, miserliness, vulgarity and incest.

¹³ Fitzgerald to Forster, 1 May 1858, Forster Collection MS XXXI..

¹⁴ (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

During his own lifetime, the ‘Protean’ Swift, Kelly argued, encouraged the view of himself as a buffoon and a jester, with publications such as ‘The Grand Question Debated’ (1732), ‘A Panegyric on the Dean’ (1735) and ‘Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift’ (1739). This view originated with Whig satires of his work and was amplified by Thomas Wilson’s *Swiftiana* (1804), as well as by stories, such as the Laracor anecdote below, introduced by Walter Scott. Swift’s vivacious tableaux of all social classes in poems such as ‘Mrs Harris’s Petition’ (1701), Orrery argued, were a waste of talent and a sign of his vulgarity.¹⁵

Swiftian quotes and tales were included in eighteenth-century chapbooks, such as Laetitia Pilkington’s *Mrs Pilkington’s Jest, or the Cabinet of Wit and Humour*.¹⁶ Jestbooks remained popular until the mid-1800s, when they were gradually replaced by volumes of anecdotage (and, eventually, by comic books). The price of jestbooks indicates that they were not bought by the semi-literate paupers who would have purchased chapbooks.¹⁷ They were, however, considered ‘low’ humour, and by the end of the eighteenth century, critics and historians were looking towards a more canonical, Augustan view of Swift, and seeking to extrapolate him from his jestbook reputation.

Conversely, biographers also faced the murkier aspect of Swift’s biography, which could be found in speculation on his sexual life and eventual madness. It was one of Swift’s earliest biographers, Lord Orrery, who first presented the public with the legends of Swift’s raving utterances, as well as the claim that Swift had the foreknowledge that he would die a madman (Orrery, p. 170). One must look to Orrery for the origin of many rumours on Swift’s parentage and sexuality; that Swift was the son of William Temple; that Swift and Stella were secretly married;

¹⁵ *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (Dublin: Millar, 1783), p. 21.

¹⁶ (London: Nicholl, 1764).

¹⁷ Simon Dickie, ‘Humour and Pitilessness in the mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humour’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37 (Fall 2003), pp. 1-22.

that Swift and Stella may have been brother and sister, and that the two may have discovered this and thus been forced apart. The public's interest was aroused by Delany's *Observations on Lord Orrery's Remarks* (1754), which claimed to provide further evidence of Stella's true character, and thus give insight into the nature of her rivalry with Vanessa. Delany accepted the story of Swift's and Stella's marriage, but argued that it was frugality which caused them to live apart.

Forster engaged with his predecessors, as he had throughout his biographical career, largely by rubbishing those long dead. Swift's contemporary biographers are dismissed 'as practically worthless'; Deane Swift's essay,¹⁸ for example, is 'dull and incoherent', written in 'boldness and bad taste' (*Swift*, 111n), and Orrery's is 'nonsense' (*Swift*, 118).

Forster showed more respect, however, towards Samuel Johnson and Sir Walter Scott. James Boswell explained Johnson's 'unaccountable prejudice' against Swift in terms of Johnson finding his writing 'shallow' and inferior to that of his contemporaries.¹⁹ This dislike is evident in the *Lives of the Poets*, which portrays Forster's hero as gloomy, proud and fundamentally unlikeable; 'querulous and fastidious, arrogant and malignant' (*Lives of the Poets*, III, 23). Forster admired the vivacity of Johnson's writing; he was, however, disappointed by Johnson's failure to test the reliability of anecdotes, his omission or failure, through laziness or lack of interest, to recognise certain sources to which Forster had access, and his tendency to scepticism, for example on the question of the authorship of the 'Tale of a Tub'. Forster argued that the wit and vehemence of the book point to Swift's authorship; Johnson argued that they debar it, and Forster used Johnson's own words frustratedly to support his argument:

Swift was to lose a bishopric in one generation because a piece of writing was thought too witty to be fathered on anybody else, and in the next he was to lose the credit of having written the piece because it was thought too witty to be fathered on him. Nowhere is there

¹⁸ *An Essay upon the life, writings and character of Dr Jonathan Swift...* (London: 1755).

¹⁹ James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 2 vols (London: Dilly, 1791).

proof of the authorship so irresistible as in the reasons against it thus expressed by Johnson. 'There is in it such a vigour of mind, such a swarm of thoughts, so much of nature, and art, and life.' These words exactly describe it. (*Swift*, pp.156-157)

All these showed, in Forster's opinion, 'how strangely unreasonable a strong personal dislike may be' (*Swift*, p. 156).

Appended to the boxes of Swift material in the Forster Collection is a small packet, on the cover of which is marked 'the letters inside here have not been made public because their contents are partly of a private character unimportant and the writers of some of them are still living. R. F. S. 1894'.²⁰ The letters inside shed light on Forster's writing in two ways. To the Rev. Robert Longe in 1858, Forster wrote that he had 'been for sometime engaged in preparations ... a new life of Swift'. However, they also illustrate how different the ethics of the nineteenth century biographer are from those of the modern biographer.

Sir Walter Scott provides an example of these ethics in practice. As he drew nearer to publication, Scott wrote to Edward Berwick that

Swift is drawing to a close but I am anxious to have your ideas concerning that part of the correspondence with Vanessa, which is not published. It is impossible to acquit Swift of great impropriety in that matter though I am convinced there was nothing criminal between the parties. I should like very much to see the letter if you can trust me so far as with the perusal. Of course I will give none of them to the public unless you think it can be done without disadvantage to the Dean.²¹

The fact that Forster had laid aside letters specifically to shield living individuals suggests that he was writing very much along the ethical lines illustrated by Scott's letter. I discussed above how Forster's biographers have accused him of misrepresentation by omission – the above is one reason why this may have been so.

²⁰ Forster Coll. 48.G. Box 6. R. F. S. Was R. F. Sketchley, Assistant Keeper of the Museum.

²¹ 10 January 1814 or 18 January 1815. Forster Coll. 48.G. Box 6.

Scott's biography had failed to provide a unified narrative of the Swift-Stella-Vanessa history.²² Indeed, it was in the nineteenth century that the more lurid Swiftian mythology truly led him to be thought of as a sensational choice of subject. Writers such as Jeffrey and Thackeray both characterised Swift as a cruel, mad murderer of Vanessa and Stella, whose end, succumbing to the lunacy he had always feared, was a kind of sinister poetic justice.²³

In 1809, at the beginning of Scott's research for his life of Swift, he wrote of his hero that 'the life of Swift, although the facts have never I think been placed in a regular point of view, does not afford much matter for controversy ...'²⁴ Scott's letters, during the five years in which he prepared his biographical sketch and edition of Swift's works, show how he was forced to reassess this view over the next five years as he became increasingly fascinated by Swift's politics and his relationships with Stella and Vanessa. Unlike Johnson, he wrote 'with much hearty liking as well as a generous admiration'. His letter to Berwick, asking for material for the *Life of Swift*, expresses this:

It may be necessary to assure you that my task is undertaken in the spirit of zealous admiration of Swift both as a writer and as a man. I know there is a modern fashion in virtue of which an Editor and Biographer endeavours to raise himself by depreciating the subject of his labours. But far from desiring to climb upon the shoulders of the Dean I am reverentially ambitious of supporting his train.

Forster as a biographer admired the energy and the 'manly' tone of Scott's writing. As a student in Newcastle, he had been 'a keen student of Byron and Scott', whose influence showed in his play

²² Scott, from *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, Ed. Walter Scott, 19 volumes (Edinburgh: Constable, 1824) 2nd ed., vol I.

²³ Francis Jeffrey, 'Review of Scott's *Works of Jonathan Swift*', *The Edinburgh Review* 53 (September 1816), pp. 1-52. W. M. Thackeray, 'Swift' in *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1853), pp. 1-54.

²⁴ Scott to the Rev. G. Berwick, 24 May 1809. A copy of this can be found in Forster Coll. 47.E Box 13.

Charles at Tunbridge.²⁵ It seems almost certain that the novelistic techniques used in Forster's historiography (see chapter 2) were also shaped partially by Scott's historical novels.²⁶

Scott's biography ultimately failed, Forster claimed, because he 'had too much other work to do' (*Swift*, vi); his editorship of Swift was too 'hasty' (*Swift*, 6). The final edition was largely plagiarised from Nichols's 1808 edition; Scott even sent unmarked, printed pages to his own printer.²⁷ There are several possible reasons for this. Scott's workload over this time was increasingly heavy. J.G. Lockhart, Scott's biographer and son-in-law, wrote that he was feeling the pressure of a 'tumult of engagements' at that time.²⁸ In 1814, Scott not only completed *Swift* but *Waverley*, *The Lord of the Isles*, two essays for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an edition of James Somerville's *Memorie of the Somervilles*, and *Guy Mannering* (Sutherland, p. 179). In 1807, Scott's younger brother was convicted of defrauding £3,000 in rents and forced to repay this sum, and John Sutherland has argued that it was Scott's anxiety over this debt which caused him to make the hasty agreement to edit Swift's works. Scott's editorial work was interrupted by the mental collapse of his assistant, Henry Weber, in 1814, and Sutherland suggests that Weber efficiently aided Scott in his work, but that the extent to which he was involved with the biographies remains unclear (Sutherland, p. 165). There certainly seems to have been no public suggestion that the biography was not Scott's own work. Considering his own workload in the late 1850s and early 1860s, while working as Literary Adviser to Chapman and Hall, Secretary to the Lunacy Commission, writing and supervising the publication of the *Historical and Biographical Essays*,

²⁵ James Gilmore to Eliza Forster, 13 August 1877. Letter in the Huntington Library, San Marino, quoted by Davies, p. 7.

²⁶ Georg Lukács describes these techniques as they were used by Scott in *The Historical Novel* (London: Penguin, 1962); while many consider his strongly Marxist account to be outdated, it has much to offer in this regard, particularly since it opposes Scott's ideology of historical character to Forster's other main influence, Carlyle.

²⁷ John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p. 166.

²⁸ *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* 4 vols (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1848) III, p. 86.

Forster was well situated to appreciate the pressure of working to such strict deadlines, and the editorial procedures which this pressure must have generated.

Forster saw the views of Johnson and Scott as extremes of disgust and admiration. Seeking to provide a more tempered appraisal of Swift, he often quoted the two in conjunction, ‘Walter Scott not inaptly remembered... how Johnson described his Oxford life to Boswell ...’ (*Swift*, p.42); ‘Johnson nevertheless rejected the denial and repeated the charge ... and Scott, taking his information from ...’ (*Swift*, p.92.) He had a high regard for the ‘noble’ styles of Scott and Johnson, and clearly recognised his debt to them both as key founders of the modern biography as well as researchers of Swift’s life. However, finding their work misrepresentative, he bowed to their authorial superiority whilst remaining critical of their scholarship; he corrected and elucidated their work, at the same time claiming that they both subconsciously selected evidence without weighing it, according to their own preconceptions. Early in his own biographical research on Swift, as he prepared John Murray’s republication of Swift’s works on the basis of Scott’s edition, Forster wrote that he was ‘somewhat doubtful of the degree of prominence to give to Scott in the description of the edition. I am so disappointed with his work as I work more closely with it.’²⁹ Describing one Sunday in Swift’s parish of Laracor, when the only parishioner to come to prayer was the Parish Clerk, Forster complained that ‘Scott found such stories fit in so well with his own biographical impressions that he was more than ready to believe them’ (*Swift*, p.120). Previous biographers had debated whether Swift truly wrote ‘The Battle of the Books’; Forster presented this debate through the opposing views of Scott and Johnson, both of whom, he argued, had founded their views on unreliable sources (*Swift*, p. 92n).

²⁹ Forster to John Murray, 25 May 1855. Quoted in David Woolley, ‘Forster’s *Swift*’, *The Dickensian*, 70 (September 1974), pp. 191-204 (p. 193).

Although avoiding any kind of a lengthy biography of Swift, Macaulay had displayed a far more tempered view in his essay on Sir William Temple, and in his *History*.³⁰ ‘Sir William Temple’ claimed that Swift was ungrateful and manipulatively self-depreciatory towards his patron; Macaulay reiterated this in the *History*, which argued that in Swift’s second residence at Moor Park, his new position of clergyman gave him the audacious confidence to make love to the ‘pretty waiting-maid who was the chief ornament of the servants’ hall, and whose name is inseparably associated with his in a sad and mysterious history’ (*History*, VI, p. 382). The *History* also suspected Swift of plagiarising ‘some of the happiest touches’ of *Gulliver’s Travels*; in response to this, Peter Cunningham, the historiographer who had acted alongside Forster in *Not so Bad as we Seem*, had already noted the similarity between the *History* and Swift’s *Four Last Years of Queen Anne*.³¹

Vocalising some embarrassment, Forster quoted and corrected what he conceived to be Macaulay’s misconceptions about Swift. Forster had already dispraised Macaulay’s work on Foote and Steele;³² he continued this, contesting, for example, Macaulay’s picture of Swift’s residence at Moor Park, and claiming that there was no evidence of Swift’s courtship of Esther Johnson at this time. Temple’s ‘cold’ nature, Forster claimed, naturally rendered Swift frustrated and miserable, since ‘to make a man feel that he is treated as a schoolboy is as mortifying a check as you can give him ... but that any secret savageness of pride was eating into Swift’s heart at the time, has as little foundation in fact as the rest of Macaulay’s picture’ (*Swift*, p. 88-89). Forster hoped to redress certain popular misconceptions about Swift, but in doing so it was necessary to deal with several of

³⁰ ‘Sir William Temple’, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1838, reprinted in *Historical and Critical Essays*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1853), vol II; *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, 8 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1858), vol VI.

³¹ John Timbs, *Lives of Wits and Humourists*, 2 vols (London: Bentley, 1862), vol. I, p. 118.

³² ‘Samuel Foote’, *Quarterly Review*, 95 (September 1854), pp. 483-548. Reprinted in *Historical and Biographical Essays* (London: Murray, 1858); ‘Sir Richard Steele’, *Quarterly Review*, 96 (March 1855), pp. 509-568. Reprinted in *Historical and Biographical Essays* (London: Murray, 1858).

his literary heroes, dismissing the ‘famous English writers’ (*Swift*, 86) whose opinions and research he had found so valuable in his historiographies.

To return to Ann Cline Kelly:

Making Swift into an epic hero or icon, though, was troubled, to say the least, by the scandals concerning his love life, madness, coarseness, and apostasy. The solution was to separate Swift from his history, to suppress works that did not do credit to his name, or to create new myths. (Kelly, p. 165)

Forster chose the latter. He created new myths about Swift (and his other biographical figures) by naturalising their behaviour, and, in Barthesian terms, by transforming ‘history into nature’,³³ by inoculating the reader against the behaviour and attitudes which clashed with the moral code of their readership. Forster’s own biographers have often accused him of misrepresenting his biographical subjects. Whitwell Elwin, Forster’s friend since 1854 and first biographer, wrote that Forster ‘could scarcely bring himself to recognise that moral meannesses could co-exist with majesty of intellect, or that a man, who was a genius in his books, could out of his line be inferior to ordinary mortals’.³⁴ James Davies has recently written more condemningly:

Many things are silently omitted from Forster’s pages: Goldsmith’s envy, coarseness in company, extravagant gambling, and failure to honour contracts; Churchill’s hatred and harrying of Smollett and vindictive satirical attacks on the man who thwarted him of his father’s living, his participation in the rites and Medmenham Abbey, the hedonism of his epitaph; Defoe’s uncontrollable anger; Foote, fat and flabby, leaving his estate to his illegitimate sons; Steele’s heavy drinking, homicidal duelling, mercenary marriage, illegitimate children, and flagrant dishonesty; Swift as absentee parish priest and congenital misanthrope. (Davies, p. 244)

We have already seen the naturalisation of his subjects’ faults, in Forster’s explanation of Sir John Eliot’s attempt on his neighbour’s life. Forster attempted in *Sir John Eliot* to disguise actions which might have been seen by a Victorian readership as indicative of Eliot’s moral defects, the action of a murderous adolescent as the natural reaction of a wilful youth, raised in a household where he was exposed to the corrupting influence of the riotous lower classes which his father allowed into the

³³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Travers (London: Cape, 1972) p. 129.

³⁴ ‘John Forster’, *Forster Collection: A Catalogue of the Printed Books* (London: South Kensington Museum, 1888), xvii.

house. As Davies suggested, Forster's 'heroicising' involves misrepresentative suppression, as well as this pre-Freudian search for a psychological motive.

In *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, Forster had explored the social and professional status of the author, and the history of journalistic and stage writing. Forster had heroicised Oliver Goldsmith in the same way that he had Cromwell and Eliot; what Victorian readers would consider to be moral faults were explained as spontaneous exuberances of character or the results of unpropitious circumstances, such as Goldsmith's unhappy childhood. These faults were smoothed over in order to create the impression of a core goodness, which manifested itself in Cromwell's and Eliot's fervour for parliamentary independence, or in Goldsmith's works. So *Swift* reflected, as had *Goldsmith*, what Davies called Forster's idea of essential character, 'an inviolate core of innate goodness expressed by the author's works'. 'His writings and his life are connected so closely', Forster wrote, that

to judge of either fairly with an imperfect knowledge of the other is not possible; and only thus can be excused what Jeffrey hardily said, and many have too readily believed – that he was an apostate in politics, infidel or indifferent in religion, a defamer of humanity, the slanderer of statesmen who had served him, and destroyer of the women who loved him. Belief in this, or any part of it, may be pardonable where the life is known insufficiently and the writings not at all; but to a competent acquaintance with either or both, it is monstrous as well as incredible. (*Swift*, p. v)

Whereas Johnson had considered that Swift's works, particularly *Gulliver*, indicated coarseness, vulgarity and low morals, Forster reinterpreted and repainted Swift with a more intellectual and more Augustan lustre. Forster argued for the first time that Jonathan Swift had obtained his university degree by fair study, that there was no real evidence for a secret marriage between Swift and Esther Johnson, that the 'binding' of his intellect to 'the sentiments and expressions of cooks and chambermaids' was an example of the broad range of his creativity, not a display of his vulgarity (*Swift*, 113).

Finding Swift's 'core goodness' was certainly a more difficult task than finding Goldsmith's, whose financial hardship was often caused by his own generosity. Bryan Procter wrote to Forster that he 'must be so tired and perplexed with [his] labour, in trying to make out a good character for Mr. Jonathan Swift'.³⁵ Procter's comment shows the permeation of the sinister or vulgar images of Swift into the Victorian cultural consciousness. However, Forster's biography sought, I would argue, to purify Swift of scandal and remould him in the form of a modern canonical icon.

Forster's writing process

Forster wrote in his preface that the idea of a biography of Swift had been in his thoughts for many years, and that he had for some time been collecting material for this purpose. Although many of John Murray's personal letters to Forster probably did not survive the executors' bonfire, creating a lamentable gap in the Forster archive, two boxes of letters from Forster to Murray, as well as several items in the firm's copy books, can be found in the John Murray archive, now in the National Library of Scotland. Many of the letters relate to the commissioning and publication of *Swift*. From these can be drawn a narrative not only of *Swift*'s publication, but also of the friendship between Forster and his publisher.

Forster first wrote to Murray in 1846, making enquiries on behalf of a friend engaged 'on some enquiries concerning the life of Canning'. In early 1854, Forster accepted an invitation to dinner, where he hoped to meet Whitwell Elwin (who would become his friend, biographer and executor in the Forster bequest), Murray's partner, Robert Cooke, and the historian, Peter Cunningham, who had already provided much useful material for *Goldsmith*.³⁶ Forster and Murray's friendship with Cunningham suffered an abrupt end when Cunningham published in the press several private letters by the 'late Rev. Dr L. Bowles', the eccentric poet and clergyman

³⁵ R. W. Armour, *Barry Cornwall: a Biography of Bryan Waller Procter* (Boston: Meador, 1935), p. 266.

³⁶ Forster to Murray, 28 Feb 1854. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc 12604.

William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850).³⁷ Forster's correspondence with Murray, written over the remaining twenty years of Forster's life, is nevertheless demonstrative of a close friendship between Forster, Murray and Elwin. Indeed, it was Elwin who was to mediate the proposal to publish a new edition of Swift's works:

This morning's post brought me a letter also from our kind good Elwin in which he tells me that you had suggested *Swift* as a 'classic' I might be disposed to edit. If that be still your wish, I will undertake it, for the subject has long been a familiar & favourite one with me. But I should require some little time before the printing could begin ...³⁸

By January 1855, Murray had issued Forster with a formal proposal for an edition of Swift's Works, based on Scott's edition, for a fee of five hundred guineas:

I received your letter this morning with its proposal that I should edit the works of Swift for the British Classics on the terms mentioned in it ... I do not contemplate making the Memoir to be prefixed to the first volume more of a 'Life' than the paper for the Quarterly will be. It will be a little longer, I have no doubt, for I am pretty sure to transgress the Quarterly limits, and what I retrench from the one I shall be too glad to retain for the other. But, though longer, it will still be only the Quarterly paper to all intents and purposes – a sketch, as life like as I can make it, of the man and of his works; not a formal biography.³⁹

The two letters show first that Forster had been contemplating Swift as a 'familiar and favourite' subject of biography for some time. Secondly, the projected biography, 'a sketch, as life like as I can make it', is more suggestive of the narrative, illustrative *Goldsmith* than the 'formal biography' which appeared in 1875, in which Forster returned to the scholarly format of his previous works, a lengthy, chronological narrative with extensive footnotes.

Goldsmith was largely a compilation, drawing information together from printed biographies of Oliver Goldsmith, most of which cannot be found in the Forster Collection. The material which Forster collected for *Swift*, however, forms a collection of original and rare Swiftiana, equally valuable to the modern scholar. Whereas *Goldsmith*, as a literary work in its various forms, is a telling distillation of Forster's views on the status of the author, *Swift* offers the opportunity of

³⁷ Murray to Cunningham, 28 June 1854. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Mss 41912.

³⁸ Forster to Murray, (14 November 1854). Quoted Woolley, p. 192.

³⁹ Forster to Murray, 20 January 1855. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc 12604.

examining Forster's collecting, binding, and annotating processes to further examine the relationship between Forster's archive and his writing.

On 9 June 1855, Murray advertised for material, published or unpublished, which might contribute to a new *Life of Swift*.⁴⁰ He received a pleasing response from booksellers, librarians and private individuals, whose letters Forster kept, bound and donated (a full summary of Forster Catalogue references to these has already been provided by David Woolley, and I shall therefore only refer to specific examples where they arise). These were listed in the preface which boasted that, following the call for material, 'more than a hundred and fifty new letters' had been made available for Forster's perusal.

Between them, Forster and Murray ensured that the names of several noble houses and private collections were included; through Forster's friend Sir James Emerson Tennent, he was given access to unpublished letters in the palace at Armagh. Francis Russell, 7th Duke of Bedford, loaned poems by Swift copied in Stella's handwriting.⁴¹ Andrew Fountaine, descendant of the art collector whose friendship with Swift was documented in Swift's correspondence and the *Journal to Stella*, allowed Forster into the manuscript collections at his family seat, Narford, where, 'amid much other matter of a very attractive kind, I found unpublished poems and letters of much importance' (*Swift*, p. viii). Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton, loaned an unprinted letter. The preface was vaguer on other new sources. 'By the courtesy of a descendant of Archbishop Cobbe,' he wrote, for example, 'some additions are made to the fragment of autobiography first printed by Mr. Deane Swift'. A Trinity College Roll 'which fell accidentally into my hands' (*Swift*, p. vii) allowed Forster to argue that Swift's university career was not as troubled as previous biographers had suggested.

⁴⁰ *Notes and Queries*, p. 442.

⁴¹ Murray to Forster, 19 June 1855. FC 47. E. Box 13.

Forster also made use of ‘on site’ fellow scholars such as Percy Fitzgerald, also a later biographer of Forster, who provided him with other illustrative pieces not described, ‘among them some valuable unprinted marginalia of Swift’s readings in Baronius and other books in the Marsh and Christ-Church libraries, for which I had the ready service of my friend Mr. Percy Fitzgerald’ (*Swift*, p. viii-ix). An ‘Irish gentleman’ was also commissioned, ‘after repeated letters and applications’, to copy an unspecified full-length portrait of the Dean.⁴²

Any documents purchased by Murray and Cooke were, as we shall see, repurchased by Forster before the completion of the first volume, twenty years later, and form the bulk of the Forster archive Swiftiana. In November 1855, Murray purchased the papers which had once belonged to Mrs Whiteway, Swift’s nurse and last companion, and to Deane Swift, ‘comprising several of Swift’s important writings in his own manuscript, and, among transcripts of other prices with corrections by himself, a copy of the Directions to the Servants with humorous addition’ (*Swift*, p. vii). Murray acquired these from Swift’s relative, Edmund Lenthal Swifte (1777-1875), for £35.⁴³

Murray also purchased the first edition of *Gulliver*, the ‘most rare of my acquisitions’ (*Swift*, p. viii), from Booth the bookseller, by whom it had been purchased at Malone’s sale, on 24 July 1855, for £30 (Woolley, p. 194). After Murray’s partner, Robert Cooke, protested that the handwriting was not Swift’s, Booth offered to reimburse his money, if the book was returned after use. However, Forster kept the copy, and described it with bibliophilic enthusiasm:

It is the large paper copy of the first edition of *Gulliver* which belonged to the friend (Charles Ford) who carried Swift’s manuscript with so much mystery to Benjamin Motte the publisher, interleaved for alterations and additions by the author, and containing, besides all the changes,

⁴² Forster to Murray, 2 November 1855. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12604.

⁴³ Forster to Murray, 18 March 1856. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12604.

erasures, and substitutions adopted in the later editions, several interesting passages, mostly in the Voyage to Laputa, which have never yet been given to the world. (*Swift*, viii)

Forster obtained his own valuable material at library sales; on pages 57 and 84, Forster quoted from a letter by Swift from Moor Park, May 29, 1690, 'first printed in Mr Cunningham's edition (1854) of Johnson's *Lives*: being then in the autograph collections of Mr Young of Blackheath. These have now been dispersed, and it is now in my possession.' Mr Young's sale took place at Sotheby's in 1869.

The sale of Monck Mason's library in 1858 gave Forster the opportunity to purchase Swift's notebooks and account books, his letters of ordination, a large number of unpublished pieces in prose and verse exchanged with Sheridan, several important unprinted letters, and a series of contemporary printed tracts for illustration of life in Ireland, 'which I was afterwards able to complete by the whole of the now extremely rare Wood Broadsides' (*Swift*, vii). These broadsides came into his possession via Henry Colburn,⁴⁴ although it is not clear whether Forster was given or purchased the letters directly, or inherited them via his wife, Eliza.

At John Mitford's library sales in 1859 and 1860, he picked up the edition of Hawkesworth's *Life* with manuscript notes by the editor and annotator Edmond Malone, and by the doctor (Lyon), who saw Swift in his last illness, 'on which [editors] Nichols and Malone, who partially used them, placed the highest value' (*Swift*, p. vii). Forster used two original letters written from Moor Park to defend Swift's refusal to marry 'Varina', or Miss Waring, in 1696. To verify these, Forster also made use of Malone's annotated copy of *Literary Relics*; Malone claimed to have collated them with the original manuscript letters (*Swift*, p. vii).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ J. Brennan to H. Colburn, 1 June 1837. FC 47.E Box 13.

⁴⁵ Monck Berkeley, *Literary Relics* (London: Elliot & Kay, 1789). Malone's annotated copy, Forster Collection, 8vo 644.

Murray also introduced Forster to the Rev. Dr James Henthorn Todd, who had lately been senior fellow at Trinity College Dublin, from whom he purchased Swift's unpublished journal for £10 in 1856,⁴⁶ 'also in Swift's handwriting, singular in its character and of extraordinary interest, written on his way back to Dublin amid grave anxiety for Esther Johnson, then dangerously ill' (*Swift*, viii).

It is clear from the list above that Forster was still seeking, as he had in his historiographies, to establish his scholarly authority, and possibly to compensate for a sense of social insecurity, by invoking the names of the great houses which had entrusted their papers to him. It is easier to gain from this list a sense of the circle of gentlemanly scholars and booksellers whom Forster wished to portray himself a part of. Largely thanks to Murray and Cooke, Forster was able not only to boast of his prowess not only as a historical authority, but as a collector of rare and valuable materials.

Despite the abundance of material acquired by Forster and Murray over 1854 and 1855, the writing of *Swift* proved as arduous for Forster as it had for Scott. On Boxing Day 1856, Forster wrote to Murray 'you will not, I hope, be sorry to hear that I am getting seriously to work with Swift. Reeve asked me the other day (this is in confidence) to write him something about Berwick - & I said to him, what I now say to everyone, that I touch nothing until Swift is done. But it will be a graver task than I expected in undertaking it.'⁴⁷ From his offices in Whitehall Place, Forster undertook his Commission and his literary duties; letters to Murray, as well as pages of the *Swift* manuscript, are written on Lunacy Commission notepaper (as *Sir John Eliot* had been). Meetings with Murray, and his printers were also arranged to take place at the Commission Offices.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Todd to Forster, 18 February 1856. FC 47. E. Box 13. Forster to Murray, 23 June 1855, John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12604.

⁴⁷ John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12604.

⁴⁸ Forster to Murray, 31 December 1859. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604.

By 1860, however, despite friendly attempts by Elwin to keep the peace, Forster's relations with Murray were becoming strained. The *Quarterly* paper, intended to accompany Forster's articles on Foote and Steele and for which Forster was to be paid another 100 guineas, never materialised. On 23 March 1860, Forster advised Murray that he had, through Bradbury and Evans, advertised his edition of the *Life, Journals and Letters of Swift* 'as in preparation'. The promised proofs, however, did not appear.⁴⁹ On 5 June, Forster expostulated at a loss of friendship with his publisher, and grumbled that Murray had been unsufferably cool ever since a financial disagreement over a year and a half before. Forster argued that, since 'the existence of a friendly feeling' had drawn him to Murray as a publisher, if this were ill founded, then he would take the *Historical and Biographical Essays* and the *Arrest of the Five Members* elsewhere, and that all previous commitments (*Swift* included) would be cut. This seems to have been quickly resolved, and friendly communication was taken up once again. In 1974, David Woolley found only three letters written between Forster and Murray from 1860 to 1869, and argued that this was indicative of a chill in the friendship (Woolley, p. 197). The archive, however, now contains twenty-one letters written during this time, and the genial tone and frequent arrangements to meet suggest that the two remained friendly through the 1860s, despite the lack of progress with *Swift*.

However, the intervening years between Forster's first enthusiasm and his completion of the project were clouded by ill health, Lunacy Commission work and executor/biographer duties on behalf of W. S. Landor and Dickens. In 1870, having completed his biography of Walter Savage Landor, Forster wrote bitterly to Murray that *Swift* had become too heavy a burden to bear.⁵⁰ Other tasks, such as assisting Whitwell Elwin in editing Murray's new edition of Pope's works (1881-1889), had been 'absolutely and unavoidably imposed' on him by Murray himself, and had prevented him from honouring his engagement.

⁴⁹ Forster to Murray, 22 March 1860. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12604.

⁵⁰ Forster to Murray, 19 March 1870. John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12604.

Having invested so much of his 'life and thought' in *Swift*, Forster was unwilling to surrender the Swiftiana which had been gathered. He divided the materials in his possession at that time into three groups: 'the Walls correspondence that you placed in my hands', 'the purchases from Mr E.L. Swifte and from Mr Booth made at my suggestion' and 'such collections as I have myself gathered and brought together'. The 'Walls correspondence' is not mentioned in Forster's preface, but may refer to Archdeacon Walls, rector of Castle Knock, near Trim, and mentioned in Swift's *Journal to Stella*; there are two letters to Walls, one from Swift and one from Thomas Parnell, now in the Forster Collection.⁵¹ Forster's wording implies that the Walls letters came from Murray's own collection: 'I will return the purchases, paying you back what was paid for them; taking also from you the Walls letters if you please; paying you for them, too, such fair price as you may please to ask'. Since most of the material which Forster lists in his preface is contained in the Forster Collection, it can be assumed that the publisher reclaimed very little of the Swiftiana which he, Cooke and Forster had discovered. A note provided by Swifte at the time of purchase showed that Murray kept three of the 26 items involved (Woolley, p. 195).

In a postscript to this letter, Forster wrote that his health had 'altogether broken down'. The tone of the letter is not dissimilar to the quarrel of June 1860. Forster was also disappointed with Murray's failure to notice *Landor* in the *Quarterly Review*, and chagrined that the break would leave Murray unlikely to publish an abridged version of *Eliot*, which he had begun to prepare (published by Chapman and Hall in 1872). The disagreement was resolved, nevertheless, and Forster was re-enthused over the imminent completion of his work. Murray wrote to apologise for the omission of a *Landor* notice, having worried that 'the subject was a difficult one for the *QR*, and in hands not strictly friendly might have turned out unwelcome.'⁵² He also apologised for his refusal to publish the condensed *Eliot*, lamenting that he could 'do no more ... than any other

⁵¹ Forster Collection Manuscripts XXXII, National Art Library; Forster Collection 48.D.2, National Art Library.

⁵² Murray to Forster, 23 March 1870. John Murray Archive, NLS, Ms. 41914.

publisher I would ask to publish it'. Murray's reluctance to republish an abridged *Eliot*, when he was still left with half the original stock, is unsurprising. Forster's impatience to republish was often contentious; in 1859, Murray had also refused to republish the *Biographical and Historical Essays* until all copies were gone from his own shelves, and from the booksellers.⁵³ With regards to *Swift*, he 'should be very sorry to abandon it altogether, among other reasons because it is a lien between you and me.' He was unwilling, however, to leave the Swiftiana with Forster, preferring to retrieve and bind it up 'as autographs', but offering to leave copies with Forster. It is unclear whether Murray gave or sold the Swiftiana to Forster, but we can only assume Forster repurchased the material from his publisher.

Once again, the quarrel was resolved. However, the work was once again interrupted by Forster's duties as executor and biographer to Dickens, in 1873. According to Elwin, *Swift* was laid to one side until the *Life of Dickens* was entirely completed, in 1874:

With the exception of a few pages he did not write a line of it till after he had completed his *Life of Dickens*. He was always rather impatient to get his works before the world. This impatience increased latterly from the fear that he should not live to utilise his materials, and he printed as he wrote. I was averse to his taking the *Swift*, & did my best to dissuade him ... His eagerness however to publish prevailed, & I could not stop him for an hour ... The marvel is that he could attempt to do anything, & his determination to defy pain, & lassitude, & failing perceptions must have been positively heroic. If he had lingered he could not possibly have continued *Swift* to any purpose.⁵⁴

Forster's relentlessness is shadowed in his letters to Murray, written from Palace Gate House where he was kept 'a prisoner' by work and illness.⁵⁵ 'I have been working [?] incessantly,' he wrote, 'in the belief that we intended to have the first volume out at once ... but I shall not be sorry to interpose at once some rest to myself'.⁵⁶ He hoped for an edition of at least three thousand copies (the final print run for the first edition was two thousand), to be published in mid-June, rather than October, which was, he considered, 'a preposterous time to take'. With this letter he sent the first

⁵³ Murray to Forster, 7 December 1859. John Murray Archive, NLS, Ms. 41913.

⁵⁴ Elwin to Murray, 22 February 1875. Quoted by Woolley, p. 198.

⁵⁵ Forster to Murray, 11 January 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604.

⁵⁶ Forster to Murray, 5 March 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604.

proofs, with an entreaty that no-one but Murray would see them; 'I am horrified to think that even you should see the slips (many of them in the most crude state) and only recover my composure when I fancy that you may be restricting yourself to occasional glance at the made-up sheets only'. By July, the final proofs, marked 'Private and Confidential', were ready.⁵⁷

Swiftiana in the Forster Collection

In 1895, the self-entitled 'book hunter' William Roberts wrote:

Among the more notable literary men who were also book-collectors of this period, whose libraries are still preserved intact, are Alexander Dyce and John Forster. Their collections, now at South Kensington, are perhaps more particularly notable for the extraordinary number of books which were once the property of famous men.⁵⁸

The writer of the *Handbook to the Dyce and Forster Collections* (1880) seems to agree, and to echo the obituarists who found that the value of the bequest was more personal than bibliographic:

there are not very many single books which it would be of importance especially to mention merely on account of their rarity ... In naming these few books it must again be observed that they are selected not so much to show the general character of the library, or for their intrinsic value and rarity, but because of some accidental circumstance which gives them, like other books in the collection, a particular interest. The Forster library is one which will be found eminently desirable for such a place of education as is the South Kensington Museum, because it is full of books of daily interest. (*Handbook*, pp. 75-79)

Dyce's library was noted not only for its rare editions, but for the unusually good condition of the books, which were 'carefully bound; and some of the more rare and important have been expensively bound by the best London bookbinders' (*Handbook*, p. 13). Forster's library, however, is seen to supply some of the deficiencies of Dyce's, which fails, the writer argues, particularly in terms of nineteenth-century literature. Even in the case of the presentation copies, review copies, manuscripts and other fragments given to Forster by his contemporaries or annotated by them, the value to the collector of 'precious rarities' is not bibliographic, 'for their intrinsic value'. It is in the 'accidental circumstance' which colours them with personal association, and which extends their

⁵⁷ Forster Coll. 47.C. Box 4 contains the final proofs, marked 'Private and Confidential July 1875'.

⁵⁸ *The Book-Hunter in London* (London: Stock, 1895), p. 84.

‘daily interest’ beyond the bibliophile or the antiquarian, to the wider audience which his obituarists assumed that Forster hoped to reach by placing the books in the South Kensington Museum.

This can also be said of his eighteenth-century collections. Pertinent to his eighteenth-century biographies, Forster also owned a first edition of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*;⁵⁹ Garth’s *Dispensary*, presented by him to Pope, and containing Pope’s autograph and manuscript notes;⁶⁰ a first edition of Goldsmith’s *Deserted Village*;⁶¹ and some proof sheets of Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*, corrected by himself;⁶² Swift’s copy of the *Dunciad*;⁶³ and ‘an extraordinary collection of the writings of dean Swift, and of contemporary pamphlets relating to him’ (*Handbook*, p. 81). Forster owned two copies of the first edition of *Gulliver’s Travels*; one, although the second volume is missing, has its original binding.⁶⁴ The copy which was seen as ‘the most rare of all my acquisitions’, however, was the one which was annotated and corrected by Swift (although his publishers called the annotations into question, as I have shown).⁶⁵ Although there is too much Swiftiana to carry out here even a broad bibliographic assessment of Forster’s Collection (which has, in any case, already been done by Woolley, and by the various compilers of Swift bibliographies),⁶⁶ I have focused here on some of the collection’s bindings and engravings, to see if they, too, are of less bibliographical than personal (and therefore biographical) interest.

i. Bindings

As the *Handbook* noted, there was a comparative lack of interest on Forster’s part in fine bindings. Many of the modern books are still in boards, which ‘implies’, says the *Handbook*, ‘one merit: the

⁵⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Taylor, 1719). Forster Coll. 47.B.4.

⁶⁰ Samuel Garth, *The Dispensary* (London: Nutt, 1703). Forster Coll. 8 vo 3325.

⁶¹ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village* (London: Griffin, 1770). Forster Coll. L 4to 3529.

⁶² Forster Coll. 48.D.56/57.

⁶³ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* (London: Dodd, 1729) Forster Coll. L 4to 7079.

⁶⁴ Forster Coll. 8vo 8552.

⁶⁵ Forster Coll. 48.D.54/55.

⁶⁶ A summary of Swift holdings with their provenances can be found in the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* 4 vols (London: Mansell, 1980-93) Vol. III, part 4, pp. 15-27.

books have not been damaged by bad binders; they are uncut, and in the state which bibliomaniacs wish for, though rather more likely to be injured by careless readers' (*Handbook*, p. 75). Since many of the modern works are review copies, or collections of editions, it is unsurprising that Forster saw binding his entire library to be an unnecessary and deflationary expense; the offer of his first editions and manuscripts to the Royal Literary Fund in 1859, and his donation to the South Kensington Museum, suggest that he saw that their original state was of interest in itself.

Dyce's collection also contains an impressive number of eighteenth-century 'rarities', including three catalogue pages worth of Johnsoniana. However (leaving aside the huge collections of correspondence by Richardson and Garrick), Forster's collection of eighteenth-century literature supplies the deficiencies in the Dyce Collection; Dyce did not own a first edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, for example. Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) was noted in the *Handbook* for the fact that it was still in a contemporary binding, possibly the original (plate 12),⁶⁷ although it has since been rebaked (plate 13). The covers are fairly standard forms of common plain panel binding of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁶⁸ A presentation copy given by Addison to Richard West, recently sold privately, was bound with identical sprinkling and panelling on the leather of the covers, with plain spines.⁶⁹

Forster's binding is unusual in the gold tooling on the spine, of which a sample is pasted into the *Remarks* (plate 14). We cannot know whether the spine was lettered, since we do not have all of the original backing; lettering the spine was still uncommon in the early years of the eighteenth century, although lettering pieces were added to many spines after purchase, particularly in the latter half of the century, as libraries increased in size and librarians began to store books with their

⁶⁷ Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c, in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London: Tonson, 1705). Forster Coll. 8vo 41.

⁶⁸ David Pearson, *English Bookbinding Styles, 1450-1800: A Handbook* (London: British Library, 2005), p. 77.

⁶⁹ <http://www.abebooks.co.uk/servlet/SearchResults?an=addison%2C+joseph&sortby=1&tn=remarks&x=0&y=0>. Last accessed 17 May 2008.

fore-edge inwards.⁷⁰ At a time when simple bindings were becoming simpler, with spinal decorations limited to narrow bands, the elegantly decorated spine to *Remarks* seems too complicated to be a standard binding. However, we cannot tell for sure whether the sample of the spine is original; the gilding of old spines to brighten them up was part of a common fashion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Pearson, p. 95). At this time it was usual for the retailer to take responsibility for binding his stock; some unbound copies were kept for gentlemen who chose to have their purchases bound immediately to their own taste. Since the presentation copies are so similar, it seems likely that this was the case for Addison.

To the writer of the *Handbook*, therefore, the binding is valuable not because it is particularly fine, nor because it is a rare example of once common contemporary bindings, but through its association with Addison and with Swift. The *Handbook* also featured a facsimile of Addison's inscription: 'To Dr. Jonathan Swift, the most Agreeable Companion, the Truest Friend and the Greatest Genius of his Age, this book is presented by his most Humble Servant the Author' (*Handbook*, p. 75); Forster had also reprinted this inscription in *Swift* as a representation of Addison's hand, 'an emphatic memorial of one of the most famous of literary friendships' (*Swift*, p. 160). The book also contains a manuscript note by George Daniel, whose library was sold on the 20 July, 1864,⁷¹ and at whose sale Forster may have obtained the volume.

Apart from the material obtained from the Monck Mason and Mitford sales, which was uniformly bound by its owners, many of Swift's other works appear to be (now crumbling) in their original bindings. Of the first editions of *Gulliver*, for example, the only conservation work which has been undertaken on FC 8vo 8552 (fig. 8), the lone volume of the first edition, is its rebacking (this may even predate Forster's acquisition of it, given its condition). The annotated *Gulliver* was

⁷⁰ Bernard C. Middleton, *History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique*, Revised fourth edition (London: British Library, 1996), p. 288-289.

⁷¹ *Notes and Queries*, S. 3- VI (1864), pp. 79-80.

placed into Solander boxes (book-form cases), and the second volume has, at some stage (probably post-Forster) been rebound. First editions of *Gulliver* are widely seen as rare but obtainable, and there is also an annotated edition in Swift's hand in the Armagh Public Library. The more ephemeral Swiftiana which Forster mentions in his preface, Swift's diary and account books, for example, were uniformly boxed and bound for Forster in green Russia leather by an unknown binder. Letters relating to the search for Swiftiana, and copies of related material made by Forster's amanuenses, were either stored among his folio volumes of correspondence, or tied in bundles and boxed. If the storage and conservation of Forster's Collection, by himself and by subsequent curators, is an indicator of the value of each item, it is interesting that the most precious items are so because of their personal association rather than bibliographical value.

ii. Engravings and frontispieces

Chapter two discussed the ways in which Forster 'heroicised' his subjects, by describing the subject's portrait, and the Carlylean importance of the heroic physiognomy. In terms of Swift, the shifts in his literary reputation can also be traced in the graphic representations of him which prefigured his works. Since its final format was more dryly scholarly (intended originally for a *Quarterly Review* article), *Swift* does not have the text-image interplay which Forster employed in *Goldsmith* to create a biographical myth. However, the representations which Forster collected, and the engraving which he finally chose to prefix to his own biography are also very telling.

Forster's frontispiece (plate 17) was completed by the eminent engraver Paul Adolphe Rajon, 'the one best known in English Society, where his liveliness and amiability, as well as his great talent, found appreciators'.⁷² Etching as a means of book illustration enjoyed a revival in England from the late 1870s to the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1861-70, etchings constituted

⁷² Eugénie Hamilton, *Philip Gilbert Hamerton: An Autobiography, 1834-1858, and a Memoir* (Boston: Roberts Bros, 1896), p. 403.

roughly 3% of illustrations (compared to wood engraving, the most popular technique, which made up 25% of total usage); by 1871-80, it had grown to 12%.⁷³ This revival had been influenced by the French, and became known as the painter-etcher movement. Indeed, technical progressions in etching seem to go hand-in-hand with the mythologies propagated by portraiture at this time. Medal-engraving machines, for example, were developed which traced medals and produced lifelike facsimiles; H. F. Chorley's *The Authors of England* (1838), used the Frenchman Achille Colas's pantograph to create a collection of medallic portraits of English authors. As photography developed as a science, the projection of photographic images on to wood blocks, photolithography and the perfecting of photogravure via the carbon print, allowed increasingly detailed images to be published, and in some cases (although not in Forster's), photographs were pasted into the books themselves.⁷⁴ Forster could reproduce Rajon's etching, as well original documents, such as Swift's college reports. Forster's main reasons in choosing an etched portrait, however, appear to be time and cost, since 'the cost would be less, and the rapidity of execution much more, and I really feel the result would be striking.'⁷⁵

The question of Swift's portrait does not arise in the Forster-Murray correspondence until early in 1875, close to the date of publication. Forster was insistent that a 'first rate engraver'⁷⁶ be found, since he attached 'the greatest importance . . . to a fine portrait.'⁷⁷ It would seem from Forster's letters that Rajon was hired at Murray's suggestion, with Forster's approbation. The etching was to be an amalgamation of two portraits by Charles Jervas (plate 16; plate 17). Swift's face and expression appear to be taken from the earlier portrait, but he has been given the fine attire and wig of the latter. Rajon focused his efforts on Swift's shoulders and head, completing, as it were, the earlier portrait (painted between 1709 and 1710, and therefore fitting Forster's timescale),

⁷³ Geoffrey Wakeman, *Victorian Book Illustration* (Newton Abbot: Charles and David, 1973), pp. 161-162.

⁷⁴ For details of these processes in the nineteenth century, see Wakeman.

⁷⁵ Forster to Murray, 26 February 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604.

⁷⁶ Forster to Murray, 27 January 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604.

⁷⁷ Forster to Murray, 15 February 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604.

omitting the iconographic paper and quill, and the copies of Aesop, Lucian and Horace which rest on the table behind him. He worked from two engravings; Pierre Foudrinier's engraving of the early portrait, lent by Murray, and George Vertue's of the latter, lent by Forster.⁷⁸

Charles Jervas and Francis Bindon were seen as having produced the 'best portraits' of Swift.⁷⁹ Monck Mason wrote that

Of Swift's portraits, those made in his juvenile years are generally deposited in cabinets in England, and those which represent him at a more advanced period of life are more frequently to be found in Ireland. It is remarkable that the chief painter of each sort was his own countryman; the most eminent of the former class was C. Jervas; of the latter, F. Bindon.⁸⁰

Jervas (1667-1745), was popular among Swift's literary circle, and may have been a member of the Scriblerus Club.⁸¹ He became a fashionable portraitist following his painting of Pope, used as the frontispiece of the *Collected Works* in 1719, and succeeded Sir Godfrey Kneller as portrait painter to George I in 1723. Jervas's painting was soon engraved under his supervision by his friend, George Vertue, and first reproduced as the frontispiece to Swift's *Miscellanies* (1722); his 1718 portrait was also engraved and used as the frontispiece to the 1725 *Works*.

George Faulkner issued the first collected edition of Swift's *Works* in 1735 (again, with Vertue's second engraving). In the same year, at the height of Swift's fame as a patriotic hero (having just succeeded in overturning the issue of Wood's copper coinage in Ireland) Swift chose Francis Bindon (1690-1765) to produce a series of full-length portraits. Published images of Swift at this time also reflect his newfound glory; one 1736 edition of the works, probably pirated from

⁷⁸ Forster to Murray, 15 February 1875. John Murray Archive, NLS, Acc 12604. Murray also mentions his purchase of the Foudrinier engraving from a bookseller in the Strand, 12 February 1875: 'My son has been chez Madame & has found the print in question – pen & dressing gown – but she wants £4 for it. I suppose I had better get it and put it in the engravers [sic] hand.'

⁷⁹ Peter Cunningham, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* 3 vols (London: Murray, 1854), III, p. 193.

⁸⁰ William Monck Mason, *The History and Antiquities of the Collegiate Church of Ireland and Cathedral Church of St Patrick, from its Foundation in 1190, to the year 1819 etc.* (Dublin: Folds, 1820), p. 444.

⁸¹ Anon. *Irish Wit and Humour: Anecdote Biography of Swift, Curran, O'Leary and O'Connell* (New York: McGee, 1872).

Faulkner's Dublin edition,⁸² depicted Swift, fanned by cherubim, and crowned by the muses with a laurel wreath.

Two subsequent frontispieces showed artists' impressions of the marble bust which Faulkner, Swift's publisher, had commissioned and installed outside his shop in 1763 (plate 19; plate 20). The bust, largely associated with Roman virtues and with classicism, has many implications to one who might seek to remould Swift as an Augustan. Faulkner's 1772 edition, however, featured an unsigned engraving ('from the original in the possession of G. Faulkner') which imbued the bust with startlingly lifelike drapery and fleshy tones. Swift was seen for the first time without a wig, and with wide dark eyes quite different from the light ones, 'azure as the heavens', which Rajon would etch into Forster's frontispiece. In *Swiftiana* (1804), the bust (by now in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin) was given a more sinister air. The marble tones and vacant eyes are very much like those of a death mask, and the engraving is headed by the epitaph-like lines taken from 'to Dr. Delany, on the libels written against him' (1729): 'Hated by fools, and fools to hate/ Be this my motto, and this my fate'. These aspects of the image, as well as Swift's severe expression, distance him from the reader, and once again render him strange. Considering that this book is a selection of anecdotes on Swift, *Swiftiana* forms an interesting intersection between the two prevailing images of Swift, the jestbook Swift and the more disturbing Swift, which I discussed above. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the two were evidently beginning to converge.

Scott chose for his *Works* a detail of Bindon's 1740 portrait (plate 21; plate 22). The engraving focused on Swift's head and shoulders, and included the view, through a window behind Swift, of St Patrick's Cathedral. There are several engravings of this portrait in Forster's volumes

⁸² This was advertised on the title page as reprinted from the Second Dublin Edition, with Notes and Additions'. However, none of Faulkner's own volumes were released in 1736. Herman Teerink, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Arthur H. Scouten (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), pp. 24-25.

of material collected for the *Life*, suggesting that Forster had considered replicating it (the portrait is visible behind Forster's head in Matthew Ward's print, plate 1). However, he eventually decided in favour of the Jervas:

The portrait of [Swift] now painted by Jervas confirms the general statement at the time, that his personal appearance was very attractive. Features regular yet striking, forehead high and temples broad and massive, heavy-lidded blue eyes to which his dark complexion and bushy black eyebrows gave unusual capacity for sternness as well as brilliance, a nose slightly aquiline, mouth resolute with full closed lips, a handsome dimpled double chin, and all over the face the kind of pride not grown of superciliousness or scorn, but of an easy confident calm superiority. Of the dulness which Pope saw sometimes overshadow the countenance of his friend, of the insolence which Young declares was habitual to it, of the harsh unrelenting severity which it assumes in Bindon's picture at the deanery, there is no trace at present. By one who loved him he was said to have a look of uncommon archness in eyes quite as azure as the heavens; and he was himself told by one who did not love him less, that he had a look so awful it struck the gazer dumb; but only the first is in Jervas's picture ... (*Swift*, pp. 226-227).

In order to make the superiority of Jervas's painting clear, Forster footnotes this paragraph with the note that Pope found it 'very like'. Not only is the Jervas more chronologically fitting, but its representation of Swift's physiognomy, Forster argues, depicts his heroic nature. Both Scott and Forster chose to concentrate on the head, shoulders and face of their subject, rather than including the iconographic objects of Jervas's painting, or background of St Patrick's Cathedral, as Bindon had. This focused the meaning of the image into their subject's physiognomy. That Forster used the image which Pope found to be 'very like' suggests the importance to him of the most faithful reproduction possible, and yet he embellishes the image with a richer dress than the original. It is interesting that in doing so, however, Rajon was echoing the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century practice of the portraitist concentrating on the head, while a professional drapery painter was employed to complete the work, thereby implying that the subject's clothing was, to some degree, less important than the mimesis of the subject's physiognomy.⁸³

⁸³ Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 11.

Portrait painters of the eighteenth century were certainly aware of the similarities between portrait and biography. In 1719, the art theorist and portrait painter Jonathan Richardson wrote:

A portrait is a sort of General History of the Life of the Person it represents, not only to him who is acquainted with it, but to Many Others, who upon Occasion of seeing it are frequently told, of what is most Material concerning Them, or their General Character at least ... These therefore many times answer the Ends of Historical Pictures.⁸⁴

The idea that portraits should communicate something of the sitter's state of mind or personality became common only in the nineteenth century. It was therefore anachronistic for Forster to apply such standards of judgement to Jervas's work. This shifting trend is shown by Rajon's focus on Swift's head, eliminating both posture and the exterior signs which would, in Jervas's day, have indicated not only Swift's social status but his character.

Conclusion

Forster's *Swift* was by no means seen universally as successful; his reviewers were critical of his own failure to give 'chapter and verse' for the 'precise details of his narrative'. While the book was not graced with the 'elegant workmanship' of *Goldsmith* (now in its sixth edition), the completed work promised to far surpass it in historical value (*Athenaeum*, 1876, p. 706). However, Forster was criticised on two counts, first for his failure to authenticate many important details, and secondly for his tendency to spend pages in the 'jungle of false statements and false inferences accumulated by earlier biographers and commentators'. His story was repeatedly interrupted while he devoted whole pages at a time to correction of these wanton or ignorant perverters of the truth'.⁸⁵ Indeed, the biography was superseded only seven years later, by Henry Craik's, which is now considered to be the great Victorian biography of Swift, and which remained the only substantial

⁸⁴ *Two Discourses. I An Essay on the whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting. II. An Argument in Behalf of the Science of a Connoisseur* (London: Churchill, 1719), pp. 45-46.

⁸⁵ Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* treated sources in a similar way; 'haranguing and arguing with such sources, as well as quoting liberally from them and letting them argue amongst themselves in his own pages, was surely a mistake' (Ashton, p. 405).

biography of Swift which returned to primary sources until Ehrenpreis's *Swift: The man, his Works and the Age* (1962-1983).⁸⁶

However, it was generally felt that Forster succeeded in presenting a balanced and refreshing reassessment of Swift's life and works. Perhaps having learned from reviewers' criticisms of the extensive passages of historical background in his previous books, Forster aimed in *Swift* to concentrate almost entirely on the life of his subject, excluding the 'introduction of history' as far as possible (*Swift*, p. vi). One reviewer congratulated Forster on successfully freeing Swift of the 'slanders which, through a century and a half, have been current concerning the life and character of his hero, first shown in his pages to have had any claim at all to be called heroic'.⁸⁷ This representation of Swift as heroic was not only constructed in the text of Forster's biography, but in the frontispiece which he chose, and in the images he collected – images which continued a long narrative of Swift's oscillating reputation. It was also reflected in the collection and storage of Swiftiana; and we have more information regarding the lengthy process of gathering and digesting the material than any other scholarly biography which Forster wrote. Forster's archive has traditionally been seen, as Forster himself has, in personal terms; as curious and valuable, not for its bibliographic qualities, but in its uncommon connections to the historical and literary figures which fascinated its creator. As one might expect, Forster is not a quiet biographer; in *Swift*, as in all of Forster's biographies, the reader negotiates with Forster's audible narration, his asides and his evaluations. There is no danger of forgetting that one is engaging with Forster's reinterpretation of Swiftian mythology. This myth is created as much in his archive, as through the published text.

⁸⁶ Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: the man, his works and the age*, 3 vols (London: Methuen, 1962-1983).

⁸⁷ Review of *Life of Jonathan Swift*, in *Athenaeum*, 27 November, 1875, pp. 703.

Plate 11a. Page of manuscript of *Life of Jonathan Swift*

Plate 11b. Page of manuscript of *Life of Jonathan Swift* (cut and pasted notes)

Plate 12. Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705), Forster Collection copy binding.

Plate 13. Modern spine to Addison's *Remarks*.

Plate 14. Sample of original binding from Addison's *Remarks*, pasted into Forster Collection copy

Plate 15. Frontispiece to Forster's *Life of Jonathan Swift* (1875)

Plate 17. *Jonathan Swift*, Charles Jervas
(1718)

Plate 18. Frontispiece to *Works of Swift*
(1736)

Plate 19. Frontispiece to Faulkner's edition, of
Swift's Works (1772)

Plate 20. Frontispiece portrait to *Swiftiana*
(1804)

Plate 21. *Jonathan Swift*, Francis Bindon
(1735)

Plate 22. Frontispiece to Scott's edition
of the *Works* (1824)

Chapter five: *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography*

Introduction

On 17 September 1864, in Florentine lodgings subsidised by his brothers, Walter Savage Landor died at the advanced age of eighty-nine. He was estranged from his wife; modern biographers tell of his disappointment in his children, in whom he had delighted in their youth (*ODNB*). A classical scholar, epic poet, dramatist, and author of the contemporarily influential *Imaginary Conversations* (1821), Landor was remarkably prolific, but little read; obituaries were scanty, but reviewers of Forster's *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography* wrote at length of the 'character and genius of a man who in his time excited the wonder and admiration of men whom the world has consented to wonder at and admire'.¹ He remains largely ignored; although two volumes of Landor's complete Latin poetry were published in 1999,² a scholarly edition of his works has not been published since 1931.³ George J. Becker, at a time when 'selections' of poetry and the *Imaginary Conversations* were still being published, wrote that 'to the literary public at large he is little more than a name. His lack of popularity has long troubled the critics, one having gone so far as to say that this is the only topic of discussion in an article about Landor'.⁴ Becker argued that the volume of Landor's writings deterred many from penetrating the mass of letters, dialogues, political pamphlets and drama.

Landor's life and the bibliographical details of his work are both intriguing and complex, and cannot be dealt with comprehensively in the constricted space of this chapter. As we shall see, there is remarkably little of Landor's presence in the Forster archive; he 'gave away, from time to

¹'Walter Savage Landor', *Times*, 13 August 1869, p. 4.

²*The Complete Latin Poetry of Walter Savage Landor*, ed. Dana F. Sutton, 2 vols (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

³*The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor*, 16 vols; vols 1-12 ed. T. Earle Welby; vols 13-16 ed. Stephen Wheeler (London: Chapman & Hall, 1927-1931).

⁴George J. Becker, 'Landor's Political Purpose', *Studies in Philology*, 35 (July 1938), p. 446. The critic quoted was W. C. Brownell, reviewing Sidney Colvin's *Landor* for the 'English Men of Letters' series, in the *Nation*, 33 (1881), pp. 179-81.

time, almost every book ever possessed by himself’;⁵ his books, manuscripts and writings were left to his nieces, and he had a habit of ‘giving away books and manuscripts without in the least remembering to whom they had gone’.⁶ As a repository of Landor’s writings, the archive contains comparatively little manuscript material; both editions of *Imaginary Conversations* (interleaved with Landor’s corrections, additions and insertions in manuscript), as well as the play *Count Julian* and other miscellaneous play material. Landor’s presence in the archive is reduced to a handful of presentation copies; a few scattered marginalia; a patchwork of letters between Landor and his most famous correspondents: Wordsworth, Carlyle, Disraeli, Emerson, William Johnson Fox, Julius Hare, William Hazlitt, Lamb, Hunt, Gaskell. Landor’s greatness, his claim to posterity, is created, through the archive as in the biography, by association.

Landor’s papers are indeed voluminous; they are scattered throughout university libraries and county record offices in England and the United States. We can be certain that many important sources were not available to Forster. Writing for the ‘English Men of Letters’ series, Sidney Colvin seems to have consulted previously unaccessed books and manuscripts belonging to Robert Browning and Augustus Hare.⁷ Biographies by R. H. Super (1954) and Malcolm Elwin (1941; 1958) also drew on much new material.

Walter Savage Landor: A Biography was published in two volumes on 17 May, 1869, at a cost of 28s. Although advertised as ‘by the author of “The Life of Goldsmith,” “Life of Sir John Eliot &c”’, it was likely to generate a different kind of public interest from Forster’s historiographical accounts of the Long Parliament, or his heroic men-of-letters biographies. *Landor* involved a number of new challenges; the knowledge of classical and European history and languages that Landor’s work necessitated had acted as a deterrent to the reading public, and his

⁵ John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography*, 2 vols (London: Chapman & Hall, 1869) II, p. 471-2.

⁶ R. H. Super, *Walter Savage Landor; A Biography* (New York: New York University Press, 1954), p. 355.

⁷ Sidney Colvin, *Landor* (London: Macmillan, 1881), prefatory note.

sales had never matched his critical acclaim. His reputation, however, was associated with domestic scandal and public feuds.

Forster's editorial and reviewing practices may now seem ethically dubious, and there is no doubt that there is an overspill of these into his biographical work. These questions have been addressed by Landor's other biographers, and they are not explored here in any depth. It is in relation to the Forster bequest, in terms of the new challenges which it presented to Forster as a biographer, that *Landor* merits exploration.

Friendship

From the beginning of their acquaintance, Forster had been a manipulator, tweaker and puffer of Landor's public image. Forster's *Theatrical Examiner* column dates his first meeting with Landor to Thursday 26 May, 1836; reviewing Serjeant Talfourd's *Ion*, he noted that 'it was interesting to recognize, in two of the heartiest applauders of the beautiful and manly writing of the tragedy, sitting together in one of the boxes of the dress circle, Wordsworth and Walter Savage Landor'.⁸

Impressing the subjectivity of his account on the reader at an early stage, Forster anachronistically described his first memory of Landor's 'well-remembered figure and face' in the middle of recounting Landor's schooldays. He arrived at the scene of his first meeting with Landor late in volume two:

I have described in a former page the impression made upon me by Landor when I first met him in the summer of 1836. He and Wordsworth had come to town expressly to witness Talfourd's *Ion*; with Crabb Robinson they occupied the same box on the first night of that beautiful tragedy; and well satisfied they seemed with themselves as with each other, as, to many who watched them during the performance, they half divided the interest with the play. We all of us met afterwards at Talfourd's house; but of the talk that might have made such a night memorable I regret that I recollect only one thing, impressed upon my memory by what

⁸ *Examiner*, 29 May 1836, p. 341.

followed a little later, that when the absence of Southey was deplored in connection with the domestic griefs that occupied him at the time, there was an expression of feeling from both Wordsworth and Landor of unrestrained and unaffected earnestness. When a very few weeks had passed after this, it was not a little startling to receive a *Satire on Satirists*, very evidently by Landor, in which Wordsworth was handled sharply for alleged disrespect to Southey ... (*Landor*, II, pp. 315- 316)

The *Satire on Satirists* (London: Saunders & Otley, 1836) was a defensive response to criticism in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Landor's slight (claiming that Wordsworth had said he would not give 'five shillings for all that Southey has ever written', as well as accusing him of sitting dry-eyed while the audience of *Ion* was moved to tears) seems to have caused no great offence to Wordsworth, or upset between Wordsworth and Southey.⁹ These events, the triggers which enabled Forster to remember his first meeting with Landor, were afterwards described by him as 'hardly worth mention here' (*Landor*, II, p. 316); the embarrassing *Satire* was instead swept aside to make way for accolades of *Pericles and Aspasia*.

Landor called upon Forster at 58, Lincoln's Inn Fields, four days after the play. He there learned that the young writer was responsible for a review of *Pericles and Aspasia* that had appeared earlier that year and which described Landor as 'among the greatest writers of modern literature',¹⁰ to have been written by the *Examiner's* editor, Albany Fonblanque. Forster reviewed each work of Landor's until *Dry Sticks, Fagoted by Walter Savage Landor* appeared in 1858, the year of Forster's resignation as the *Examiner's* editor, and Forster's appointment as Secretary to the Lunacy Commission. Comparing (as he would later in the biography) Landor to Shakespeare and Marlowe,¹¹ Forster acclaimed him as one of the most original thinkers of the age, with 'a fine wit, and a profound knowledge of character, a solid understanding and a most subtle imagination, a

⁹ Landor to Mrs Southey, 2 January 1843. Quoted by R. H. Super, p. 276.

¹⁰ *Examiner*, 27 March 1836, pp. 196-197 and 3 April 1836, p. 212.

¹¹ Review of 'Dramatic Scenes', *Examiner*, 8 April 1838, pp. 211-212.

range of learning and scholarship which embraces almost every variety of subject'... 'blessed with the immortality of worth and genius'.¹²

A friendship was soon struck up. The two shared a love for the history of the Long Parliament:

Here I may say, once for all, that a continual and inexhaustible source of sympathy between us was our common admiration of those chiefs of our English Commonwealth to whom early studies had led me; and that even the glittering forms of antique gods and heroes never took more radiant shape in Landor's imagination, than the homely iron helmets and buffalo cuirasses of our own Hampdens, Iretons, Blakes and Cromwells. (*Landor*, II, p. 318)

Landor's gift to Forster of a copy of Milton's *Defensio* (1651) which had belonged to Godwin Swift¹³ also suggests a shared fondness for Swiftiana. Landor felt that Swift was 'the most imaginative or the most simple' writer for his 'power of saying more forcibly or completely whatever he meant to say!', and claimed to have read *A Tale of A Tub* 'oftener than any other prose work in our language' (*Landor*, II, p. 537).

This predilection was almost certainly enhanced by Landor's longstanding affair with the Countess de Molandé, formerly Sophia Jane Swift, whose first husband was the nephew of Jonathan Swift's great-grandson. While Landor's 'neglected poet' status can be regarded as Romantic, as we shall see, his eager anticipation of posthumous fame draws on Swift's own. In 1857, Landor was persuaded by his publisher, James Nichol, against printing the title page of *Dry Sticks* with 'Dry Sticks, Fagoted by the late W. S. Landor' (*Landor*, II, p. 552). This strange request brings to mind the epitaph of Swift's tomb, which he had written himself:

Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift, D.D., Dean of this cathedral, where burning indignation can no longer lacerate his heart. Go, traveller, and imitate if you can a man who was an undaunted champion of liberty.

¹² Review of 'The Pentameron and Pentalogia', *Examiner*, 3 December 1837, pp. 772-773; review of 'Last Fruit off and Old Tree', *Examiner*, 26 November 1853, pp. 756-757.

¹³ Forster Collection, Forster Fol. 6156, NAL.

Forster soon formed the opinion that his new friend was ‘dangerously unfit’ for any intercourse with publishers (*Landor*, II, p. 334). His publishing connections allowed Forster to act as an interposer between the author and his publishers; by 1838, Forster was chief reader for Richard Bentley, and he himself commissioned the printing of *Andrea of Hungary* and *Giovanna of Naples*, merely notifying Bentley that he had done so.¹⁴ Forster conceded that Landor’s dramas might not prove to be the most lucrative books on Bentley’s publishing list; ‘whatever the sale may be,’ he wrote, ‘and I have no doubt it will be such as may at least hold you harmless - it will at *all* events not be an unpleasant matter of reflection with you to have given to the world the masterpieces - which such as these tragedies are - of such a writer as Landor’.

So convinced was Forster of his friend’s literary value that he was prepared to fund publication himself. It was also on Forster’s suggestion and with his help that Landor collected and revised all of his writings. His reward for the supervision of the *Collected Works* was the copyright, transferred to him in 1844, of any *Imaginary Conversation*, published or unpublished, and any writing published after 1820; only at the last minute did Edward Moxon take on the cost of publishing the second, extended edition of *Imaginary Conversations* from Forster himself (Super, p. 351).

Whatever his motives may have been, Forster’s work as an unofficial literary agent produced an extensive body of work. As editor of the *Foreign Quarterly*, Forster facilitated and fostered articles by Landor on Catullus and Theocritus in 1842, under the guise of reviews (although these were both disappointing and disorganised, culminating in the conclusion that Wordsworth’s poetry was inferior to the ‘exquisite’ work of Felicia Hemans).¹⁵ As soon as this was published, Forster began the arduous task of compiling a similar edition of the Latin poems (1847); he also supervised

¹⁴ Forster to Bentley, 31 January 1839. Mss in Berg Collection, New York Public Library; quoted in Super, p. 303.

¹⁵ ‘The Writings of Catullus’, *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 29 (July 1842), pp. 329-369; ‘The Idyls of Theocritus’, *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 30 (October 1842), pp. 161-190.

the printing of the political pamphlets *The Italics* (1848), *Imaginary Conversations of King Carlo-Alberto and the Duchess Belgioioso, on the Affairs and Prospects of Italy* (1848); *Popery, British and Foreign* (1851); *Five Scenes* (1850); edited (although not to Landor's satisfaction), arranged publication and reviewed *Last Fruit off an Old Tree* (1853); *Antony and Octavius* (1855); and *Dry Sticks* (1858).

Critics of Forster's *Landor* have habitually disparaged the writer's intrusive attempts to portray his role as a benevolent and expert adviser. Landor was heartily pleased with Forster's work, as this tribute showed:

As the volumes begin they must end with you [...]
 FORSTER! Whose zeal hath seiz'd each written page
 That fell from me, and over many lands
 Hath clear'd for me a broad and solid way,
 Whence one more age, ay, haply more than one,
 May be arrived at (all through thee), accept
 No false or faint or perishable thanks.
 From better men, and greater, friendship turn'd
 Thy willing steps to me [...] (*Landor*, II, p. 449)

Following the publication of the 1846 edition of *Imaginary Conversations*, co-edited by Forster and Julius Hare, Forster wrote to Landor some 'congratulatory verses on the completion of their joint labour in editing' (I have been unable to find a copy of these). The above verses are taken from Landor's response, which was first published in the biography with a forced blush from Forster.

In later years, the combination of Forster's demanding workload and Landor's age and temper resulted in a divergence of opinion on editorial matters; Landor was displeased by errors in the proofs of *Last Fruit off an Old Tree* as well as the removal of an essay on Landor's friend Eliza Lynn Linton, and began to refer to Forster's supervision as his 'interference'.¹⁶

¹⁶ Walter Savage Landor to Kenneth Mackenzie, April and May 1853, quoted in Super, p. 414.

In *Landor*, Forster portrayed himself at once subservient scribe and benevolent adviser. The following letter from Landor to Forster refers to Forster's advice on the 'stage requirements' in *Fra Rupert*, the final play in Landor's dramatic trilogy:

I have made the changes you wished at the deaths of Caraffa and Caraccioli ... I seldom write *Straight on end* as the hunters say, or in the house, but generally while I am walking or riding, or sitting out in the air; sometimes in a very small pocket-book, sometimes on a scrap of paper. Do, in your long-suffering, paste in this where Giovanna and her sister are together, and she talks of life being made almost as welcome to her as death itself' ... On the last day of November, the whole of the manuscript was in my possession, and I had sent him further objections to portions of the first which it seemed desirable to alter. (*Landor*, II, pp. 353-355)

Forster's own biographer, James Davies, expressed concern that the verses from Landor to Forster (above) risk presenting Forster as an 'agile office boy'. This passage negates any such risk, expressing Forster's 'long-suffering' editorial authority as a creative art. In this passage, the manuscript of *Fra Rupert* takes on a quilt-like quality, whereby scraps of inspiration are pasted on to the design and stitched together by Forster, not unlike his own manuscripts.

For eight years prior to his death, Landor lived in exile as a consequence of the scandal surrounding his publication of several libellous poems. These accused a former friend, Mrs Yescombe, of exploiting her charge, Geraldine Hooper, in order to enrich herself with gifts from Landor; Landor had been enamoured of Geraldine, and had given gifts which had fallen into Mrs Yescombe's care. Landor's biographers have argued that Forster convinced him to sign a retraction of his statements, originally published in pamphlets which Landor distributed around Bath, where he and the Yescombes were resident;¹⁷ despite this, Landor stubbornly included numerous verses in *Dry Sticks, Fagoted by W. S. Landor* which maligned 'Mrs Pescombe' and salivated over

¹⁷'Summer Assizes; Western Circuit, Bristol', *The Times*, 24 August 1858, p. 9.

‘Caroline’. Letters between two of Landor’s nieces at this time imply that Forster counselled Landor to depart for Italy, where he had already spent much of his life.¹⁸

During these eight years, Landor’s annual allowance was transferred from his brothers via Forster in London to Robert Browning, who acted as Landor’s guardian in Florence. Forster’s *Landor* hints at senility, since (even Landor himself agreed) he was ‘wholly unfit to be anything but the recipient of the money’s worth, rather than the money itself’ (*Landor*, II, p. 563). This continued despite a four-year estrangement, from 1859 to 1863, brought about by Forster’s cutting lines from *Hellenics* which defamed the Yescombes, and his refusal to publish a statement by Landor defending himself against the court’s verdict (Super, pp. 476-7).

A new biographer stepped forward at this time, in the shape of Landor’s companion in Florence, Dr Arthur Walker. In a will written in 1862, Landor bequeathed to Walker his writing desk and all its contents, including his personal papers, letters and manuscripts. Walker’s alleged mismanagement of the printing of *Heroic Idyls* (1863), however, led to a cooling of their friendship; soon after this, the publisher of the *Idyls*, Thomas Newby, sent an extract from a biography of Landor which he intended to publish. Landor assumed that Walker was responsible and appears to have, once again, transferred all rights to any sources for a future biography to Forster (Super, pp. 496-501). Although Walker sought to prove this 1862 will, he failed to do so in time to prevent the 1859 will from being put into effect.

Super argues that it was in early 1849 that Forster first thought of writing Landor’s biography. In January, Landor read the *Life and Letters* of the Spanish poet and theologian Blanco

¹⁸ Sophy Landor to Ellen Landor, 1858; William Salt Library, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, D1929/3/16-18.

White;¹⁹ to Forster, he wrote ‘all that I shall ever have to communicate to you about myself will occupy no wider span than the sheet on which I am now writing’.²⁰ At this time, Landor was deeply affected by his reading of Southey’s *Life and Correspondence*.²¹ Although Landor and Southey only met three times, they formed a strong friendship; Southey sent many of his own poems in manuscript to Landor for his consideration, and in return exercised a moderating effect on his impulsive and tumultuous friend.

Glimpsing himself in his friend’s letters, he remarked sadly to Forster, ‘here I stand, brought to life by a dead man’ (*Landor*, II, p. 524). The letters between Landor and Robert Southey were of utmost importance in the biography; Landor’s specific request being that his own letters would be ‘wholly reserved for the use now about to be made of them’ (*Landor*, I, p. 210). They seem, somehow, to have found their way into Forster’s archive; there is no way of determining whether Forster purchased them or was given them by Landor’s nieces, Southey’s family, or another collector.

As James Davies notes, the petulant, explosive Landor did not easily fit Forster’s Carlylean hero of literature; he argues that Southey, in fact, appears as the hero. Certainly, Forster’s concern for the dignity of literature is represented via Landor’s close association with the ‘Lake poet’:

Southey was the representative man of letters of his day; and the subject to which Jeffrey refers, the position and the claims of writers by profession, had engaged his earliest thoughts, as it was among those that occupied his latest. One of the last to which he gave expression, for example, was his bitter dislike and contempt for that sort of support which the Literary Fund bestowed upon such men, ‘relieving them like paupers, and waiting till they become paupers before any relief is bestowed.’ One of his latest public appeals, in a like spirit, was to claim the only true help for the writer which consists in obtaining for him his own, by juster legislative arrangements as to copyright ... (*Landor*, II, pp. 408-409).

¹⁹ *Life of the Reverend Joseph Blanco, written by himself*, ed. John Hamilton Thomas, 3 vols (London: Chapman, 1845).

²⁰ Landor to Forster, 22 January 1849; Super, p. 386.

²¹ *Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1849-1850).

Unlike Goldsmith, Swift, Steele, Foote or Churchill, Landor is represented as a writer for pleasure: literature was to him neither a spiritual calling, as Wordsworth regarded it; nor the lucrative employment for which Scott valued it. Landor wrote without any other aim than to ‘please himself, or satisfy the impulse as it rose’ (*Landor*, I, p. 3). Forster’s Landor was reluctant to engage in the material problems of publishing, and yearned only for a discerning, admiring audience, which contrasted with Forster’s own interest in the economics of the publishing market:

Landor ... was never very tolerant of the publishing ‘craft,’ protested all his life (in my judgement properly) against such offices of editing as consisted simply in collecting indiscriminately the worst as well as the best productions of a famous writer, and swelling out even these by needless annotation ... (*Landor*, I, p. 391)

The energy with which Forster spoke of the economics of the ‘craft’, however, poured out in a jumble of metaphors:

Very sore was Southey’s need of his friend’s praise just now, for upon him and upon Wordsworth dark days had set in. The still continuing and increasing rage for Byron and his imitators had all but extinguished what scant popularity the others once enjoyed, and for selling power their books were at zero. Southey hoped to see the bubble burst in a year or two; but double the time had come and gone, and never did it soar so high as now, or flare out with what doubtless seemed to him such frothy but highly coloured pretences. (*Landor*, I, p. 448)

Recent scholarship suggests that it would be naïve to accept Forster’s picture of Landor as a writer at leisure, misunderstood and unfairly maligned. Geoffrey Carnall’s *ODNB* entry suggests that Landor’s quarrels with his publisher, John Taylor, over the first two volumes and the arrangements for the third, are evidence ‘that at last he was seeing himself as a professional writer who might gain an income from his pen’.

Forster’s reviews of Landor

Only two biographical sketches written by Forster’s contemporaries pay tribute to his reputation as a reviewer. Espinasse (1893) referred to Forster as a ‘tuft-hunter’ whose position as a critic gained

him influential friendship, but also wrote that ‘in his own department Forster had brought things so far that praise of a new book or a new play in the *Examiner* was a feather in the cap of an ordinary author or dramatist’ (Espinasse, p. 114). Elwin (1888) noted the generosity of his reviews and his skill at identifying the promising qualities of ‘writers afterwards celebrated’. However, both writers downplayed newspaper journalism as ephemeral, and not something likely to bring lasting fame.

The mass of newspaper comments are the judgements of men who keep abreast with a moving world, and deal with it under its passing aspects – comments too limited in their view, and at once too fragmentary, and too bulky for reading. Not that remarks are wanting worthy both in form and substance to be preserved, but they are buried in piles of obsolete matter, never to be disinterred. (Elwin, *Forster Collection Catalogue*, p. xiii)

This view seems to have been shared by newspaper obituarists, and by Charles Kent in the first *DNB*, who refer in the main to Forster’s historical and biographical work.

The more recent biographies by Davies and Renton, however, give considerable weight to Forster’s reviews. John Fenstermaker summarised Forster’s criteria of good work as insistent on three points, that a work a. be true (faithful to reality); b. provide a humane perspective on fundamental human passions and experiences, and c. have a form so exactly embodying a unified concept as to produce a single effect or emotion (Fenstermaker, p. 36). These three principles are demonstrated better in Forster’s reviews of Landor than in his biography of him.

In his review of *Fra Rupert*, Forster praised the nobility of Landor’s claims that he wrote only to please himself. He transmitted to the reader how Landor’s pride and artistic pleasure were

all the gratification he ever can, in his own person, receive; tender emotions, sweet and strong excitement; and the sure fore-knowledge that he will in turn communicate these, at no distant day, to a larger and wider circle.²²

He often expressed disappointment at the reading public’s failure to embrace Landor’s writing. The ‘thin volume’ of *Fra Rupert* (1840), for example, was ‘inexpensive indeed, and easily read

²² ‘*Fra Rupert*’, *Examiner*, 3 January 1841, p. 4.

through', and he wondered why so few had read it, and if any at all had bought it. In 1853, a paragraph of *Imaginary Conversations* seems to foreshadow Forster's withdrawal from contemporary literature later in the decade:

When men's writings were copied by hand, there were some pains taken to exclude unnecessary words. As we have become hardened to the uses of the printing press, we have begun to abuse it – even as we have abused our tongues – and are almost as diffuse in the use of printed as of spoken words. Our general feeling as to books now-a-days is a regret that types are not more expensive. Not so with these *Imaginary Conversations*.²³

This retreat, which would eventuate in what Dickens called an unhealthy and weary 'old way', was compounded only four years later. At the age of forty-five, having resigned his editorship at the *Examiner*, Forster described himself as a 'retired newspaper veteran'.²⁴ The above remark indicates a frustration that the criteria which Landor fulfilled were lacking in contemporary literature.

This same review expresses best those qualities that Forster summarised as the criteria for good work. In terms of 'faithfulness', Landor's characters converse 'naturally', with a fluidity rather than a staged drama, 'by the association of ideas through a variety of topics'. Their language creates verisimilitude, once again invoking a kind of cultural *vraisemblance* which Forster had succeeded in drawing from his own sources. Landor's rhetoric is so similar to Greek, Forster argued, that if the *Conversations* were translated they would be indistinguishable from the 'best Greek authors'. At the same time they are both 'sterling English; clear, transparent, vigorous; or, when needful, exquisitely delicate,' and 'sturdily' Roman.

The dialogue between the slaves Aesop and Rhodopè embodied to Forster the best of Landor's empathetic power. Rhodopè's character was both 'delicate' and 'tender', and her account of being sold by her father into slavery so that she would not starve was full of 'tender pathos'; her attraction to Aesop is a time of 'confusion' which troubles her 'childish innocence ... with thoughts

²³ 'Imaginary Conversations of Greeks and Romans', *Examiner*, 9 July 1853, pp. 435-436.

²⁴ Dickens to Macready, 25 December 1868, Berg ms. Dickens blamed the dullness of his Lunacy Commission friends for his withdrawal from literary society; James Davies claimed that Forster's ill health was the root cause.

of budding maidenhood'. Forster's second stipulation, that of a 'humane perspective on fundamental human passions and experiences', seems clearly indicated throughout the review.

The third stipulation, 'to have a form so exactly embodying a unified concept as to produce a single effect or emotion', Renton quotes himself from the opening paragraph of the article:

A book that *is* a book, no simulacrum, but a living mass of thoughts and feelings grouped in their own peculiar way, made visible under their own peculiar form, cannot be characterised in a sentence. The spirit of such a book, in its lights and shades and wonderful varieties, not only resembles, but it really is – the spirit of a man. (*Imaginary Conversations*, p. 435; quoted Fenstermaker, p. 36)

This image of the 'living mass' is effective. To Forster, the multitude of voices generated by this highly individualised and stylised host of characters, did not become a melting pot of sound but a complex, moving, multi-layered structure. Forster's overall impression is therefore one of completeness, of wisdom and of progression.

Landor the neglected poet

Southey's *Life and Correspondence* appears to have provoked thoughts in Landor of biographical solutions to the problems of his own posterity.

Landor once proposed to send me reminiscences of his life. He had been reading the delightful fragments of Southey's boyhood, and the fancy struck him to write down from time to time some such recollections of his own. But he went no further than his sixth year, finding the difficulties beyond that date to be insuperable; and unfortunately his letters were so carefully, for better preservation, slipped into some book at the time, that they are not now to be discovered. It was in vain I urged him to continue what he had been eager to begin. He had satisfied himself of the propriety of abstaining. He had found that though in boyhood we stand alone we are afterwards double in more and better than the Platonic sense, and that no instrument is fine enough for the amputation. I pressed him no farther. (*Landor*, I, p. 10).

Lady Blessington, the blue-stocking friend of both Forster and Landor, urged similarly: 'If you do it,' she is reported to have said, 'I'll get Colburn to give you 600 guineas for it tomorrow'. Landor, however, refused with the argument that 'a pretty figure some of your ladies would cut in it if I told

the truth' (Super, p. 386). Landor's autobiographical fragments were thus, Forster told, lost in his archive; his own library held, and still holds, if Forster is to be believed, lost biographical details.

Landor is concerned with this conflict - the Romantic struggle between the misunderstood poetic ego with the pain of neglect and rejection - and its solution in scorning the contemporary audience and living in hope of posthumous worship. In the mid-nineteenth century, volumes of *Lives and Letters* such as Richard Monckton Milnes's *Keats*, Alexander Gilchrist's *Blake* and Frederick Martin on John Clare sought to redress what they felt to be the unmerited obscurity of their literary subjects.²⁵ As Andrew Bennett explains in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*,²⁶ Romantic writers, feeling overlooked in their own generation, resented the fact that their fame relied on inept readers who were unable to distinguish the depth of their genius; scorning their own generation of critical readers, they embraced their neglect as a by-product of originality, which must always result in deferred reception. The poets negotiated these difficulties by cultivating the hope that they would be celebrated by a later audience, indeed, 'to be neglected in one's own lifetime, and *not to care*, is the necessary (though not of course sufficient) condition of genius' (Bennett, p. 4).

The Victorian biographer's task was to sift these geniuses and remould public taste accordingly, teaching their audience to 'admire, where once we despised'.²⁷ Despite the biographer's claim that the public had a duty to maintain a national heritage by becoming more

²⁵ Richard Monckton Milnes, *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats*, 2 vols (London: Moxon, 1848); Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1863); Frederick Martin, *Life of John Clare* (London: Macmillan, 1865). For an excellent discussion of these texts in terms of their subject's obscurity, see Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography and the Representation of 'Obscure Lives'*; PhD thesis, University of London, 2008.

²⁶ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁷ Review of Monckton Milnes's *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats*, *The Times*, 19 September 1848, p. 3.

discerning and appreciative readers, their biographers pleaded their subjects' rights to posterity in emotive terms, rather than in terms of literary discernment.²⁸

Landor himself took a pained pride in his limited readership. In the 'conversation' between himself and Archdeacon Hare, well quoted by Landor's few critics and biographers, he claimed that he would 'dine late; but the dining-room will be well lighted, the guests few and select' (*Works*, 1933, vol. VI, p. 37). On his choice of a frontispiece portrait for *Landor*, Forster wrote that he had selected

An engraving of this portrait of him in his thirtieth year, and another of him by Boxall on the eve of his seventy-eighth birthday, illustrate these volumes. With Boxall's work he was greatly pleased, and wished it to appear in any posthumous edition of his writings. 'I care little,' he wrote to me in December 1852, 'how many folks look at me when it is clear and evident that I do not step out to be looked at. If I have any vanity or affectation, let me at least have the merit of concealing it. No author, living or dead, ever kept himself so deeply in the shade throughout every season of life. Perhaps when I am in the grave, curiosity may be excited to know what kind of a countenance that creature had who imitated nobody, and whom nobody imitated: the man who walked thro' the crowd of poets and prose-men and never was toucht by anyone's skirts: who walked up to the ancients and talked with them familiarly, but never took a sup of wine or a crust of bread in their houses. If this should happen, and it probably will within your lifetime, then let the good people see the old man's head by Boxall.' (*Landor*, I, p. 17n)

Landor's reasons for choosing the Boxall portrait (plate 23), painted in 1852-53 and donated by Forster to the South Kensington Museum,²⁹ embody many of the complexities of his character. Affectedly nonchalant, keenly self-pitying, the passage leaks the misunderstood Landor's need for recognition by the 'good people'.

As has been seen in his review of *Fra Rupert*, Forster's reviews had always been concerned with raising Landor's profile, referring frequently to his neglected status and longed-for posthumous recognition, although not exclusively. An anonymous reviewer of *Gebir, Count Julian*

²⁸ Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography and the Representation of 'Obscure Lives'*; PhD thesis, University of London, 2008, p. 231.

²⁹ F. 3, Victoria and Albert Museum.

and other Poems (1831) wrote that ‘in the small poems at the end, which Mr Landor has saved from probably a larger mass of similar ones, and which he dreaded should be disinterred after his death, we discover many beauties which we could not have suspected lay within the grasp of the author of “Gebir”’.³⁰ Reviewing the *Examination and Citation of Shakespere* (1834), Forster ardently lamented (with more feeling than skill) that a book which deserved to ‘live’ should meet with such unfavourable or indifferent responses.³¹ This theme returned in 1838:

The (comparative) neglect with which the works of Mr Landor have been treated by his contemporaries, will be a matter of remark hereafter, when the profound thoughts he has left to posterity, and the noble style they are embodied in, shall have borne richest fruit and blossom. For the ultimate destiny of such a writer is placed beyond chance or change – he has secured the advocacy of Time, the rectifier of all things, who matures as well as he destroys, who strips oblivion from some to place it on others, and darkens finally and forever only upon the undeserving.³²

The antagonism towards his audience’s failure to understand Landor’s writing developed throughout Forster’s reviews, coming to fruition in the biography. Each notice similarly cried out against the ‘present neglect and future fame’ of the volumes.³³ Now Forster’s own editorial work, his compositional suggestions, his relationships with publishers were also in question; his arguments for the publication of Landor’s work, such as his justifications to Bentley for printing *Andrea of Hungary* and *Giovanna of Naples* (above), were similarly based on the premise of Romantic neglect and the promise of future glory.

It was not until 1853, however, that these references became explicitly biographical. The self-consciously humble *Last Fruit off an Old Tree* inherently invited questions of mortality and posterity. Forster’s review deals little with unjust neglect, but reassures:

There is but one consideration that suggests unfitness in the grave and touching title to this volume. Fruits from the tree are subject to decay, but of the produce here garnered the chief

³⁰ Review of ‘Gebir, Count Julian and other Poems’, *Examiner*, 15 May 1831, pp. 308-309.

³¹ Review of ‘Citation and Examination of Shakespere’, *Examiner*, 30 November 1834, pp. 756-8.

³² Review of ‘Dramatic Scenes’, *Examiner*, 8 April 1838, pp. 211.

³³ Review of ‘Fra Rupert’, *Examiner*, 3 January 1841, pp. 4-5.

part is imperishable. The book contains all the thoughts and feelings of a noble spirit, uttered in words that stir us by their earnestness, and charm us by their tenderness. Now rugged with the strength of the patriot, now instinct with the refinement of the poet, they display everywhere a man so blessed with the immortality of worth and genius, that we lose the sense of mournfulness that would connect them with a farewell... The parting will never be complete. Landor is one of those friends that can not be lost.³⁴

Landor's illustriousness gently replaces the neglect which he has suffered, and is invoked to ease the passage into retirement after a long and prolific career. The volume, as its title suggests, was autobiographical and intensely personal, including verses on Southey, on his youth and on death, which he felt to be near. The superficial humility of the titles, *Last Fruit off an Old Tree* and *Dry Sticks, Fagoted by Walter Savage Landor*, begs Forster's response that, just as he had argued in 1838, the true fruit had yet to come:

When the life of its author shall hereafter be written, perhaps in distant times, by one among the thousands who will hold his name in honour, how beautiful a picture will this volume enable him to present of the tranquillity with which the rest of death may be waited for, after a long life of healthy and hearty labour.³⁵

The convergence of views on Landor's unjust neglect and imminent posterity made Forster the natural choice of biographer. Landor's refusal to complete any more than six pages of his autobiography (above) and the titles of his final volumes of verse suggested a conflict between his wish not to appear solicitous of good public opinion and his craving for recognition as a poet. By the end of Landor's life, Forster argued, it was Landor's desire for just representation which led to his choice of biographer:

14 DECEMBER 1863.

'Well do I know the friendship you had for me, and have grieved over its interruption. I would not now write but for the promise you once held out to me that you might consent to be my biographer. Last week I received a most insolent letter from a Mr. - , containing a note from a person connected with him informing me that he was writing my life. He gave me a specimen, full of abuse and falsehood. This I communicated to my excellent friend Mr. Twisleton. If you still retain a thought of becoming my biographer, I hope you will protect me from this injustice. How often have I known you vindicate from unmerited aspersions

³⁴ Review of 'Last Fruit off an Old Tree', *Examiner*, 26 November 1853, pp. 756-757.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 756.

honest literary men! Unhappily no friend has been found hitherto who takes any such interest in WALTER LANDOR.’ (*Landor*, II, pp. 587-588)

It seems likely that the would-be biographer was Arthur Walker, Forster’s designated replacement.

Walker had by this time, however, shows sufficient ineptitude for the task for the above to be written, and for Forster to be reinstated.

The challenges of *Landor*

As a biography, *Landor* posed new physical and ethical challenges. The writing process began, Forster wrote in a note to the corrigenda, in the winter of 1865, and the ‘entire volume’ (presumably the first volume) was printed off in the summer of 1867. A letter from Forster to Landor’s niece shows that she had gathered what family papers were available, and forwarded them to him within five months of her uncle’s death. Forster suggested that more letters would be available ‘here and there’, and encouraged her to keep searching, assuring her that the letters would be carefully preserved and ultimately returned. He was already, he wrote, feeling overwhelmed by the task. The letter mentions that he had received Landor’s ‘notes’, and that they were ‘wise’ and ‘admirable’, but ‘only, alas! Too brief’. It is unclear what these notes were - perhaps they were the autobiographical fragment written by Landor - but ever since he had received them, Forster said that he had been ‘at my wits’ End “what to do and how to do it”. Unlike his correspondence with Dickens, his letters to and from Landor ‘as far as yet examined, [fall] lamentably short of the “usable”’.³⁶

The completion of the book dragged until 1869. Although Forster, at fifty-three, was barely middle-aged, he felt the onset of the gout, bronchitis and rheumatism from which he suffered throughout his life to be particularly cruel, at the same time as his workload as Lunacy Commissioner increased. In his cramped letters to the Landor family during these years, Forster

³⁶ Forster to Kitty Landor, 20 February 1865; Landor correspondence, Box 1 Folder 8, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

often complained of his ill health, asking Eliza to write on his behalf; ‘I have never been well,’ he wrote to Robert Landor in the Autumn of 1868, ‘and have had to struggle thro’ my official work as I could.’³⁷ He was greatly grieved by the losses of Jane Carlyle in 1866 and of his sister Elizabeth in 1868, but was prevented from escaping through historical scholarship by the new obligation of sifting what *The Times* imagined to be the ‘trunks of letters and miscellaneous materials’³⁸ and the editing of Landor’s *Complete Works* (1876).

The memory of Landor’s rather tempestuous life was still fresh in the public mind, and in the minds of his friends and family. Forster was well acquainted with the quarrelsome and undignified behaviour brought about by Landor’s old age, and the scandalous marital breakdown and extramarital affairs, which challenged his biographical ethic. As I have shown in the previous chapter on *Swift*, Forster bound himself by Scott’s refusal (common to Victorian biographers) to publish certain documents in his possession which might affect the reputations of persons living at the time of writing. This had serious implications for what he was ethically bound to publish or suppress from the ‘trunks of letters’ which were placed into his care. For this reason (as well as because of Forster’s famed carelessness in transcription), and because so much material was repressed, biographers such as Super and Elwin have severely questioned the reliability of *Landor*, while respecting the sentiments and tirelessness with which it was written.

In neither of the wills made by Landor in Florence, was Forster bequeathed ownership of Landor’s papers. Instead, all of Landor’s ‘books, pictures, plate and papers’ were left to his nieces, Sophie and Kitty.³⁹ Not only, therefore, did the biographer face the challenge of one who played in the Romantic tradition with his own projected posterity, but also the shadow thrown over the work

³⁷ John Forster to Robert Eyres Landor, 1 October 1868; *Ibid.*

³⁸ Review of *Walter Savage Landor*, *The Times*, 13 August 1869, p. 4.

³⁹ October 1859. Walter Savage Landor, L #8539. James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

by the Landor family; by Walter's brother, Robert Landor, whose presence is felt in the biography, and by Kitty and Sophie, whose presence is felt in the archive.

Both of Landor's surviving brothers were alive in the autumn of 1865, when *Landor* was begun; by Easter of 1869, as Forster approached completion, both had died away.

It is little more than three weeks, since I stood at the grave which closed over Robert, the last of this family of remarkable men. Without him the book could not have been written; he took a natural interest in what he had helped so much; and but for him I should not have persisted with it against many difficulties. (*Landor*, II, p. 500)

Robert, for example, permitted the publication of a letter encouraging Landor to give up a scheme in 1812 to leave his estate and head for France, despite having 'forgotten it and the occasion of writing it' (*Landor*, I, p. 3). This eulogy reflects the tone of Forster's letters to Robert Landor, as the two corresponded about the biography over the years 1867-9. Kitty Landor acted as an intermediary in the first instance between Forster and Robert Landor; the letters do not make clear why this was necessary, and why a direct correspondence did not take place until 1867.⁴⁰ The consultative use of the family letters is evidenced in Forster's continual expressions, firstly to Kitty and then to Robert, that if they objected to anything written, it would be taken out. In a dispute over 'a particular application of the word "nephew"', to which Kitty had shown some unease, Forster replied that he thought she might be over-rating 'the importance and even the meaning of it'. However, he offered his assurance that 'nothing will ultimately appear to which you continue to feel any objection'. The manuscript was to be forwarded to Uncle Robert, who, 'if he objects to the passage, he will tell me, and all difficulty will be ended – But even if he should not object, and you retain the same feeling about it, I promise you that it shall not appear'.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Forster mentions a letter written from Herefordshire in September 1867; Forster to Robert Landor, 1 October 1868 (Princeton University Library).

⁴¹ Forster to Kitty Landor, 27 October 1866, *ibid.*

As for Kitty and Sophie, their only documented contribution to the Forster archive is a copy of Landor's *Simonidea*, in which is inscribed 'From the Old Library at Tachbrooke. Given by the Misses Landor to the South Kensington Museum, to be added to the Works of their uncle, W. S. Landor'.⁴² It seems that the family papers were returned, as promised; it is unclear how Forster acquired his manuscript material, during his work as biographer and editor of the 1876 *Complete Works*.

Conclusion

In the final decade of his life, Forster was obliged to lay aside his biography of *Swift* in order to negotiate the new challenges of biography as a literary executor. Although, as in the case of *Goldsmith*, Landor's 'presence' in the archive is relatively limited, where it can be seen, it reflects the attempt to counterbalance scandal with the dignified sentimentality of Landor's strong friendship with Southey. It is clear that Landor was concerned during his lifetime for his posthumous fame, and Forster's recognition of Landor's talent and skill at controlling his friend's public image allowed Landor to trust Forster in the role of biographer, despite lapses in the friendship.

The archive has been supplemented in this chapter with correspondence between the Forsters and Landor's family, now in Princeton University Library. This correspondence illustrates the respectful process of work beneath what Carlyle called the 'Damocles' Sword of *respectability*'.⁴³ The tensions brought about by this process - the conflict between the public image and the private, the battle for posterity - both of biographer and subject, were challenges faced for the final time in Forster's landmark biography, *The Life of Charles Dickens*.

⁴² (London: Robinson, 1806). Forster Collection, 12mo. 5085, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁴³ 'Sir Walter Scott', in Thomas Carlyle, *Essays on Burns and Scott*, ed. Henry Morley (London: Cassell, 1908, p. 109.

Plate 23. *Walter Savage Landor*, William Boxall (1852-53)

Chapter Six: *The Life of Charles Dickens*

Introduction

By the time of Charles Dickens's death, his image was as recognisable as his novels were popular.

The reading tours and Dickens's long walks had made him familiar in the streets of London:

It has been remarked that Thackeray in Houndsditch, Thackeray in Bethnal-green or at Camden Town would have appeared anomalous; as well could we picture Carlyle at Cremorne, or Tennyson at Garraway's; but Charles Dickens, when in town, was ubiquitous. He was to be met, by those who knew him everywhere - and who did not know him? Who had not heard him, and who had not seen his photographs in the shop windows? The omnibus conductors knew him, the street boys knew him; and, perhaps, the location where his recognition would have been least frequent - for all that he was a member of the Athenaeum Club - was Pall Mall.¹

In his book *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (2002), Gerard Curtis explored the connections between Dickens's central role in publishing as an industry, his predominant role as the model of the 'author', and his ability to reach a wider audience by effectively uniting the textual with the visual. Dickens and his publishers had been keen to propagate his image, beginning with the inclusion of a full-length portrait by Maclise as a frontispiece to the last instalment of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838). In doing so, Dickens laid down the mask of 'Boz' and abandoned the conceit that *Nickleby* had written the story as a memoir. From as early as 1851, biographers had sought to give added interest to these famous images with glimpses of the writer's life, in series with titles such as 'Our Great Contemporaries'.²

Unsurprisingly, there are many parallels between Forster's *Landor* (1869) and *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1871-4). Dickens had chosen his friend and editor as his future biographer many years before his death, apparently at around the same time he failed in writing his own

¹'The Late Charles Dickens', *Western Mail*, 13 June 1870, p. 3.

²Amedee Pichot, 'Charles Dickens: Notice biographique et litteraire', *Aux Bureaux de La Revue Britannique* (Paris: 1851), pp. v-xx; J. H. Friswell, 'Lives of the Illustrious: Charles Dickens', *The Biographical Magazine*, 2 (1852), pp. 276-297; quoted from William Miller, *The Dickens Student and Collector* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1946).

autobiography, as shall be seen later in a brief examination of the autobiographical fragment used in chapter two of the first volume. The biographies were also written under the same ethical constraints of duty to surviving family members. Forster's failure to satisfy the Dickens family was implicit in their endorsement of other biographies, and the publication of their own memories of their father. Both were completed at a time of illness and heavy workloads, and were unwelcome distractions from Forster's compulsion to return to historiography. However, *Landor* received reviews and sales which were lukewarm at best. The much anticipated *Life of Dickens* flew from the booksellers' shops but sat uncomfortably with many as a biography, and allowed Forster's critics many jibes at his expense. It has, however, become the basis of a number of 'mini-archives' through bibliophilic grangerisation; a testimony to its cultural significance.

'Interim' biographies

A transatlantic proliferation of unofficial biographies appeared in the two years between Dickens's death and the publication of the first volume of John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*, in December 1871. Editors were 'positively overwhelmed with every form of literary tribute', as 'Charles Dickens: In Memoriam' articles flooded in to British and American journals.³ Numerous 'memorial' volumes appeared quickly in Britain and the United States, with formats varying from 'Life and Writings' essays to commemorative Christmas books.⁴

Fans and would-be biographers of Dickens cringed at what they felt to be the tastelessness of the media response. In the Welsh *Western Mail*, a London correspondent addressed his readers from beside Dickens's grave on the day following the author's burial:

³ 'The Magazines', *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 3 July 1870, p. 6.

⁴ R. A. Hammond, *The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens: A Memorial Volume, containing personal Recollections, Amusing Anecdotes, Letters and Uncollected Papers by 'Boz', never before published* (Toronto: Maclear, 1871); Phebe Hannaford, *The Life and Writings of Charles Dickens, A Woman's Memorial Volume* (Augusta: Allen, 1871); Alexander Butler Hume, *These To His Memory; A Christmas Memorial of the Greatest of Christmas Writers, Charles Dickens* (London: Pitman & Allen, 1870).

One grieves to see market being made, immediately after death, of a beloved reputation. The thought occurs to me with a pang of regret when I observe, upon the morrow of Charles Dickens's burial in Westminster Abbey, the advertising of all sorts of little catch-penny publications purporting to give memorials of him – anecdotal records just simply scamped up in a hurry, to catch the curiosity of the general multitude, the latter naturally enough snatching at any information about their lost and tenderly-lamented favourite. The biography of Charles Dickens must be written somewhat deliberately, and ought to be commenced only when the first anguish of our regrets shall, by the mere lapse of assuaging time, have become in some degree mitigated.⁵

The writer uses the impersonal pronoun at the beginning of the passage in an attempt to nationalise his emotion. The volume and immediacy of the media's response are seen as vulture-like; in their vulnerability the mourners clutch at anything which might help them to build a 'true' memory. 'Snatching' might typically imply greed, or an invasive curiosity; but 'naturally' neutralises the adverse judgement on the public – if not on the scampers-up – of catch-penny memorials. The articles in question, being hastily compiled and anecdotal, are both deplorably unreliable and exploitative.

What the writer means by 'deliberately' is unclear, but he seems to imply slowly, methodically, sensitively, and with detachment. To him, the freshness of grief seems to bring with it the inability to discern truth from fiction or exaggeration. While the public indiscriminately 'snatch' at morsels of information, their sorrow makes it more difficult to digest that which contradicts the evolving 'heroic' myth of Dickens, and more likely to embrace that which propagates it. Only with tact could one continue to portray Dickens as a hero in the private sphere, knowing his separation from his wife, or in the public sphere, knowing his arguments with publishers; only with deliberation could one take into consideration his vast output of written material, both public and private.

⁵ 'London', *Western Mail*, 18 June 1870, p. 2.

George Augustus Sala's essay on Dickens, published first in the *Telegraph* and then by Routledge in July 1870, suggested Forster and Wilkie Collins as suitable candidates for such a biography:

His Life, in an extended, substantial and authorized form, will, ere long, I doubt it not, be written; and I hope that the writer of such a Life may be either his constant and noble-minded friend John Forster, or his near connection and co-labourer in letters, Wilkie Collins. Both are admirable writers, both experienced men of the world; and both had opportunities of studying and of judging the personal character of Charles Dickens - opportunities possessed by none other of his contemporaries.⁶

Like the *Western Mail* columnist, Sala (one of Dickens's 'young men'; a regular contributor to *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*) complained of the parasites who 'at no distant date, may retail his minutest words', and who violated the author's memory by making public what was always intended to be private.

As a method of control over his public image, Dickens burned all of his private letters in the infamous bonfire of 1860. Traditional accounts tell of the Dickens children carrying armfuls of letters for the fire out of Gad's Hill House; of Katie Dickens's tears and her pleas to keep some of the letters; and of Charles Dickens Jr. and Henry Dickens 'roasting onions in the ashes of the great'.⁷ This tale originated in Gladys Storey's *Dickens and Daughter* (1939), a memoir of Dickens's eldest daughter, Kate Perugini, written by one of her friends. These three children wrote biographical sketches of their father, and the influence of these on Dickensian biography and in the Forster archive will become apparent later. Storey's account of the bonfire is disputed by Paul Lewis, co-editor of Wilkie Collins's letters, who argues that Katie was on her honeymoon with her first husband, Charles Collins, at that time, and that there is no evidence of Henry's involvement. In his correspondence, Dickens referred to the bonfire several times, as well as his subsequent

⁶ *Speeches, Letters and Sayings of Charles Dickens; To Which is Added a Sketch of the Author by George Augustus Sala and Dean Stanley's Sermon* (New York: Harper Bros, 1870), pp. 133-134.

⁷ Gladys Storey, *Dickens and Daughter* (London: Muller, 1939), p. 107.

practice of destroying personal letters, abhorring the ‘Daily ... improper uses made of confidential letters, in the addressing of them to a public audience that has no business with them’.⁸

Both Sala’s essay and the first Dickens biography in book form, *Charles Dickens: The Story of His Life* written by H. T. Taverner (1870), identified the strata of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ biography. Biographies had appeared breathtaking quickly; by the end of 1870, at least two fairly substantial Lives had been published in the United States, and one in London. In America, Robert Shelton Mackenzie published his *Life of Charles Dickens; With Personal Recollections and Anecdotes; Letters by ‘Boz’, never before published, and uncollected papers in prose and verse* (Philadelphia, Peterson & Bros, 1870) and Frederick Beecher Perkins, *Charles Dickens: A Sketch of his Life and Works* (New York: Putnam & Sons, 1870).

These were largely based on journalism, scraps from Forster’s *Life of Walter Savage Landor*, and anecdotes from the reading tours and from literary ‘reminiscences’ such as George Hodder’s *Memories of My Time including Personal Reminiscences of Eminent Men*.⁹ One source appears to have been a complaining Cruikshank; it was in Mackenzie’s biography that the artist apparently argued that he had inspired many of the characters of *Oliver Twist*, a claim rebuffed by Forster in the preface to the twelfth edition of the *Life*.

The publisher of Taverner’s biography was John Camden Hotten (1832-1873), described by Simon Eliot as ‘a bookseller, publisher, journalist, author, controversialist and general textual entrepreneur’ (*ODNB*). Hotten’s preface claimed that he had written the work himself, although H. T. Taverner (credited in the preface as having ‘heartily assisted’ Hotten) told Forster that *he* had

⁸ Dickens to Macready, 1 March 1865, *Letters*, XI, pp. 21-22. Dickens’s letter to William Henry Wills, 4 September 1860, dates the bonfire to 3rd September, 1860 (*Letters*, IX, p. 304).

⁹ (London: Tinsley, 1870); Hodder was an amenuensis of Thackeray’s, for whom Dickens had secured a place as secretary of Dr Southwood Smith’s Sanatorium in Devonshire Terrace.

written the main body of the work.¹⁰ Hotten's journalistic training had already allowed him to produce biographies of Macaulay and Thackeray within two months of their deaths, under the pseudonym Theodore Taylor. His preface to *Dickens* was dated 29 June 1870, only weeks after Dickens's death.

Hotten claimed that the biography responded to a public need:

The following brief Memoir of the late Mr. Charles Dickens may, perhaps, be acceptable as filling an intermediate place between the newspaper or review article and the more elaborate biography which may be expected in due course. The writer had some peculiar means of acquiring information for the purpose of his sketch; and to this he has added such particulars as have already been made public in English and foreign publications and other scattered sources.

The common complaints against memoirs of this necessarily hasty and incomplete character will not be repeated by those who are accustomed to test questions in morals by the principles which underlie them. That there is nothing necessarily indelicate or improper in the desire of the public to obtain some personal knowledge of the great and good who have just passed away, is assumed by every daily, weekly, and quarterly journal, which, on occasions of this kind, furnish their readers with such details as they are able to obtain, and which in no case confine themselves strictly to the public career of the deceased.

Although some private facts in the life of Mr. Dickens will be found to be touched upon in these pages, the writer is not conscious of having written a line which would give pain to others. (Hotten, 'Preliminary')

The preface defends Hotten and Taverner's work against the complaints of journalists such as the *Western Mail* correspondent and Sala. Both had complained at the unreliability and incompleteness of newspaper sketches, caused by the haste with which they were compiled, and the moral questions of the appropriateness of such inquiries so soon after the subject's death and the pain this might cause to his grieving family and friends. Sala's satirically tinged essay had anticipated such 'unofficial' biographies:

Biographers there will be also in plenty who, at no distant date, may retail his minutest words and deeds; who will make public his private correspondence with his friends, and who will do

¹⁰ MS UCLA; cited *Letters*, XII, p. 478.

justice to the integrity of his character, to the cordiality of his manner, to the charms of his conversation, to the generosity of his hospitality, to the inflexible integrity which he ever showed in his dealings with his fellow-men, to his private charities - which were innumerable, untiring, and unostentatious - to his public spirit and lofty sense of right, to his unflagging industry, his wonderful sense of will and tenacity of purpose, his undeviating punctuality, his forbearance under provocation ... (Sala, pp. 133-134)

There is no evidence to suggest that Sala knew of Dickens's habit of destroying personal letters; we do not know how much of Dickens's views on the 'improper uses made of confidential letters' Sala was privy to. Sala thus identifies the phases of Dickensian biography as first newspapers, then intermediate biographical books and finally elaborate (authorised) biography.

Hotten's preface, however, reacted against the assumption that a memoir published as a book must be judged on other criteria than a journalistic one; the press sought to 'furnish' readers with equally hastily researched notices, articles and supplements. Hotten was merely responding to this need, he argued, by publishing the 'peculiar' information which he had obtained - a collection of stories from journalists and editors such as Blanchard Jerrold, Arthur Locker and James Grant, supplemented, as he wrote in the preface, by much material already in the public domain.

Life of Dickens: reception

Chapman and Hall published the first volume of Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*, on 4 December 1871. Within a day, the entire first edition had been subscribed to by the press, and the second was in print. The press remarked on the public's glut of Dickensian biography with amazed glee; 'It will be found, probably, that the most popular novel of the most popular novelist within the recollection of the oldest of us has not had a more extraordinary vogue than the author's biography', wrote one journalist.¹¹ By the time the second volume was published in 1872, the first had reached its twelfth edition; *The Times* remembered (with equal exaggeration) in 1879 that 'few works from

¹¹ *Freemen's Journey and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 8 December 1871.

the great novelist's own pen excited intenser interest than the volume in which the story of his early years and struggles was revealed to the public'.¹²

The Life of Dickens was the only biography of Forster's to be published in this triform way, and thus invites comparison with the three-volume novel. Frederick Nesta recently traced the economic history of the three-volume novel for *Publishing History*, from Scott's *Kenilworth* (1816) to the format's demise in 1894.¹³ On first publication, the triple-decker novel was sold to the public at £1 11s. 6d. The main market for this expensive format was the circulating libraries; based on figures from Smith, Elder & Bentley, Mudie's took the largest number of copies at 15s. per set, with a customary 13 sets sold at the price of 12 for an additional discount, making the actual price 14s. 6d.¹⁴ The other circulating libraries would take a quantity between them which just about matched Mudie's, and any left would be sold to the trade. Within a year of publication a single-volume reprint, selling at 6s., would appear and any unsold copies of the three-volume edition would be remaindered by the publisher. As demand for the cheap reprint grew, the time between the three-volume editions and the 6s. copies grew gradually shorter, until the circulating libraries cancelled their orders altogether; it was this factor, Nesta argued, which was the final nail in the triple-decker's coffin.

Unlike either the triple-decker novel, or Forster's earlier *Goldsmith, The Life of Charles Dickens* did not quickly become available in a cheaper version. A two-volume edition was published in 1876, priced at 28s., which was designed to accompany the 'Illustrated Library Edition of Dickens's Works'. A single volume edition seems not to have appeared until 1878; and seems hardly to have been advertised; I have found reference to it only in advertisements by the Dublin

¹² 'Letters of Charles Dickens', *The Times*, 27 December 1879, p. 9.

¹³ Frederick Nesta, 'The Myth of the "Triple-Headed Monster": The economics of the three-volume novel', *Publishing History*, 61 (2007) pp. 47-69.

¹⁴ See Simon Eliot, 'The Three-Decker Novel and its First Cheap Reprint', *The Library*, S6 - 7 (1985), pp. 38-53.

publishing firm M. H. Gill, priced at 10s. 6d.¹⁵ Although the British Library Catalogue lists a single-volume library edition published by Chapman and Hall in 1878, I have been unable to establish whether this is the copy advertised by Gill, or a pirated edition.

The first volume of the *Life* was sold for 12s., the second for 14s. and the third for 16s.; at £2 2s., the work was over a pound dearer than the average three-volume novel. Forster's biography was indeed advertised on Mudie's lists, but publisher's advertisements and notices in the later editions of the volumes show that even in its three-volume format, it enjoyed print-runs which took the first volume to at least fifteen thousand copies, and the second and third to at least twelve thousand. Although, as mentioned previously in my chapter on *Swift*, Chapman and Hall's records have not survived, the profit margin on the *Life of Dickens* must have been immense.

Each volume of the *Life* was illustrated with several plates (which doubtless contributed to its high cost). On the front fly-leaf was a copy of Dickens's ornate signature; as a frontispiece, a portrait of Dickens (in volume i, aged 27 by Maclise; in vol. ii, at 47 by Frith; in vol. iii, at 56, engraved by Jeens from the last photograph taken in America of Dickens); inserted were copies of sketches by Maclise; playbills; invitations; photographs or watercolours of the houses in which Dickens had lived at various times.

In the tradition of his previous biographies, many of the illustrations were facsimiles of handwriting, in the form of autograph letters. The third volume closed with a copy of the last page of *Edwin Drood*, written on the 8th of June, 1870:

...written in the Châlet in the afternoon of his last day of consciousness; and I have thought there might be some interest in a fac-simile of the greater part of this final page of manuscript that ever came from his hand, at which he worked unusually late in order to finish the chapter. It has very much the character, in its excessive care of correction and interlineations, of all his

¹⁵ *The Freeman's Journal*, 1 July 1878, p. 4.

later manuscripts; and in order that comparison may be made with his earlier and easier method, I place beside it a portion of a page of the original of *Oliver Twist*. His greater pains and elaboration of writing, it may be mentioned, become first very obvious in the later parts of *Martin Chuzzlewit*... (*Life of Dickens*, p. 809)

The manuscript pages were gently used to evoke sadness and nostalgia, as Dickens's death was represented by the end of his writing, and a kind of retrospective undertaken by chronicling the development of Dickens's writing style and method as recorded in the manuscripts. In the words 'earlier and easier method', we can read 'earlier and easier life'.

This is compounded on the following page, where Forster reproduced some late scribbled ideas for *Edwin Drood*:

Within the leaves of one of Dickens's other manuscripts were found the detached slips of his writing, on paper only half the size of that used for the tale, so cramped, interlined, and blotted as to be nearly illegible, which on close inspection proved to be a scene in which Sapsea the auctioneer is introduced as the principal figure, among a group of characters new to the story ... The scene now discovered might in this view have been designed to strengthen and carry forward that element in the tale; and otherwise it very sufficiently expresses itself. It would supply an answer, if such were needed, to those who have asserted that the hopeless decadence of Dickens as a writer had set in before his death. Among the lines last written by him, these are the very last we can ever hope to receive; and they seem to me a delightful specimen of the power possessed by him in his prime, and the rarest which any novelist can have, of revealing a character by a touch. (*Life of Dickens*, p. 810)

That Forster's authority can be found among the leaves of Dickens's manuscripts, lies at the heart of the ethos behind both the biography and the archive. His biographical aim was a defence of his friend as a writer; his authority, that he had in his possession the most significant and telling sources upon which to base such a reading. Dickens's infirmity is represented in the description, rather than in the form of a facsimile, but it is again embodied in the 'cramped', 'interlined' and 'nearly illegible' manuscript. Addressing the unnamed critics 'who have asserted that the hopeless decadence of Dickens as a writer had set in before his death', and encompassing the reader as 'we', are both rhetorical devices used by Forster throughout his biographies passive-aggressively to convey his authority. In this example, Forster's possession of his source material gives the impression that in terms of professional biography, he must have the final word.

Dickens's autobiographical fragment

A great deal of review column space was apportioned to the earliest readers' shock at the first two chapters. In the opening pages, Forster revealed how Dickens had based the characters of Mr and Mrs Micawber on his parents, drawing on his own memories of his father's time in the Marshalsea debtor's prison to create David Copperfield's childhood. In the second chapter, Forster introduced an autobiographical fragment written by Dickens between 1846 and 1848. Chapter Two told the story of how Forster came to learn about the hardship which his friend had suffered at Warren's blacking factory, on Hungerford Stairs. The scrimping, wasted existence which David Copperfield was forced into at the age of ten, Forster claimed to be Boz's childhood, apparently on Dickens's own authority.

Forster himself would not have learned of this, he wrote, apart from a chance question put to Dickens in the Spring of 1847:

I asked if he remembered ever having seen in his boyhood our friend the elder Mr. Dilke, his father's acquaintance and contemporary, who had been a clerk in the same office in Somerset House to which John Dickens belonged. Yes, he said, he recollected seeing him at a house in Gerrard-street, where his uncle Barrow lodged during an illness, and Mr. Dilke had visited him. Never at any other time. Upon which I told him that some-one else had been intended in the mention made to me, for that the reference implied not merely his having been met accidentally, but his having had some juvenile employment in a warehouse near the Strand; at which place Mr. Dilke, being with the elder Mr. Dickens one day, had noticed him, and received, in return for the gift of a half-crown, a very low bow. He was silent for several minutes; I felt that I had unintentionally touched a painful place in his memory; and to Mr. Dilke I never spoke of the subject again. It was not however then, but some weeks later, that Dickens made further allusion to my thus having struck unconsciously upon a time of which he could never lose the remembrance while he remembered anything, and the recollection of which, at intervals, haunted him and made him miserable even to that hour.

Very shortly afterwards, I learnt in all their detail the incidents that had been so painful to him, and what was then said to me or written respecting them revealed the story of his boyhood. (*Life of Dickens*, p. 23)

Dilke was Charles Wentworth Dilke (1789-1864); it is unclear whether Forster is referring to Dilke himself as having made the 'mention', as the passage implies it might have been.

Forster was not given or did not keep the autobiographical fragment, nor did he keep the manuscript of the *Life of Dickens*. It has been assumed until recently that Dickens drew the details of David's mournful employment at Murdstone and Grinby, and his depictions of the Micawbers (his own parents, John and Elizabeth Dickens) directly from this fragment, believed to have been locked in a drawer, before being shown at an unknown date to Forster, after which it was destroyed.¹⁶

Nina Burgis gives an excellent description of the fragment's history in her introduction to *David Copperfield*.¹⁷ Dickens may have hinted to Forster as early as 1845 of the 'dark days' of his childhood. The fragment is likely to date from 1845-46, since Dickens wrote to Forster on 4 November 1846 that *Dombey's* Mrs Pipchin was drawn from the life, and asked 'Shall I leave you my life in MS. when I die? There are some things in it that would touch you very much, and that might go on the same shelf with the first volume of Holcroft's'.¹⁸ Holcroft's *Memoir*¹⁹ also contained a description of the writer's difficult upbringing; the child of a failed shoemaker, he was briefly apprenticed as a stocking weaver and a groom, before joining his father in London to write and cobble (*ODNB*).²⁰

Burgis also suggests that while the child's point of view in the early numbers of *Dombey* does imply that Dickens was thinking of or working on the fragment during his residence in Switzerland, it is more likely that this was completed during his leisure months in Italy, after *The Battle of Life* had been completed. Burgis also notes that Forster's dating of the fragment was inconsistent. John Dickens is said to have petitioned for the provision of a drink for the prisoners to 'drink his

¹⁶ Stanley Tick, 'Autobiographical Impulses in the *Haunted Man*', *Dickens Quarterly*, June 2001, pp. 62-69.

¹⁷ *David Copperfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹⁸ *Letters*, IV, p. 653.

¹⁹ *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*, ed. William Hazlitt, 3 vols (London: 1816).

²⁰ P. C. Kitchen, 'Dickens, *David Copperfield*, and Thomas Holcroft', *Schelling Anniversary Papers* (New York: Century Co., 1923), pp.181-8.

majesty's health on his forthcoming birthday' (*Life of Dickens*, p. 32), and Forster claims that this found a place in *David Copperfield* 'three or four years after it was written'. Later, however, he wrote that Dickens's description of his first visit to the Marshalsea prison was written two or three years before Dickens had conceived of *Copperfield*, and David's childhood reading 'had been written down as fact some years before it found its way into *David Copperfield*' (Burgis, p. xix).

It was over the years 1847-8, following the Dilke incident, that many letters and confidences relating to Dickens's childhood were exchanged, as it became 'a subject on which thoughts were frequently interchanged between us' (*Life of Dickens*, p. 10). The *Life* states that Forster saw the autobiographical fragment, written recently and in continuous form, on 20 January 1849 (*Life of Dickens*, 11-12n.). As Burgis notes, the manuscript of chapter XI is fluent and comparatively free from amendments, suggesting that it was copied from the fragment itself. The fragment, however, was destroyed long before Forster came to writing the *Life*, and he never saw anything about Dickens's relationship with Maria Beadnell. Writing to Maria in 1855, Dickens remembered that 'A few years ago (just before *Copperfield*) I began to write my life, intending the Manuscript to be found among my papers when its subject should be concluded. But as I began to approach within sight of that part of it, I lost courage and burned the rest'.²¹ The editors of the *Letters* suggest that since Forster had kept or had access to the fragment in manuscript but was told nothing about the affair with Maria Beadnell, Dickens probably burnt everything later than 1826. Not having the fragment at the time he was writing the *Life*, Forster bridged the gaps in his narrative of Dickens's childhood from letters and the interlined proof-sheets of *Copperfield* (*Life of Dickens*, p. 24).

For some time, scholars have speculated on how much Dickens revealed of his youth to Forster, how much of the fragment was included in *David Copperfield*, and the question of the

²¹Dickens to Maria Winter, 22 February 1855. *Letters*, VII, 543-4.

border between fiction and autobiography. They have also undertaken psycho-biographical reconsiderations of the Christmas Books, particularly the *Haunted Man*, and *Dombey and Son*, which preceded *Copperfield* and are roughly contemporary with the fragment. Tick's 2001 article in the *Dickens Quarterly*, 'Autobiographical Impulses in *The Haunted Man*', for instance, argued that the fragment arose out of a mid-life crisis at this time, 'not only because of what we term existential anxiety', but because he was afraid of the Dilke incident leaking to the public (Tick, p. 62).

The autobiographical fragment is both 'a literary construct, an interpretation, which inevitably contains fictional elements',²² and a construct mediated by Forster's editing of the original fragment in *David Copperfield*, and his re-inscription in the *Life*. We know that Forster exercised a certain amount of influence over his friend during the writing of *David Copperfield*. He proposed, for example, the first-person narrative; 'a suggestion that he should write it in the first person, by way of change, had been thrown out by me, which he took at once very bravely; and this, with other things, though as yet not dreaming of any public use of his early personal trials, conspired to bring about the resolve to use them' (*Life*, p. 522). The manuscript and the printed proofs of chapter XI, generally considered to be the most 'autobiographical' chapter, contain little or no indication of Forster's input. This may be one reason that Forster's role in creation of the fragment in a number of ways (his role as the intended reader, the intended receiver of confidences, his editing of the fragment's existence in *David Copperfield* and as the sole repository of the fragment) is often overlooked.

It is certain that Forster was not the only person to know that Dickens intended to write his own life, nor that biographical experiences had been worked into *David Copperfield*. While it is

²² Oliver Buckton, 'The Reader Whom I Love: Homoerotic Secrets in *David Copperfield*', *ELH*, Spring 1997, p. 192.

unclear whether or not Catherine had seen the fragment, she knew enough of Dickens's childhood to attempt to dissuade Dickens from representing his parents in the characters of the Micawbers.²³ Burgis quotes from an unpublished letter from Georgina Hogarth to Mrs Field, saying that Dickens had intended to take the manuscript up again some day, and had admitted that 'the first part is an autobiography, of course'.²⁴ Likewise, he commented to Mary Howitt in 1859 that he had 'worked many childish experiences and many young struggles into *Copperfield*'.²⁵ In the preface to *Copperfield*, Dickens hints publicly at the autobiographical nature of the work: 'I do not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from this book. My interest in it is so recent and strong, and my mind so divided between pleasure and regret ... that I am in danger of wearying the reader whom I love, with personal confidences and private emotions'.²⁶ Buckton speculates that that this 'reader' refers to Forster, who had already received his personal confidences, rather than a generic reader (Buckton, p. 193), although the speculative break away from the more general reader seems rather stretched.

Despite the absence of the fragment from the Forster archive, Forster's re-inscription gives the same air of authority as his possession of the manuscripts. In writing the biography, he wished to focus critical attention not on the scandals which had plagued Dickens's reputation, but on his reputation as a novelist; to provoke the re-examination of the novels in the light of each autobiographical revelation.

Chapters XI and XII of *David Copperfield* were indeed reread with surprise. Robert Buchanan, a contributor to *All The Year Round*, wrote:

Only the first instalment of Mr Forster's biography has yet appeared, and already the subject eclipses even the Tichborne case as a topic of after dinner chat. It is not without a shock that we are admitted behind the curtain of the good Genie's private life. All is so different from what we had anticipated. The tree which bore fruit as golden as that of the Hesperides was

²³ Preface to *David Copperfield*, by Charles Dickens the younger (London: Macmillan: 1892).

²⁴ January 1872, quoted Burgis, p. xi.

²⁵ *Letters*, vol. IX, p. 119.

²⁶ Preface to *David Copperfield* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1850), p. 45.

rooted in a wretched soil, and watered with the bitterest possible tears of self-compassion... Never, perhaps, has a fragment of biography wakened more interest and amazement than the first chapters of Mr Forster's biography ...²⁷

The Tichborne Case, which took place over 188 days from 1871 to 1872, involved the trial of Arthur Orton, who claimed to be the lost heir to the Tichborne family fortune. Buchanan's article appeared only two months after the publication of Forster's first volume, and still the blacking factory was outdoing the Tichbornes as a subject of gossip. Not only had Dickens's upbringing been far humbler than his readers had expected, not only had his life been secretly presented to them in the form of his own 'favourite child',²⁸ but they debated how entitled he was to complain at his ill treatment.

The *Graphic* also remarked on the 'extraordinary bitterness' with which Dickens described his upbringing, and seemed surprised at the sensitivity of a boy whose lot was not unlikely or unreasonable; 'it was natural enough that in 1822 no one should have seen anything strange in the eldest son of a debtor earning seven shillings a week, though in a menial capacity, in his cousin's warehouse'.²⁹ William Luson Thomas had founded the *Graphic* in 1869 as a rival to the *Illustrated London News*, seeking to influence through the wood engravings of artists such as Luke Fildes and John Millais. The journal was more explicit in its condemnation in the January number, reporting on *Fraser's Magazine* that:

in reviewing the 'Life of Charles Dickens' the writer evidently thinks, as we do, that Dickens was unduly sensitive about his blacking factory experiences. Read by contrast Thomas Holcroft's admirable fragment of autobiography, and mark in what a simple manly fashion he relates the far severer sufferings of his early days.³⁰

This is particularly ironic when we remember that Dickens compared his own autobiographical propensities to Holcroft's when he first began the autobiographical fragment in 1846.

²⁷ Robert Buchanan, 'The "Good Genie" of Fiction: Thoughts while reading Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*', *St Paul's Magazine*, 10 (February 1872), pp. 130-48.

²⁸ Dickens, preface to Charles Dickens edition of *David Copperfield* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1867), p. 3.

²⁹ 'Charles Dickens', *Graphic*, 23 December 1871, p. 610.

³⁰ 'The January Magazines', *Graphic*, 13 January 1872, p. 31.

Other reactions to the autobiographical chapters were more sympathetic. The *Examiner* found the first two chapters to be as pathetic as any of the novels:

Everybody knew that Dickens worked bravely up from humble life by his own exertions, and that the genius by which he has brightened the lives of millions was quickened amid hardships that might well have stifled it, if it could have been stifled; but few indeed could have guessed how great was the strain, how bitter were the hardships, put upon his young life.³¹

It should not be forgotten at this point that the writer of the *Life* was the *Examiner*'s former editor, who had himself risen from quite humble circumstances. Dickens was not unfairly bitter, but 'heroic'. Despite the journal's allegiance, however, the *Examiner* still found the self-authored fragment to be the most valuable writing; 'the last six years fill nearly four-fifths of the volume; but what is told about the first four-and-twenty years is its most welcome portion'.

The *Graphic* in November 1872, following the publication of the second volume, was more complimentary; Forster's tact, sensitivity and authority both as the 'most genial and popular of biographers' as well as 'the affectionate and close intimacy of the two men' were praised; 'when Dickens found a true friend he opened to him all his heart, and to Mr. Forster were confided all the hopes and projects of his life'.³² Such praise was by no means universal, however:

The 'Life of Charles Dickens' continues, both by its proper substance and by its execution, to be a most interesting work. Its proper title, nevertheless, would be, 'History of the Relations between Charles Dickens and John Forster.' From beginning to end John Forster is 'never off the stage.' Sometimes he addresses the hero, sometimes the hero addresses him. When the hero goes abroad his chief occupation seems to be to write to his confidant at home. If a new book is to be brought out, the confidant is consulted as to the names to be given to the principal characters; if the hero finds himself troubled with a tendency, in writing prose, to run into blank verse, the confidant is entrusted with the task of 'taking a word here and there and knocking its brains out;' if the hero has a twenty-pound note sent to him from travelling expenses on account of a meditated lecture at a provincial institution, it is at the confidant's recommendation that he returns the money.³³

The reviewer here does not merely complain that Forster's narrative standpoint does not give an objective, or at least a more rounded view of Dickens's character. Letters had already been sent to

³¹'Mr Forster's Life of Dickens', *Examiner*, 9 December 1871, p. 1217.

³²'Charles Dickens', *Graphic*, 23 November 1872, p. 490.

³³'Forster's Life of Dickens', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 December 1872, p.11.

the *Times* in response to the first volume, complaining that none of Dickens's voluminous correspondence to anyone other than Forster had been referred to in the *Life*. The term 'hero' is used instead in a negative way to express the artificiality of Forster's writing and the pretentiousness of his stance; journeys abroad, the novels, financial decisions become plot twists and narrative devices. Unlike the appreciative responses which Forster's early historiographies and biographies received in response to the use of fictionalisation, Forster's interposition into the narrative grated on his critics. By the time the third volume was realised this vogue for sarcasm was apparent, the following reviewer quoting Polonius:

Each succeeding volume of Mr Forster's 'Life of Dickens' is now looked forward to chiefly out of curiosity to see how the biographer will treat of this or that particular quarrel which the course of events will bring under his pen. We forget the precise piece of scandal that may be expected in Mr Forster's next volume, but readers of *Temple Bar* will be able to satisfy themselves on this and other kindred points in the article, 'Life of Charles Dickens.' ' 'Tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true' that nothing delights some people so much as to gloat over the littlenesses of great men.³⁴

Other nineteenth-century biographies, and the Dickens children

Three notable biographies included those by Dickens's own children, Mamie, Henry and Charles Dickens Jr.³⁵ Mamie and Georgina Hogarth had published, in 1882, an edition of Dickens's letters:

It will be a sort of supplement to Mr Forster's 'Life' - *That* was exhaustive as a *Biography*- leaving nothing to be said ever more, in my opinion. But, I believe, it was universally felt to be incomplete as a *Portrait*- because the scheme of the Book... prevented his making use of any letter- or scarcely any, besides those addressed to himself. And Charles was a man who expressed his individuality so strongly in his letters that we cannot help feeling that a collection of them to various people on various subjects will supply a want.³⁶

The biographies themselves were quite different in their intended audience from Forster's, and from each other. Mamie's was a children's book, published by Cassell in the 'World's Workers' series

³⁴ 'The Shilling Magazines', *Examiner*, 10 May 1873, p. 482.

³⁵ Mamie Dickens, *My Father as I Recall Him* (London: Cassell, 1900); Henry Fielding Dickens, *Memories of My Father* (London: Gollancz, 1929); Charles Dickens Jr, 'Reminiscences of my Father', *Windsor Magazine*, 1934, supplement to the Christmas edition.

³⁶ Georgina Hogarth to Mrs J. T. Fields, 22 March 1878. Letter in Huntington Library; quoted *Letters*, I, p. ix.

alongside 'worthy' nurses, engineers, clergymen and presidents. Her wish, she wrote, was to gather together 'every incident which will be most likely to interest and to appeal to young readers', using, wherever possible, her father's own words. The work was also intended as an introduction to Dickens's work, and Mamie assumed that it would be accessible to people who were too young, as yet, to attempt the novels:

If the reading of this little book be the means of making any boys and girls love and venerate the Man - before they can know and love and venerate the Author and the Genius - I shall have accomplished my task with a thankful and a grateful heart. (*My Father as I Recall Him*, p. 9).

Charles Dickens Jr. and Henry Fielding Dickens, his eldest and sixth sons, released biographies similar in subject matter if more advanced; with memories from their childhood homes, and some unpublished photographs.

Mamie claimed that she had nothing new to write, reiterating her aunt's view that Forster's biography was 'exhaustive'. Charles Dickens Jr. wrote politely but coldly about Forster, as though resentful of his influence. With regards to the public readings, he described Forster's opposition:

But, if Mr. Forster could not altogether put a stop to the project, he could delay it considerably, and it was not until the 29th April, 1858, at St. Martin's Hall in London, now no longer in existence, that the first professional appearance as a reader was made. (*Reminiscences of my Father*, p. 27).

Forster objected to the tour on the basis that it was beneath Dickens; when Dickens proposed, in the second tour, to include a dramatic monologue of Bill Sikes's murder of Nancy, he says 'Mr. Forster had also objections to urge - he had, as he tells us, a strong dislike to the proposal, less, perhaps, on the ground which ought to have been insisted upon, of the excessive physical exertion it would involve, than because such a subject seemed to be 'out of the province of reading', and it was finally resolved that, before the murder was incorporated in a public programme, there should be a private trial performance of it at St. James's Hall' (*Reminiscences*, p. 29).

Hotten's preface had set forth the primary tenet of Victorian biographical ethics: 'Although some private facts in the life of Mr. Dickens will be found to be touched upon in these pages, the writer is not conscious of having written a line which would give pain to others'. We have already seen how Forster worked according to this ethic in his biographies of Landor and Swift. Despite this consideration, however, and his dedication of the work to his goddaughter Mamie and her sister Kate, the younger Dickens generation all recommended George Dolby's *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him* instead of Forster's biography of their father.³⁷

Dolby was Dickens's tour manager; his work is light hearted and almost entirely anecdotal, comprising familial stories from Gad's Hill and the reading tours. Like Charles Dickens the younger, he depicted Forster as domineering and over-emotive. Prior to the second American tour in 1867, only three people were consulted on the schedule drawn up by Osgood, their correspondent in the States; these were Forster, William Henry Wills (Dickens's literary adviser and sub-editor of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*) and Frederic Ouvry (Dickens's solicitor), 'Mr. Dickens reserving the right of pleasing himself eventually' (Dolby, p. 132). Dickens sent Dolby to test the waters with Forster; Dolby, although intimidated by the close relationship between Forster and Dickens, saw Forster's oppositions as oppressive and incomprehensible, and describes a very 'unpleasant' interview between them (Dolby, pp. 136-139).

Finally, seeing that Dickens was fully determined on going, Forster's attitude changed.

Later in the day Mr. Dickens returned to London, and then a sudden change came over Mr. Forster's spirit. These good qualities which had endeared him to Mr. Dickens's heart began to manifest themselves, leaving an impression in my mind that the churlishness displayed at our first interview was the outcome of love and affection for Mr. Dickens and of an anxious desire for his welfare. The objections to the American Tour were heard no more; but when Mr. Forster was leaving Ross, he gave me at the railway station a parting injunction to take care of

³⁷ George Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887).

Mr. Dickens, which would have been really comic, but for the earnestness with which it was delivered. (Dolby, p. 139)

Dolby's view was endorsed by the reviews of the *Life* which exclaimed against Forster's intrusion into the narrative. While Dolby admitted that he was intimidated by the close friendship of Dickens and Forster, and pointed out that any kind of behaviour which might be seen as controlling (attempting to prevent him from undertaking the reading tours, for example) arose out of genuine affection for Dickens and concern for his welfare, the unpleasant sense of overbearing appropriation stuck.

The truth of this view may have influenced Mamie's recommendation to her young readers:

I should like you all, some day, to read Mr. Dolby's own book about these readings. He gives the best and truest picture of my father that has yet been written. They were on the most intimate and affectionate terms, and Mr. Dolby knew better than anyone the amount of suffering Charles Dickens went through during the latter part of his American visit ... (*My Father as I Recall Him*, p. 117)

Charles Dickens Jr. also referred to Dolby's as an 'excellent book' (while also seemingly resenting Forster's attempt to prevent the reading tour as misplaced; 'Reminiscences', p. 30). Although Georgina and Mamie may have been 'touched and deeply moved' when Forster first read the unpublished manuscript of the *Life* to them,³⁸ this cannot be assumed to be unreserved approval.

Dickens collectors; extra-illustrated *Lives*

Despite being viewed with such scepticism, the biography became highly collectible. In 1882, the *OED* first defined the verb 'to Grangerize', as the embellishment of published works with portraits and other prints, first begun by James Granger (1723?-1776) in his *Biographical History of England from Egbert the Great to the Revolution* (1796). Extra-illustrated volumes, embellished with pasted-in portraits, newspaper cutting, letters and autographs, enjoyed a vogue throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

³⁸ Gladys Storey, *Dickens and Daughter* (London: Muller, 1939), p. 148.

The first notice in *The Times* of an extra-illustrated *Life* appeared in 1889; Sotheby's priced the book, 'with autograph letters of Dickens and Forster', at £17.³⁹ In 1896, a copy belonging to the chemical manufacturer A. G. Kurtz was sold for £252. It was described not only as the most important work in the four-day sale, but 'the most extensive and unique collection in existence', and the following list of its contents gives a useful insight into extra-illustrating practice at this time:

The most important work in the sale was an extensively illustrated copy of John Forster's 'Life' of Dickens, the three volumes inlaid and extended to 13 volumes folio, and profusely illustrated with 282 fine portraits of eminent personages mentioned in the text, about 317 views of places visited by Dickens, and places where he resided; 114 autograph letters, eight original drawings, and his original manuscript speech at the Royal Academy...⁴⁰

The 'Grangerized' lives were typically extended to between six and eighteen volumes; Kurtz's appears to have achieved a relatively high sale price presumably due to the large amount of manuscript material it contained.

'Grangerized' copies of the life seem to be more culturally significant than simple material indicators of its popularity. The copy extra-illustrated by the London bookseller Francis Harvey extended from three octavo volumes octavo to thirteen folios, was noted in his obituary alongside his 'triumphs'.⁴¹ Lord Northcliffe's extra-illustrated *Life* was exhibited in the 1908 'Franco-British Exhibition of Books', and acquired as 'an important accession' by *The Times* Book Club later that year;⁴² it was auctioned during the First World War in aid of the Red Cross, alongside the manuscript of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*.⁴³ In 1905, a sale of books and other goods belonging to the actor Henry Irving (1838-1905) included an extra-illustrated copy of the *Life* extended to eight volumes folio, 'one of the finest and most interesting examples of "grangerizing" which can come into the open market'. Irving was an eclectic collector 'of varied and catholic tastes, which extended from Dickens's stuffed black raven to books of art, and from playbills to

³⁹ 'Sale of First Editions', *The Times*, 26 March 1889, p. 13.

⁴⁰ 'Sale of books and mss', *Ibid.*, 22 February 1896, p. 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16 February 1900, p. 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17 November 1908, p. 5.

⁴³ 'Court Circular: More gifts for Red Cross sale', *Ibid.*, 26 January 1918, p. 9.

snuff-boxes' and the auction was seen as rich territory for 'relic-hunters'.⁴⁴ The 'black raven', Grip, is now in the Free Library of Philadelphia, kept alongside the manuscript of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven'; Poe's poem was inspired by Dickens's pet, which also appeared as Barnaby's companion in *Barnaby Rudge*.

The extra-illustrated *Life*, however, was bought by Major James Knowles and donated to the Dickens Museum in Doughty Street, in 1927. It contained 28 letters in a collection of over 300 autograph letters; letters from a variety of other correspondents, including Queen Victoria, Walter Scott, Gladstone, Ainsworth, Cruikshank, Hunt, Thackeray, Ruskin, Tenniel and Millais (Forster is not mentioned); a page of the manuscript of *Dombey and Son*; several rare and original playbills; and a valuable portrait of Edward Chapman. By this time, the role of archives had expanded beyond the private collection, into the offering of a Dickens 'experience' to the public. Percy Fitzgerald, among others, donated personal items and a collection of printed materials to the Guildhall Museum in Rochester shortly after it was founded in 1897; these included early editions, Dickens's walking stick, a bible, a glass and several watercolours. The Dickens Birthplace Museum in Portsmouth was founded in 1903, with a collection of Dickensiana relating to Dickens's early life in Portsmouth (1812-1815). The greatest collection, however, was established when the Dickens Fellowship (formed in 1902) purchased 48, Doughty Street in 1925. The aim in purchasing the house was to preserve 'for all time this house as a Dickens shrine and as a National Dickens Library and Museum ... [inculcating] a spirit of sentiment and reverence', but also aimed at 'something much more substantial and valuable ... useful and, above all, educational'. It was hoped that the house would contain a collection of Dickens relics, a picture gallery, and 'the finest Dickens Library in the world'.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ 'The Henry Irving sale', *The Times*, 18 November 1905, p. 13.

⁴⁵ B. W. Matz's address at the sixteenth annual Conference of the Dickens Fellowship, 1922; Florian Schwiezer, 'The Charles Dickens Museum', available at <http://www.dickensmuseum.com/mediainfo.htm>. Last accessed 29 April 2009.

It is needless to say that a huge amount of scholarly and popular biographical work has been produced since the publication of the *Life*. Forster's claim to fame rests chiefly now on the *Life of Charles Dickens*, and much has been written on the work's reliability. For this reason I will not attempt to discuss its scholarship here, but refer to Graham Storey and Madeline House's excellent summary:

John Forster, although he wrote his three-volume *Life of Dickens* within a few years of Dickens's death, had his subject remarkably in perspective. He was, moreover, concerned not simply with the public image, as Georgina and Mamie were, but with the truth as he conceived it. The *Life* contains numerous small distortions of fact, but paradoxically these distortions were in the interest of a larger, or ideal, truth.

His methods when quoting from Dickens's letters demand close examination, as far as the limited extant evidence allows. But whereas the manuscripts of at least three-quarters of the letters published by Mamie and Georgina have survived, and the great majority of their texts can be checked, the position is very different in the *Life*. Out of nearly a thousand letters to himself from which Forster quoted, only fifty-five have survived - all but two of them early letters, used in his Volume I (covering 1812-42). Many of Dickens's most important letters are among the hundreds of which the only available text is that given in the *Life*, and the question of Forster's editorial integrity must therefore be discussed here at some length.

When Forster started work on the *Life* he was already a sick man, and his health became worse during the writing of the second volume (covering 1842-52). It was perhaps then, because he found the labour of transcription too heavy, that he decided to cut up the letters and paste them in his manuscript. Altogether, of the letters which survive in the Forster Collection, only six (the two mentioned above and four others) were written in the years covered by Forster's second and third volumes, and these probably owe their preservation to the fact that they dealt not with concerns of Dickens but with the work of Forster. The other letters must have gone the way of Forster's manuscript.

Only by collating the originals of the fifty-five letters which have survived with the extracts from them given in the *Life* can the kinds of liberty Forster took with his originals be determined (*Letters*, I, p. xi).

The introduction to the *Letters* suggests, as did the early reviews of the *Life*, Dolby's biography and Dickens's children, that Forster misdated and altered letters in order to 'increase his own importance'. However, House and Storey also point out that this was standard nineteenth-century biographical practice.

House and Storey's consideration of Forster's biographical practices goes some considerable way to explaining the construction of his archive. 'Forster had believed his biography should try to present Dickens as the man he actually was,' they wrote. 'The story of Dickens's books was therefore Forster's first care' (*Letters*, I, p. xiii). Dickens's manuscripts therefore take pride of place in Forster's archive not only because we regard them, as modern Dickensophiles, as the ultimate subjects of 'sentiment and reverence'. They represent the relationships of friends and writer and editor in a material way; as a material interface. Forster's proof reading marks, his cutting and pasting of the letters, his marginalia in the editions, his selection of the letters to be donated and the letters to be burned, all show his editorial authority and his involvement in the creative process in the same piecemeal, patchwork and yet carefully constructed way we saw with Landor's archival presence.

Edgar Johnson, in the preface to his 1953 biography of Dickens, wrote that 'the Dickens manuscripts in the Forster Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum are the core of any investigation into Dickens as a novelist'.⁴⁶ Since this was written, biographical aims have shifted, and the Forster Collection's role seems to have been diluted by the imposing number of Dickens collections worldwide, not least the National Dickens Library at Doughty Street. Just as we have seen in Forster's previous biographies, his archive was constructed and maintained for the same reasons that the biography was written, as a manuscript-centric collection which, in terms of Dickens's presence, focused almost exclusively on Dickens as a writer, and publicly represented Forster's relationship with and to his friend. For the Dickensian biographer, it has always been clear that the Forster Collection has its limitations, and this was publically implied by Kate Perugini's donation of the letters between Charles and Catherine Dickens to the British Museum in

⁴⁶ *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, 2 vols (London: Gollancz, 1953), I, p. x.

1934, rather than to the South Kensington Museum.⁴⁷ However, the *Times* article which quotes from the letters begins thus:

The continued attention bestowed on the life of Charles Dickens is commensurate with the lasting popularity of his novels. More than most great writers he has lived in the public eye; and the public eye has been as scrutinizing as kindly.

Although predictions that sales of the biography would equal novel sales went unfulfilled, the *Life* has remained a subject of study and discussion. I have not addressed here the voices which many have shown to be missing from the archive; there is little or no reference in the Forster Collection either to Dickens's separation from his wife, or to his supposed affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. The contextualisation and examination of his biographical aims and practices can help us to understand (as in the cases of all of his biographical works) the archive as it was compiled, exploited, donated and as it now exists.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 14 May 1934, p. 15.

Conclusion

This study has analysed John Forster's biographies chronologically in order to 'tell the story' of the immense archive which he donated to the South Kensington Museum. It has sought to combine a contextualisation of Forster's work within the intellectual history of biography with methods used in the study of bibliography and the history of the book. The results of this combination have demonstrated how the meaning and intention of a text carries through (and can be experienced) in the archive, when that archive is constructed around the gathering, exploitation, organisation and preservation of the material used to write the work. Although this study has specifically addressed issues relating to biography, I would argue that this textual/archival relationship is present between any archive and the work it supports, whether literary, scientific, imaged or performative.

In doing so, the study has identified one of Forster's literary intentions to be the reaching of a new audience with his historiographical and biographical research. Advances in production technology made books cheaper to manufacture, and enabled publishers and printers to work on a significantly larger scale. New channels of reading access were opened through the expansion of lending libraries and technical institutes, and literacy rates rose. Series of affordable books such as the *Library of Useful Knowledge*, the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* were published with the aim of producing 'books of standard value and universal interest, cheap enough to find their way into every cottage'.¹ Public museums and galleries such as South Kensington further widened accessibility by staying open late and refusing to charge for entry. Forster's Unitarian roots, his early publications in Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, his donation to a public museum, insisting that whoever

¹ 'Books for the Million', *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, 1 June 1844, p. 3.

wanted had direct access to his books, suggest that he was committed to reaching this new readership.

By analysing the prices of Forster's books in the context of wider studies by Simon Eliot, it has become clear that only those with a comfortable salary would have been able to purchase his books. The lower-middle classes may have been able to afford the 6s volumes of the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, or *Goldsmith* at 7s. 6d., but the only access which poorer readers might have had would be through lending libraries and Mechanics' Institutes. Articles which indicate that these kinds of works might have been priced for lending libraries, whether official or non-official (see p. 41) as well as for individuals, problematize the idea that we can learn more about a book's target audience, or who might have had access to it, from its price.

Many of the numerous folio volumes of correspondence and manuscript material in Forster's collection relate to his interest in the history of the Long Parliament, and either found their way into *Sir John Eliot* or were put aside for a never-completed full-length biography of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford. The biographical sketches of Vane, Pym, Marten, Eliot and Strafford were originally published in the *Englishman's Magazine* in 1831, extended into entries of roughly one hundred duodecimo pages for Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* (1836-9) and reprinted by Longmans in 1839 as a set on their own. Every stage of the publication of *Sir John Eliot* is documented in Forster's library, from transcribed, annotated and cut-and-pasted sources, to proof-read manuscript, to galley proofs, to the two volumes which the booksellers would have received and sold.

In 1961, E. H. Carr raised some common assumptions about the process of historical writing. Non-academic friends or friends from other disciplines assumed that the historian

‘spends a long preliminary period reading his sources and filling his notebooks with facts: then, when this is over, he puts away his sources, takes out his notebooks and writes his book from beginning to end’.² Traditional biography often gives the impression that the subject works in this way, perhaps influenced by novelists such as Dickens and Trollope, whose letters record them turning out a sequential number of pages per day for almost immediate publication. Forster’s archive, however, shows how co-operative his working process was; that he often worked from home or, later in his career, on the move between Lunacy Commission appointments, that he made the most of his correspondents and that he was generous with his own source material. While feelings of social inferiority and the need for historical authority via ownership may well have contributed to the size and grandeur of Forster’s library, the space is also understandable on a practical level.

Forster’s prefaces usually identified the printed sources which he had consulted, and his annotated copies of many of these can be found in the Forster Collection. Chapter one studied an example, D’Israeli’s *Commentaries on the Life and Reign of Charles the First* (1828-31), describing how both Forster and D’Israeli reinterpreted the seventeenth century chroniclers, both complaining of the way in which their partisanship caused them to misuse or ignore sources. This was examined in relation to an event in Sir John Eliot’s youth, in which he lost his temper and stabbed a neighbour. The quite different conclusions about Eliot’s character drawn by D’Israeli and Forster illustrate the way in which Forster sought to create a new, heroic myth of Eliot by claiming that previous biographers and historians, including D’Israeli, had missed, misquoted and misdated letters relating to the incident. In their published squabbles over these points, both Forster and D’Israeli called attention to their correspondence with the St. Germans family, in a way that equated the original source

² E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001; first ed. 1961), p. 22-23.

material and an acquaintance with Eliot's descendants with historical authority. Both Forster's and D'Israeli's biographers have associated the grand physical spaces of their libraries with a need to compensate for provincial backgrounds and a sense of social inferiority in the literary world.

Contemporary reviews and Forster's correspondence with his publisher, John Murray III, have shown that *Eliot* achieved mixed critical reviews and failed to sell all of the first edition. His work was soon made redundant by Samuel Gardiner's historiography and Alexander Grosart's commissioned reprints of Eliot's manuscripts. Both complained of Forster's lack of scholarly rigour, and his Whig partisanship.

Chapter two explored Forster's methodology and narrative technique in the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* biography of Oliver Cromwell. From the correspondence, manuscript volumes and annotated books relating to *Cromwell* in the Forster archive, it is clear that Forster's library grew as he did his research from home, employing an amanuensis where necessary. In order to bring historical documents to life, Forster employed narrative techniques used in the realist novel, including narrative perspective, metaphorical language, and character psychology, and these were examined with reference to his novelisation of two sources, a letter by the Scottish Covenanter Robert Baillie (1640) and a diary entry by Bulstrode Whitelocke (1682).

Forster's 'imagination' and ability to 'body forth' his documents was admired by Carlyle, and a friendship grew between them which allowed Carlyle to use the books and documents gathered by his friend. Chapter two also explored ways in which Forster re-examined his view of Cromwell in the light of Carlyle's influence in 'The Civil Wars and

Cromwell' (1856), originally published in the *Edinburgh Review*. Carlyle's marginalia in the books which he borrowed, and the annotated copies of the review in the Forster Collection, have indicated that Carlyle took an active role in re-writing Forster's article. Both of these chapters demonstrated that while Forster's historiographical rhetoric may be standard, the extent of the documentation regarding his working processes is quite unusual, and allows us to dissect and determine how individual his methodologies and working space were.

Following his *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* sketches, it was almost ten years before Forster published the first of his literary biographies of eighteenth-century men of letters. *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* (1848) was published in five different editions throughout Forster's life. This chapter described bibliographical differences between each of the editions, linking them to price in order to establish links between publishing format and target markets. It also explored Goldsmith's popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, including the popularity of images from *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and the ways in which the varied backgrounds of the contributing artists brought kudos and sensitivity to the work. The 1848 illustrated volume used images in a way that was new to biography; Maclise, Stanfield, Leech, Doyle and Hamerton created designs that interpreted the narrative, and which were placed on the page within the text.

Forster's choice of a subject was not purely sentimental. The biography coincided with his involvement in the Guild of Literature and Art, and Goldsmith's financial struggles made him a heroic representative for the need for organised relief for struggling artists. Finally, in studying Forster's methodology, it has been necessary to summarise James Prior's accusation that Forster had plagiarised his 1837 *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, as well as Forster's response,

in which he listed the printed sources he had consulted in order to write the biography.

Tellingly, none of these can be traced in the Forster archive, apart from Prior's.

This is not the case for Forster's other full-length eighteenth-century biography, the *Life of Jonathan Swift* (1875). The archive has an impressive collection of Swiftiana, gathered by Forster and Murray for the biography. This chapter diverted the chronology of the study in terms of publication dates to examine Forster's final work, which was published only months before his death in 1876. It charted the perception of Swift in Victorian culture, and contrasted his rise as a satiric figure with Goldsmith's decline in popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century. Approaching Swift with the heroic view of biography which Forster had demonstrated in *Goldsmith* and in his historiography was problematic, due to Swift's widespread and complex reputation. The chapter examined Forster's responses to Johnson, Scott and Macaulay, three previous biographers of Swift with their own considerable reputations, and the way in which Forster sought to recreate Swift as a canonical figure, cleansed of scandal.

The correspondence between Forster and Murray relating to the writing and publishing of the biography was summarised, and the provenance of the sources listed within the biography was traced as far as possible through the archive, and in this correspondence. Some of these Swiftiana, such as the first edition of Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) have been considered to be some of the most interesting and valuable items in the Collection. *Remarks* was noted in the Collection handbook for its original binding, but is not in fact valuable because it is rare or fine, but because it is associated with Addison and with Swift. These personal connections, rather than bibliographical preciousness, are currently seen to give the Collection its value. Finally, the chapter traced

the reflection of Swiftian mythologies in a selection of title-page engravings, and how this may have influenced Forster's choice of a frontispiece.

Although Swift was published latest of all Forster's works, the process of writing had begun in 1855, and had to be halted in order to work on promised biographies of Landor and Dickens. The study's six chapters follow periods of writing in Forster's career; the historiographies in his early to mid-career, the eighteenth-century men of letters in his mid to late career, and the biographies of his friends in the closing years of his life. Forster completed *Walter Savage Landor* begrudgingly, at a time of life when he was busy with Lunacy Commission business and often ill. The *Examiner* reviews of Landor's poetry which Forster wrote between 1834-1853 demonstrate that Forster appreciated the way in which Landor's 'spirit' was represented in the realism, the humanity and the unity of his work; they also repeatedly vocalise Forster's surprise that Landor's sales failed to match his critical acclaim.

Landor took some pride in his limited readership, believing that it indicated posthumous glory among future generations. Both he and Dickens (as discussed in chapter six) wrote autobiographical fragments, and appointed Forster as their future biographer after roughly twelve years of friendship (Landor in 1849; Dickens, possibly as early as 1846). Both biographies posed new ethical challenges; Forster's correspondence with Landor's niece Kitty and brother Robert are demonstrative of Carlyle's 'Damocles' Sword of *Respectability* [which] hangs forever over the poor English Life-writer', preventing him from writing anything which might offend. Landor's papers were bequeathed to his nieces, and it is unclear how the letters now in the Forster archive came to be there. Those which are in the Forster archive, such as Landor's correspondence with Southey, give a respectable

counterweight to the scandal in Landor's reputation and are used to constitute a significant part of the biography. Forster's biographical ethics are commonplace among Victorian biographers, and this correspondence gives an insight into nineteenth-century perspectives on the balance between accurate representation of character and respect for the subject's living relatives.

Dickens, like many of his contemporaries, held a dread of being misrepresented by future biographers which led him to destroy an enormous quantity of papers.³ This is indicative of a desire to control his posthumous reputation that also manifested itself in the writing of an autobiographical fragment which he showed to Forster before destroying at an unknown date. A number of 'unofficial' biographies published before Forster's sold, unlike his previous biographies, through edition after edition.

The preservation, storage and use of Dickens's manuscripts and letters by the National Art Library in recent years, in comparison to other items in the collection, indicates that they are seen as the most valuable and culturally significant. The manuscripts, annotated with Forster's corrections, form the basis of the *Life of Charles Dickens*, along with his reviews of Dickens's novels, and the correspondence. Forster was heavily criticised for placing himself at the centre of the biography in this way, and this does seem consistent with Forster's reputation as a 'tuft-hunter', a lick-boots, who shared with Dickens a sense of social inferiority and tried misguidedly to compensate for this by drastically over-asserting his biographical authority. Health issues, time constraints and writing habits (working from sources gathered to him in his library) contributed to this tendency. Forster's biography has,

³ Michael Millgate, *Testamentary Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Michael Holroyd, *Works on Paper; The Craft of Biography and Auto-Biography* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2002).

in turn, become the basis for other mini-archives, as editions have been Grangerized with autograph letters and other Dickensiana.

Many of the comparisons drawn in this study have been limited by the fact that most research which focuses on the economics of book publishing in the nineteenth-century has been based around the novel. Non-fiction easily found its way into investigations in book production and technology, which choose their lithographs or bindings indiscriminately. However, there are few studies on publishing formats and the economics of non-fiction, and the relation between these and the aesthetics of the text. This means that there is very little with which to compare, for example, the prices of the biographies or the use of images. This is a case study, and, as Eliot writes, ‘the case study approach is interesting and important, but, on its own, is never enough’ (Eliot, 2002, p. 284).

This study has been undertaken in the context of expanding debate about the nature and the cultural value of the archive. As Louise Craven recently wrote, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the archive and the text have come to the forefront of cultural studies, engaging with politics, sociology, philosophy, linguistics, history and literary criticism.⁴ The number and scope of international, transdisciplinary conferences on some aspect of the archive have continued to multiply since Craven wrote in 2008. Over the past three years, the AHRC has funded platforms such as LICAU (‘Literary Illustration: Conservation, Access, Use’), a series of workshops run by the Centre for Editorial and Textual Research at Cardiff University, and the V&A, to discuss ‘three key sets of issues which are usually kept apart: curatorial and conservation issues; aesthetic and interpretative issues; contexts and

⁴*What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*, ed. by Louise Craven (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 1.

continuities of illustration'.⁵ Digitization and web-based catalogues and collections are rapidly changing the nature of the archive, and archival theory is currently racing, as fast as archivists race, in an attempt to catch up. This study contributes to that discussion, by lowering a bucket into Strachey's 'great ocean of material'. Narrating the cultural significance of Forster's archive, the study has sought to 'interpret' a number of its components; its texts, historical documents, organisation and preservation, with reference to its biographical content.

⁵ <http://cardiff.ac.uk/encap/newsandevents/events/summerschools/literaryillustration.html>; last accessed 29 June 2010, 10.00pm. This study has also been funded by the AHRC as part of their Collaborative Doctoral Scheme, which aims to 'encourage and develop collaboration between Higher Education Institution (HEI) departments and non-academic institutions and businesses. <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/CDA%20Guidance%20Notes.pdf>; last accessed 29 June 2010 at 3.30pm.

Appendix: Price of editions published in Forster's lifetime

Title	Release date	Bookseller's price per volume	Bookseller's price per set
<i>Lives of Eminent British Statesmen</i> , 7 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1836-9). Lardner's <i>Cabinet Cyclopaedia</i> series			
Vol II (Sir John Eliot; Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford)	4 May 1836	6s	N/A
Vol III (John Pym; John Hampden)	2 June 1837		
Vol IV (Henry Vane; Henry Marten)	5 Feb. 1838		
Vol VI (Oliver Cromwell)	1 Nov. 1838		
Vol VII (Oliver Cromwell)	29 Jun. 1839		
Reprinted as <i>Statesmen of the Commonwealth</i> , 5 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1839)	27 Jul. 1839	N/A	30s
<i>The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith</i> (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848)	15 Apr. 1848	21s	N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd edition, 2 vols (Bradbury & Evans, 1854) • New (abridged) 'popular' edn; 1 vol (Bradbury & Evans, 1855) 	11 Mar. 1854	N/A	25s
	17 Nov. 1855	N/A	7s 6d
<i>Sir John Eliot: A Biography</i> 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longmans, Roberts & Green, 1864).	[?] Mar. 1864	N/A	30s
<i>Walter Savage Landor</i> (London: Chapman & Hall, 1869)	17 May 1869	28s	N/A
<i>Life of Jonathan Swift</i>	15 Nov. 1875	15s	N/A
<i>The Life of Charles Dickens</i> , (London: Chapman & Hall, 1872-3)			
Vol I	4 Dec. 1871	12s	£2 2s
Vol II	15 Nov. 1872	14s	
Vol III	31 Jan. 1874	16s	

This data has been collected from publishers' advertisements in a number of periodicals: The *Daily News*, *Examiner*, *Graphic*, *Morning Post*, *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Standard*, accessed via the British Library's Nineteenth Century Newspapers Online Database (http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn/bncn_about.htm; last accessed 8 April 2010) and supplemented with data from the *Publisher's Circular*. These advertisements are often unreliable in terms of release date, and the dates should therefore be seen as approximate.

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i. John Forster: manuscripts and published works

I have consulted the following archives, which hold partial manuscripts, letters and other documents relating to Forster:

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Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

Berg Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

British Library, London.

Forster Collection Correspondence, National Art Library, V&A, London.

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertfordshire.

National Library of Scotland Manuscript Collections, Edinburgh.

Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

University College London Special Collections, London.

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Arrest of the Five Members. Forster Collection, National Art Library, F.48.G. Box 3.

Sir John Eliot. Marked with publishers' or composers' notes, and galley proofs. Unbound, paper varies and is occasionally Lunacy Commission headed notepaper. Forster Collection, National Art Library, Forster 47.B. Boxes 1-6; 48.G. Box .7.

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- Another edn, ed. G T Bettany (Ward, Lock & Co, 1890).
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