REVIEW ESSAYS

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ART FOR THE NATION: SIR CHARLES EASTLAKE AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

By Hilary Fraser

VISITORS ENTERING THE NATIONAL GALLERY from Trafalgar Square by the grand Portico Entrance immediately encounter all the familiar features of the modern museum experience: legions of school children with clipboards and harried teachers, tourists studying travel guides and plans of the gallery, cafes to refresh the weary exhibition-goer to the right, a shop selling tasteful souvenirs and postcards to the left. But this is also ineluctably a Victorian institution, reminding us that modern museum culture has its origins in the nineteenth century, and the temporary exhibition *Art for the Nation: Sir Charles Eastlake at the National Gallery* shows how significant a figure Charles Eastlake was in shaping the National Gallery as a public institution and, more broadly, establishing modern principles of museum collection and display.

Though founded in 1824, the National Gallery moved to its current home, designed by William Wilkins, in 1838, and between1843, when Charles Eastlake was appointed Keeper, and 1855, when he became the Gallery's first Director, its collection more than doubled in size. Under his decade-long directorship, he purchased over 150 pictures for the Gallery, and it was further transformed from a somewhat arbitrary, patchy collection, with no clear acquisitions policy or display principles, into a modern, professionally run public institution. Given Eastlake's pivotal role in the history of the National Gallery and of the Victorian and modern museum, and in light of current critical interest in Victorian museum cultures, as well as in our own contemporary museological practices, an exhibition on how the very idea of "Art for the Nation" was developed, celebrating his influential work as Director, and held in the very heart of the institution he did so much to define, seems important and timely.

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Figure 23. (Color online) Frederic Leighton, *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna Is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence*. Oil on canvas. 1855. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2012.

We mount the stairs and, turning to walk towards Room One on our left, are struck, even before entering the exhibition itself, by a painting which hangs in the vestibule, above the Portico Entrance. *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna Is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* (1855) (Figure 23) by Frederic Leighton was produced in the same year as Charles Eastlake assumed the Directorship, and it seems to embody his vision. Leighton was then a young painter only beginning to establish his reputation, though he was eventually to become, as Eastlake himself was, from 1850 until his death in 1865, President of the Royal Academy. Leighton's picture, based on Vasari's account of the dawn of the Renaissance, depicts the celebrated thirteenth-century artist, crowned with laurels, processing before his painting with his pupil Giotto, and following them a line of other early Renaissance artists. Painted and exhibited at the very historical moment that Eastlake was thinking about the acquisition and display of a national collection representing the history of Western art, its linear frieze-like composition irresistibly suggests the Vasarian idea of the progress of art, running right up to the present day artist, and metapictorially invites the viewer to draw comparisons between the acclaimed Florentine picture and the modern painting that represented its enthusiastic reception to the art-going public of 1855. "Everyone talks of [it]," wrote Dante Gabriel Rossetti to his friend William Allingham (*Letters* 1: 252), and they did so in ways that recapitulated the hype that, according to Vasari, circulated around Cimabue's work. The reviewer in the *Art Journal*, picking up his cue from Leighton's Vasarian subject, singles out his painting as the "one picture in the collection that will mark this year . . . as an epoch in British Art," and sees it as "prophetic of a future," not only for the young artist who produced it, but for the art of the nation ("The Royal Academy" 169–70).

The painting is a paean to the idea of the artist as heroic public figure, to a particular view of the history of art that Eastlake shared and promoted, and to art as a public good to be nationally celebrated and supported, and its prominent placement in the National Gallery today suggests that such ideals are valorised as much now as they were in 1855, when the

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picture stole the show at the Royal Academy Exhibition and was purchased by the Queen. It also rather handily presents us with an image that, despite its historical subject, prepares us for thinking about what the Victorian art world was like when Charles Eastlake took up his appointment as Director. It speaks of a new enthusiasm for early Italian art, for example, which Eastlake himself had pursued and promoted since he first became involved in the formation of the national collection, and which was one of the contexts for the newest movement in contemporary art, Pre-Raphaelitism. It exemplifies the idea of an orderly chronological history that demonstrates the evolutionary development of painting, and emphasizes the importance of a school of art, produced in a particular place at a particular time, both shaping principles for Eastlake in his vision for the Gallery. And in its depiction of a spontaneous popular display of appreciation for art, a street party that includes princes and prelates and poets among the ordinary citizens, it shows the ennobling effects of art for the nation, the very mission that Eastlake was appointed to fulfill for a Gallery intended to be accessible equally to the wealthy inhabitants of West London and the poorer communities of the East End.

Art for the Nation: Sir Charles Eastlake at the National Gallery was a small but perfectly formed exhibition, occupying only one room and featuring a mere dozen mixed media items, but deftly encompassing a great deal about Eastlake's life, mission, and achievements during his tenure as Director. It was curated in such a way as to convey the details of Eastlake's career and also to emphasise the crucial role he played in forming the modern identity of the National Gallery and, indeed, the culture of the modern museum more broadly. The visitor is invited to ask questions of a gallery experience that is often taken for granted. Why and how was its collection acquired? Why are pictures organized and displayed as they are; how are they conserved and catalogued; and, crucially, how were their attributions authenticated? The labelling of the five Renaissance paintings on display focuses less on the works themselves than on how and why Eastlake came to purchase them for the Gallery, revealing how astonishingly hands-on his role was in the days when acquiring a collection involved the Director in making annual demanding journeys around continental Europe and negotiating directly with owners and dealers. Supporting documents, in the form of maps, letters, journals, sketches and other material objects, add texture to the narrative, and also demonstrate how he brought his knowledge of museum exhibition practice in Germany to bear upon the display of the Gallery's collection.

This thoughtfully conceived show, designed to unveil the vision behind the works of art on display, takes us back to the very early days of connoisseurship, when the profession and discipline of art history were only just emerging, and into the lives and work of two individuals who were at the forefront of this new field. For the formidably scholarly Charles Eastlake was married to an equally formidable art historian and critic who, as Elizabeth Rigby, had already established a reputation for her learned and groundbreaking art writing, translation, and reviewing before she married him in 1849, and who worked side by side with him throughout his tenure as Director of the National Gallery.

The exhibition begins with a brief look at Charles Eastlake's early career as a painter before he made the crucial transition to becoming one of the foremost art historians and arts administrators of his time. Although he never achieved the highest rank among painters, his artistic education and his extensive travels in continental Europe are shown to have been critical formative experiences for his later role, which involved a great deal of travel, hard-nosed negotiation with local owners and dealers, and connoisseurship. His reduced copy of

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Figure 24. (Color online) Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna of the Meadow*. Oil and egg on synthetic panel, transferred from wood. c. 1500. The National Gallery, London.

Titian's *Assassination of Saint Peter Martyr* (1830), displayed as the first item in the show, and produced as he completed his fourteen-year residency in Italy, bears witness to his close scrutiny and understanding of the Renaissance master's technique and use of colour, as does his journal of1830, which includes detailed notes on Titian. This early training was to stand him in good stead when he took up his post as Director, and was given an annual grant of £10,000 to acquire new work for the Gallery, with the aim that the entire history of Western European painting be represented in the national collection.

One of the first works Eastlake acquired for the Gallery, and one that exemplifies his taste for the sumptuous colouring and atmospheric landscapes of the Venetian Renaissance, was by Titian's master. Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna of the Meadow* (c 1500) (Figure 24) was purchased for £641, and the exhibition includes both the painting itself and material that reveals Eastlake's persistence and his wiliness in making the deal. It seems that the owner sold the painting as a work by Marco Basaiti, a contemporary of Bellini whose pictures did not command as high a price, and it is attributed to him in subsequent National Gallery catalogues. However, the exhibition includes a letter written by Lady Eastlake that makes it clear that her husband recognized its true worth as a "perfectly exquisite" Bellini, which, she confides, "is a dead secret for the present" (*Journals* 2: 103–04).

The attention given by the exhibition to this kind of contextual material is one of its strengths. Eastlake's passport, for example, which includes the names of his wife and his manservant Nicholas Tucker, is displayed, giving evidence in the form of consular stamps of how extensively they travelled, and a map showing the route the Eastlakes took round Italy when they went on a purchasing tour from August to October 1858 to buy early Italian works

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for the Gallery and also for their own private collection likewise shows the magnitude of their enterprise. Included also is one of Eastlake's travel notebooks, open at the page where he records his views on the Pisanello painting, and a guidebook to Venice which includes notes he made in the margins on Titian's *Assassination of Saint Peter Martyr*. And, to complete the picture, the travel diary from this period of his Travelling Agent, Otto Mündler, is displayed, full of detailed notes on his research trips across Europe in search of new acquisitions for the Gallery. The cumulative effect of all this material adds texture to our understanding of what went into the formation of the national collection, and gives a marvellous sense of what the curators aptly name "the thrill of the chase." It also underscores the hazards of transporting artworks from mainland Europe to England at that time, recording calamities like the loss at sea of a Bergognone lunette for the National Gallery and a painting by Fra Angelico intended for their own collection: "The vessel collided with another – how or why we don't know . . . money can't compensate," wrote Lady Eastlake in a letter of November 14, 1860. "The picture would have been the pride of our collection" (*Journals* 2: 157).

As well as the Bellini, they acquired Pisanello's *Virgin and Child with Saints* (1435–41) and Bono da Ferrara's *Saint Jerome in a Landscape* (c 1440) from the Costabili collection in Ferrara on their 1858 trip, again at a very good price, because the work of the early Ferrarese school was not at that time widely appreciated. Both paintings are displayed in the exhibition, as are other purchases from this period, Ambrogio Bergognone's *Virgin and Child with Saints* (c 1490) and Vincenzo Catena's *Saint Jerome in his Study* (c 1510). Where paintings are referred to in the labels but not included in the exhibition, as in the case of Giovanni Bellini's *Assassination of Saint Peter Martyr* (c 1507), donated by Lady Eastlake in 1870, the visitor is told where to locate it in the Gallery (Room 61 in this instance).

The curators of the exhibition, Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, show by way of their helpful labels and exhibited material how Eastlake's work involved being at once a sleuth and a connoisseur, and they explain how he arrived at his attributions by a combination of close examination of evidence supplied by the work itself (such as signatures, dates, and inscriptions), research in the archives and critical literature, consultation with other experts, and most importantly what they call his "proto-scientific research into painters' techniques and preparation of pigments and varnish." They explain how his careful and discerning scholarship led to new attributions and greater understanding of artists such as the fifteenth-century Milanese painters Andrea Solario and Ambrogio Bergognone, and a pioneering book, *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*, the first volume of which appeared in 1847,the second posthumously in 1869.

They also show how, using his knowledge of museum practice in Germany, Eastlake transformed the way in which the Gallery's collections were displayed, paying particular attention to how pictures were conserved, and how they were framed and displayed in historically sensitive ways. For example, he experimented with the colour of the walls that provided the backdrop to the paintings displayed and, rather than crowding too many pictures in a space, he encouraged greater selection and the arrangement of displays according to country and date. Such practices are now so naturalised as to become invisible to most museum-goers, but for the Victorians it must have represented a radical change to their viewing experience. A nice example of Eastlake's enduring legacy is included in the exhibition in the form of a travel notebook kept by Sir William Boxall, his successor as Director of the National Gallery, open at the page where his secretary has transcribed Eastlake's comments on display practices – the colour of walls, lighting, the hanging and

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design of picture frames – he had observed at the Dresden Gallery. Again, this is material that helps the visitor understand the principles of display that underpin the exhibition itself, and invites reflection upon not only Eastlake's choice of an historically appropriate frame for Pisanello's *Virgin and Child*, for example, but its own installation and, by extension, the installation of pictures throughout the National Gallery today.

Jonah Siegel has described the Victorian museum-going experience as highly "scripted," the spectator's view of the art work mediated even more insistently than the modern blockbuster exhibition visitor's by an array of captions, commentaries, guidebooks (*Desire and Excess* xxvi). The curators of this exhibition show in their own helpful wall labels how influential Eastlake was in this regard also, improving the information provided to visitors about the collection through the accurate labelling of pictures and, from 1856, the publishing of catalogues.

There is no catalogue to the Eastlake exhibition; however, Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon have published an excellent accompanying monograph, *Art for the Nation: The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World*, which gives a greater place to Elizabeth Eastlake than the exhibition can afford, and a strong sense of the Eastlakes' personal and professional relationship. Furthermore the exhibition was timed to coincide with the publication by the Gallery and the Walpole Society of the complete set of thirty-six travel diaries kept by Sir Charles Eastlake, also edited by Dr. Avery-Quash. Together these books succeed in reanimating for the twenty-first century a couple who were at least as important, both in their own day and enduringly, as others, such as John Ruskin and Sir Henry Cole, whose fame has eclipsed them in subsequent histories of the Victorian art world. Valuable as these volumes are in restoring the Eastlakes' place in Victorian cultural history, though, it was the exhibition at the centre of the very Gallery that Charles Eastlake, with the support of his wife, can be said to have formed, that for me most effectively and movingly conveyed the magnitude of that contribution and legacy both to the Victorian museological project and to our own.

Birkbeck College, University of London

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APOCALYPSE THEN AND NOW

By Lynda Nead

John Martin: Apocalypse (Tate Britain, September 2011–January 2012) is an exhibition of and for our times. The first major survey of the artist's large – and they are very large – paintings, the exhibition and its popularity can tell us a lot about both the Victorians and twenty-first century Elizabethans. Martin (1789–1854) is an artist of whom it can confidently be said that he had fallen out of fashion. If Victorian painting has audiences today, then it is for Pre-Raphaelite painting and perhaps the enduring fascination of modern-life painters such as W. P. Frith. Martin, however, represents a very different aspect of Victorian art and society: the sublime; the grand manner; the religious epic. He was also a showman and an engineer, outside of the cultural establishment but socially ambitious. He was a man with a social conscience who also had a keen sense of entrepreneurship. Martin, it turns out, was a true Victorian, who possessed all the complexities and frailties that we associate with that historical period. The skill of the exhibition at Tate Britain was to recapture some of his popularity and significance to Victorian audiences and to reinterpret Martin for modern times. His huge canvases *The Fall of Babylon* (1819) and *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851–53) (Figure 25), *The Last Judgement* (1853) (Figure 26) are recast as the disaster movies of his day, appealing to a similar popular taste for apocalyptic terror as films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Independence Day* (1996) do now. The exhibition poster looked more as though it was advertising a movie than an art show with short press quotes and even star ratings; related promotional material also emphasized the artist's contemporary relevance. Martin's work was being brought into the twenty-first century and into the cultural framework and competencies of audiences today.

As the exhibition revealed, however, Martin might well have been happy with this reinterpretation. Although not all nineteenth-century artists came from the wealthier classes, Martin certainly did not conform to the image of the artist as gentleman. He came from a poor working-class family in Northumberland and trained initially as a coach painter in Newcastle. With little art training he came to London at the beginning of the nineteenth century and worked as a decorator of glass and ceramics and as a drawing master. After a few years of patching together a living through teaching and selling his drawings, from 1811 he started exhibiting spectacular works of art and gaining public attention. Although he was able within a few years to purchase a large family house in Marylebone, his social status remained for him a fragile and sensitive issue. One of the most fascinating and poignant objects in the exhibition was an ebonized cabinet, designed by Martin himself, to store his papers and engineering plans and to display the medals and honours that he had received from European royalty in recognition of his work. To the man whose background,

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Figure 25. (Color online) John Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath*. Oil on canvas. 1851–53. Tate.



Figure 26. (Color online) John Martin, *The Last Judgement*. Oil on canvas. c. 1849–53. Tate.

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in his own words, "could scarcely be humbler," upward mobility had to be put on show for reassurance and for others to see, but how many other successful men might have felt like Martin in these years? Beginning his career as an artist at the start of the Regency period, he bought his house in the final years of that era and built his cabinet as Victoria came to the throne – a span of twenty years in which his self-improvement had been meteoric and an instance of the precariousness of social identity that Martin shared with others of his contemporaries.

Martin's wealth came primarily from his print business. Because his paintings were so large and labour intensive, he could not make a living from selling these alone, and so he skilfully exploited the diverse cultural spaces and media of late-Georgian and early-Victorian England. Like other artist-entrepreneurs in this period (see for example, Benjamin Robert Haydon or William Holman Hunt) Martin sent his big works on tour and showed them in theatres and music halls; he held a one-man show at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, a place famous for its popular entertainment and displays of practical science. His publicity boasted about the vast numbers of people who had seen his work; shortly after his death a flyer (illustrated in the excellent accompanying catalogue) for an exhibition of his *Last Judgement* triptych claimed: "These pictures have been inspected by upwards of 2,000,000 persons. Size of each Picture, 13 Feet by 10 Feet. OPEN from 10 until 5 DAILY. . .." This is the language of the show rather than the gallery, but it gives us a much richer and more complex picture of visual culture and, indeed, of high art in Victorian Britain than can be gained by looking at Victorian painting through the lens of the Royal Academy of Arts. The flyer suggests that the boundaries between high culture and popular/show culture were extremely porous and that artists were able to exploit the commercial strategies of popular entertainment in order to extend and develop their audiences. Inevitably, perhaps, Martin's willingness to explore the extent of the cultural marketplace impacted on his critical reception. Although some described him as a poet and genius, others believed that he was pandering to popular and ignorant taste and simply repeating one idea over and over again. William Hazlitt dismissed him as "gaudy" and Samuel Taylor Coleridge described him as "a poor creature. It seems as if he looked at Nature through bits of stained glass" (qtd. in *John Martin: Apocalypse* 13). His work was seen by many critics as cheap, tawdry, unschooled, and popular, while for John Ruskin it did not count as art at all: "Martin's works are merely a common manufacture, as much makeable to order as a tea-tray or a coal-scuttle – such as may be made and sold by the most respectable people, to any extent, without the least discredit to their characters" (from Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, qtd. in *John Martin: Apocalypse* 13). The terms in which Martin's work is dismissed are the same; they question the status of the artist and the art, contending that both have been tainted by populism, and that the work is mechanical and lacks the crucial factor that turns an image into Art: Imagination. In this respect, Martin's career once again illuminates a critically important point about the state of the British art world in this period, engaged in a struggle with mechanical reproduction and popular entertainment and resisting the inevitable transformation into a modern commercial art world.

Martin's involvement with print culture is well represented in the exhibition and also highlights a significant element of the Victorian art world. Following the success of his mezzotint series of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Martin set up a print-making business from which he produced a number of large, high-quality prints of Biblical and other subjects. In an age of increasing mass reproduction of original images, copyright became a focus of legal

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Figure 27. (Color online) John Martin, *Belshazzar's Feast*. Oil on canvas. 1820. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. (This version was not included in the exhibition.)

dispute. To own the copyright to a popular image was to possess the most profitable part of the art process, and Martin protected his rights assiduously. The Tate display sets out the story of Martin's 1820 painting, *Belshazzar's Feast* (Figure 27) as a case study of such a legal dispute. A key painting that really launched Martin's career, it depicts a feast in the palace of the Babylonian king during which a divine hand appears and writes a mysterious text that is later interpreted as prophesying the downfall of Belshazzar's empire. When the painting was first exhibited it was so popular with the public that it had to be protected by a barrier from the crush of the crowd. As with many of his epic paintings, Martin produced an interpretive text to accompany the painting and the exhibition offers the visitor a "taste" of this original viewing in the form of a pamphlet reproducing Martin's original outlines of three of his paintings, along with keys to their subject matter. While *Belshazzar's Feast* was still on show he sold it to his former employer, the glass-painter William Collins. Collins, being a sharp businessman, required Martin to sign a contract agreeing not to make any reproductions of the image; the purchase of *Belshazzar's Feast* was an investment and Collins did not want anyone else profiting from his valuable property. Accordingly, the picture went on a huge British tour around the end of which Martin announced the publication of a print of the painting. Invoking his original contract, Collins began legal action which Martin contested by claiming that he had agreed not to make a reproduction of the painting sold to Collins and that his print was based on a small sketch that he had painted whilst working on the original.

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Figure 28. (Color online) John Martin, *The Plains of Heaven*. Oil on canvas. 1851–3. Tate.

He had the right to publish the engraving, for the copyright agreement had only covered the large-scale painting and any subsequent versions. Martin won the case and presumably lost a patron; he made a very substantial amount of money from the print and its subsequent versions and the painting became part of a long history of reworking and translation – it became the subject of painted copies, a dioramic view, a panorama, a coloured wood engraving and a glass painting. This was the Victorian world of images to which Martin and other painters in this period belonged and which this inventive exhibition so carefully evokes.

The coup of the Tate Britain exhibition and the element that most effectively captured the vibrancy and potency of this world of visual entertainment was the son et lumière presentation of Martin's great triptych *The Last Judgement*. In a recreation of the visual and sound effects used in its original display, the installation (designed by Uninvited Guests and Fuel) took the viewer into a darkened lecture room where lights, commentary, and sound animated the images and created an incredibly embodied and visceral experience. The three paintings of the triptych are: *The Last Judgement*; *The Plains of Heaven* (1851–53) (Figure 28); and *The Great Day of His Wrath*. The subjects are taken from the Book of Revelation; the central painting, *The Last Judgement*, shows God sitting in judgement surrounded by twenty-four elders; on one side, the damned, including the whore of Babylon, plunge into a pit, while on the other side of the canvas the good are shown enjoying the plains of Heaven. *The Plains of Heaven* itself depicts the good in a heavenly landscape and the New Jerusalem in a distant background; while the third painting, *The Great Day of His*

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Wrath, represents the moment in Revelation when the sixth seal is broken and an entire city is destroyed by the cataclysmic forces of nature. Simply hung on the walls of a gallery, these large, biblical landscapes would certainly have an impact on the visitor, but placed in this different environment, where the purpose is thrill and sensation, the viewer gains a new understanding of nineteenth-century painting. Martin clearly understood the effects of artificial illumination on his paintings; he had been a glass painter and knew about the richness of tone and narrative that could be achieved through different media, and through these techniques he brought his art into the world of popular Victorian optical entertainment. Richard D. Altick evoked something of the wonder of this culture in his marvellous study, *The Shows of London*; now galleries like Tate Britain are contributing to this scholarship by taking paintings out of the modern gallery setting and allowing them, where appropriate, to be sensational. As Ian Christie observed in an article on the "new media" world of the nineteenth century, it was an age of showmanship and spectacle; big paintings vied with the scale of panoramas, dioramas, and projected images, and audiences developed a taste for the huge. It was a visual world rather like our own, with IMAX and 3-D films transforming our own image world and perhaps making us more sympathetic to the pictorial ambitions of Martin.

Many of Martin's paintings depict the fall of great biblical and ancient kingdoms and empires, but Martin spent the last years of his life at the heart of a growing imperial power: the city of London. In 1848 he moved to a house in Chelsea overlooking the Thames, from where the infrastructure of the great metropolis, its transport and trade, would have been apparent in all its strengths and failures. Martin had what might be described as a "second career" as an engineer, developing plans for the disposal of sewerage and the supply of clean water to the capital. The work of Edwin Chadwick and Joseph Bazalgette on the cleansing and improvement of Victorian London is now reasonably well known, but Martin got there first, suggesting from as early as the 1820s various ways of embanking the Thames, bringing clean water to the city, and creating beautiful parks. The Tate exhibition displayed a small number of his engineering plans, including a fine lithograph from 1828 showing the subsidiary benefits of supplying fresh water to central London through the improvement of Hyde Park, Green Park, and St. James's Park (http://collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk/collage/app?service=external/FullScreenImage&sp = Zjohn+martin+hyde+park&sp=18820&sp=X&sp=2). Martin regarded his engineering schemes as a viable business venture, although he acknowledged that he had expended "two-thirds of my time, and a very large portion of my pecuniary means" on these plans (qtd. in *John Martin: Apocalypse* 153). In the 1840s he addressed, like others in the period, the unproductive disposal of sewage by founding the Metropolitan Sewage Manure Company which proposed to carry London's sewage to the countryside where it could be used as fertilizer. Martin's proposals were rejected by the Royal Commission on Improving the Metropolis, but he remains a key player in this very Victorian sanitation enterprise even though his role has been overlooked or placed in the shadow of other more famous figures.

London in the nineteenth century was imagined as a modern Babylon, and many writers drew on the image of the doomed ancient city to invoke the wealth, splendour, and possible demise of the nineteenth-century metropolis. Babylon and other great ancient empires such as Rome were used as images of London's greatness and also as warnings of the dangers of hubris. These great trading centres and capitals of empires had succumbed to luxury and sensuality, and their ends had been apocalyptic; Victorian Babylon could look to its

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ancient predecessors and find not only signs of its own magnificence but also traces of its inevitable destruction (*Victorian Babylon* 3). Amongst Martin's most powerful images and included in the exhibition are paintings such as *The Fall of Babylon* (1819), *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822), and *The Fall of Nineveh* (1828); as well as offering audiences spectacular images of ancient catastrophe they must surely have also produced a frisson of recognition that London could suffer the same fate in the future. This is also the thrilling appeal of recent disaster movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *2012* (2009). There is, however, a far more chilling representation of imperial decline in a drawing in this exhibition made by John Martin's brother, Jonathan, while he was a patient in Bethlem Hospital. Based on the composition of *The Fall of Nineveh*, it brings the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral and the imperial lion into a convulsive collision with the architecture of ancient Nineveh as the great city and its population burn. It is an image from nightmares, produced by a man who had been incarcerated for attempting to burn down York Minster. John Martin remained faithful to and supported his brother; this personal dimension to Martin's iconography adds further layers to our understanding of the significance of his work.

So just what is it about John Martin's work that appeals to twenty-first century audiences and that was so effectively captured at the exhibition at Tate Britain? Do audiences today still experience the power and sensation of his works, or are the artist and his works Victorian curiosities? I am persuaded that the resurrection of Martin's reputation and the attraction of apocalyptic images do have a particular resonance in our own catastrophic days, but not in the way one might first imagine. A recent comment by Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek may offer one way of understanding the popularity of Martin and the visual culture of disaster today; referring to the tranche of disaster movies in recent years, he observed: "We talk all the time about the end of the world, but it is much easier for us to imagine the end of the world than a small change in the political system" (qtd. in www.lacan.com).Rather than being an engagement with contemporary crisis, the cultural fascination with the apocalypse can be seen instead as a form of escapism or displacement. This is why *John Martin: Apocalypse* is an exhibition of and for our times.

Birkbeck College, University of London

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EXHIBITING DICKENS AT 200

By Anne Humpherys

THE YEAR 2012 MARKED THE TWO-HUNDREDTH birthday of Charles Dickens. As a result, there has been a natural rush among institutions on both sides of the Atlantic – universities, museums, libraries – to commemorate this bicentennial with lectures, conferences, movie festivals, and exhibitions. Having sampled seven of the last, I find myself asking: what is the best way for an institution to exhibit what makes Dickens worth commemorating? After all, even if he was, as Vincent van Gogh said, the only writer "in my opinion, who is *so* much a painter and a black-and-white artist" (Bills 1), the problem in commemorating him in an exhibition is how to turn words on a page into images or in some cases, sounds.

The exhibitions under review here answer this question in different ways, though one thing they all share is the desire to highlight their own Dickens holdings. The Morgan Library's *Dickens at 200* does only this, mainly with letters. But since the Morgan made the letters and transcriptions available online (they remain so after the exhibition closed), this limited format has a really useful aftermath. The Watts Gallery had to borrow heavily for its *Dickens and the Artists*, since its holdings are mainly limited to G. F. Watts and related material; the loans, however, generated an excellent catalogue. (Many of the Watts Gallery's borrowings, incidentally, came from the Dickens Museum on Doughty Street in London which, surprisingly, was closed for renovations during the whole of the bicentennial year, though they do have an online presence.)

The rest of the exhibitions variously balanced the institutions' holdings and loans or reproductions. What links them is their different contextualizations of Dickens the writer and his work. One exhibition, furthermore – the Museum of London's *Dickens and London* – presented the viewer with a vision of the museum of the future by going far beyond manuscripts, printed books, illustrations, and so forth to a multimedia extravaganza both in the exhibition hall and online.

The first exhibition I saw, *Dickens at 200*, was at the Morgan Library. While the title might lead the observer to expect to learn where Dickens and his works stand in the year 2012, in fact the exhibition, in one room, was designed to highlight the Morgan's Dickens holdings. As the brochure states, the Morgan Library and Museum's collection of Dickens's manuscripts and letters "is the largest in the United States and is one of the two greatest collections in the world." (The other is the Victoria and Albert Museum.)

Included under glass and on the walls were the manuscripts of *A Christmas Carol* and *Our Mutual Friend* along with a handful of early parts and book editions of other of his published works, some plates and illustrations, and a few photographs, including a rare one by Robert Hindry Mason which shows Dickens reading in a chair in 1864. There were also playbills for some of Dickens's private theatricals and, the largest category, twenty letters (out of the Morgan's 1500), for which the library provided a printed transcription. These were organized under six headings: a kind letter to a Sophie Verena, who had asked him about his writing processes, and then letters about Philanthropy, America, Mesmerism, Christmas Books, and the "Story Weaver," a title Dickens gave himself when describing his writing process. While it is unlikely that many of the viewers of the exhibition took the time to read through all twenty letters at the exhibition, the letters and their transcriptions can be read on

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the online exhibition, which also contains the sixty-eight-page manuscript of *A Christmas Carol*. Nonetheless, I am not sure that rows of manuscript letters lead to much interest for the casual, the amateur, or even the professional Dickensian viewer. That doesn't mean there wasn't an impact on the viewer of the Morgan exhibition: this viewer at least came away impressed, not for the first time, by the richness of the Morgan's manuscript and printed books collection, which may have been the point.

This exhibition also made me wonder what would be the most effective way to represent a writer in an exhibition? Part of an answer began to emerge at the next exhibit I saw, *Dickens and Popular Culture* at the Senate House Library of the University of London. Though again the show was designed to highlight the special collection print holdings of the library and also the extensive private collection of Professor Michael Slater, who was curator of this exhibition, unlike the Morgan exhibit this one had a point to make about Dickens, namely how his early reading of popular fiction and experience of the theater fed into his writing and in turn how his writing fed back into popular culture. This involved the presentation of some of the sources of "his youthful readings of popular literature and exposure to theatre," as the website for the exhibition put it, and then some of the ways these early influences went back into popular culture.

This was a small exhibition, five cases in all, devoted to three topics. The first two, "Dickens's Early Reading" and "Dickens and the Stage," were mainly represented by printed materials like the *Arabian Nights*, which Dickens loved and Scrooge remembered reading as a boy. In the label on Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* we are reminded that this book was the indirect source of Dickens's early pen name "Boz," drawn from "Moses" in *Vicar* which morphed into "Boses" and finally "Boz." A complete list of all the displays and the informative labels for each are still available on the exhibition's website.

The last group of printed materials and artifacts, labeled "Great Expectations: Dickens Plagiarized and Popularized," had a remarkable document, a "Proclamation" issued on behalf of Dickens by Chapman and Hall in 1838, in which the author attacked the "piratical dramatists and plagiarists who unabashedly exploited his works" and proclaimed himself as "the only true and lawful 'Boz'." (See the *Dickens and Popular Culture* website.) This section also included a printed object that surprised and pleased: a mock Cambridge examination paper dated 1857, which tested the student's knowledge of *Pickwick Papers*. There was a pack of face cards (c. 1865) with characters from Dickens's novels and a selection from 1912 of some fifty cigarette cards from John Player and Son, with Sam Weller, Bob Sawyer, Toby Weller, Mr. Squeers, Newman Noggs, and Fanny Squeers represented. All these objects point to one of the conclusions I drew from my exhibition experiences: the impact of Dickens on his contemporaries and early twentieth-century admirers came primarily from his early novels, a useful reminder to post-1960 Dickens enthusiasts that his near contemporaries valued his humorous and lovable early characters and his innocent and vulnerable young girls more than we do and that his nineteenth-century fame was based on different cultural values than ours.

The *Dickens and His World* exhibit at the Bodleian Library at Oxford was one of the richer contextualizations of Dickens's work. This richness came primarily from the many items drawn from the incomparable John Johnson Collection of Ephemera at the library. The theme of the exhibition, beautifully realized, was, as the exhibition label stated, "the relationship between the fictional worlds that Charles Dickens created in his novels and the historical reality in which he lived." The resulting exhibition managed both to highlight

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the library's unique holdings and at the same time to draw meaningful connections between Dickens's novels and the library's ephemera collection. In the section on "The Diversions of London," Mansell's 1847 *Guide to the Amusements of London* is side by side with quotations from Dickens about many of these amusements.

Though in only one room somewhat dimly lit, the space was imaginatively used with a huge panorama of London in 1844 from the *Pictorial Times* and a map with Dickens's homes marked as well as his schools and points of interest from his novels. The exhibition was divided into sections such as "Dickens and the Theatre," the highlight of which for me was a terrific c. 1875 toy theater set up to perform *Oliver Twist*. You can buy a reproduction of this theater complete with all characters in the Bodleian Shop.

The exhibition also has displays of illustrations and the part publications of Dickens's novels, but wonderfully it shows us the *back covers* of some of the parts so we can see the advertisements, such as "Heal and Sons Illustrated Catalogue of Bedsteads" on the back the third number of *Bleak House*. The section "Crime and Punishment" demonstrates the interesting juxtaposition of contemporary materials, for example, an 1849 broadsheet of the "Execution of the Mannings" next to a letter to the editor of the *Times* from Dickens protesting that public execution and a quotation from the executioner in *Barnaby Rudge*. This section also contains an 1848 "Tables for calculating the quantity of provisions consumed by any number of persons according to the Workhouse Dietary." Additional sections organized on the same principle of juxtaposition are "Evenings at Home," including music scores of popular songs; "Dickens's Christmas Books"; and "Dickens and Railways."

The section from which I learned something new was "Catherine Dickens and Food," which contained fascinating advertisements for food products and implements, including a "peripurist" which boiled, steamed, or cooked all manner of foods, and a copy of Catherine Dickens's 1852 book (published under the name of Lady Maria Clutterbuck) *What Shall We Have For Dinner? Satisfactorily Answered by Numerous Bills of Fare for from Two to Eighteen Persons*. Catherine, the label tells us, did all the catering for the Dickens establishment, including all the parties.

One can also look closely at many theatrical posters for some eighteen plus dramatic performances of Dickens's novels as well as posters for his own amateur theatricals in the section "Dickens Performed and Dickens Performing." There is an advertisement for Dickens's "Final Reading" as well as his own reading of "The Story of Little Dombey." One could finish the exhibition by putting on earphones and listening to passages about the characters his contemporaries most loved: the Varden family at the Maypole, the Nicklebys, and Sam Weller, and then wind up in the gift shop, where there was a grand array of calendars, coffee cups, pens, and other bric-a-brac, including a reproduction of the *Oliver Twist* toy theater, for sale. Gift shop items are *de rigueur* now for all exhibitions, but these at the Bodleian are the most extensive of any I saw and a reminder, if we needed one, of the continuing consumer interest in Dickens's life, work, and characters.

However, in some ways, *Dickens and Music*, at the Royal Academy of Music, though one of the more unassuming of the exhibitions I saw (no brochure, no catalogue, nothing to buy), was one of the more informative in the sense that it provided an unusual contextualization of Dickens and his work and suggested ways a writer can be both heard and visualized. One key element shaping this exhibition was that Dickens's sister Fanny was a student at the Academy on two occasions; one of her stays overlapped Dickens's stint at the blacking factory. The Academy has a sizable collection of items related to the musical interests of

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both, including an unpublished letter by Dickens, in which he gives permission to Fanny Stirling to do a reading of Mrs. Nickleby, and the score of a musical composition by Fanny Dickens.

Housed in one small room, the exhibition is divided into five "chapters" and some CDs of music connected to Dickens, which one can listen to but not buy. Chapter 1, "Dickens's Musical World," explores Dickens's and his sister's connections to the Victorian musical world through the popular music brother and sister played and sang together, as well as the street music that irritated him, while Chapter 2, "Our Mutual Academy Friends," charts Fanny's progress at the Academy, as well as providing performance notes and a holograph of the 1873 opera of *Cricket on the Hearth* by Sir Alexander MacKenzie. There is a folio of manuscript songs for the 1836 comic opera "The Village Coquettes," for which Dickens wrote the libretto and through which, so the label tells us, Dickens had his first encounter with John Forster, who wrote an unfavorable review. The music was by a well-known composer John Hullah, who was at the Academy with Fanny.

Chapter 3, "Music for Hard Times," stresses the popular song "The Song of the Shirt," but most interesting is information that Hullah, the composer of the comic opera, became known for teaching music to working-class men, and as a result Dickens invited him to teach music to the women at Urania Cottage. Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to "Dickens Set to Music," with scores of songs inspired by Little Nell, Paul Dombey, Dolly Varden, *The Chimes*, and Sam Weller, again demonstrating the preferences of his contemporaries for the early works, though there is a duet for David and Emily composed by J. H. Tully. The exhibition closes with "A Dance with Mr. Dickens" and scores for a number of quadrilles and polkas named variously "*The Cricket on the Hearth*," "*The Chimes*," "The Sam Weller Two-Step," and "Little Nell Waltzes."

The last exhibition I actually saw was *Dickens and the Artists* at the Watts Gallery in Surrey. Because of the specialized holdings of the Watts Gallery, this exhibition was less about their own holdings and more about, as the brochure says, "what Dickens thought about art and artists and what artists thought about Dickens." Housed in two good-sized rooms and supported by a beautiful catalogue published by Yale, the exhibition highlighted Dickens's strong likes and dislikes about art: his reverence for Hogarth, whose prints he collected and displayed on the staircase of Gads Hill, and his strong distaste for the hyperrealism of the Pre-Raphaelites, as seen in his vitriolic attack on John Everett Millais's "Christ in the House of his Parents" in *Household Words* in June 1850. The first section of the exhibition, "Dickens as an Art Critic," begins with "Dickens's Visual Imagination," largely taken up with the iconic 1870 "Dickens's Dream" by R. W. Buss. After that, the room is devoted to sections such as "Dickens's Art Collection" (represented by works by Daniel Maclise, William Frith, and Marcus Stone as well as an 1842 caricature by Charles Frederick Stanfield of "Logan Rock with Dickens, Stanfield, Maclise and Forster on holiday in Cornwall") and "Dickens and the Old Masters," about which we are informed that he liked Titan (the only old master represented in the exhibition) and Tintoretto, but hated Correggio. "Dickens among the Artists" includes an oil painting by Augustus Egg of "Dickens in the Character of Sir Charles Coldstream" and though it looks nothing like Dickens, since it comes from the Dickens Museum, we must suppose it is.

The second-room section on "The Influence of Dickens on the Artists" begins with "Dickens in Paint," which includes ten paintings, six of Little Nell, three of these being of Nell and her grandfather. The remaining four paintings are the Tate's *Kit's Writing Lesson* by

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Figure 29. (Color online) Thomas Sibson, "Quilp as if drawn by Swiveller (*The Old Curiosity Shop*)." Etching from Charles Dickens, *Illustrations of Master Humphery's Clock* (London: Robert Tyas, 1842). Rare Book Division, NYPL

Robert Braithwaite Martineau and various paintings of Florence Dombey and Kate Nickleby, as well as an 1866 work by Sir John Gilbert of *Miss Flite introducing the wards in Jarndyce to Krook the Lord Chancellor*, in which picture a mysterious extra woman is depicted. Again we see the fondness of Dickens's contemporaries for his early works as well as the centrality of Little Nell to his contemporary popularity.

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The last two sections of the exhibit consist of large paintings of "Dickensian Modern Life," such as Frith's *The Railway Station* and *Derby Day*, in which a scene at the bottom right involving a swell ogling a young girl, is, according to Mark Bills, "taken directly from chapter 19 of *The Old Curiosity Shop*" (Bills 138). "Dickensian Social Issues" suggests that Luke Fildes's *Houseless and Hungry* and *Application for Admission to a Casual Ward* and Hubert Herkomer's *Old Age: A Study at the Westminister Union* can be credited with absorbing much from Dickens's descriptive accounts of social problems in his novels" (Pat Hardy 155), which seems a bit of a stretch to me. The exhibit closes with Fildes's *The Empty Chair* and *The Grave of Charles Dickens* plus a couple of objects, the most unusual being a crockery spill (lights for cigars and fires) vase in the shape of Dickens's head. Though limited in space and dependent on reproductions and borrowings, this exhibition made its point definitively: during the nineteenth century Dickens's characters, particularly those from his early works, were a pervasive subject for the artists of his time.

There are two additional exhibitions I would like to mention, neither of which I was able to see, one because it was not yet open by the journal's deadline and the other because it was over before I could get to London.

For the New York Public Library's *Dickens: The Key to Character*, the curator William Moeck generously allowed me to see a preliminary floor plan, a list of objects to be displayed, and drafts of general and individual labels. The exhibition celebrates, as the website says, "the power of Dickens's characters to be imagined ever anew, examining important precedents for his art of characterization as well as intersections between his personal life and his literary creation" through selections from the library's holdings of Dickens and Dickens-related illustrations, translations, and sheet music (see Figures 29 and 30). Highlights the website notes include the "memoranda book the author used to jot down possible names for characters" as well as "an 1867 pocket diary containing the code through which Dickens communicated with his mistress Ellen Ternan."

The last exhibition I will mention, one I unfortunately could not see, was probably the most ambitious, the Museum of London's *Dickens and London*, which the Museum says was "the first major UK exhibition [of Dickens] in 40 years" (*Dickens and London* website). It was by all accounts (and as pieced together from the brochure, accompanying book, and online sources) an inventive multimedia exhibition that attempted to recreate the London that Dickens loved and hated, walked obsessively, and used as a setting for the majority of his novels and journalism. As an exhibition, it showed manuscripts of six great Dickens London novels, but it also provided a number of multimedia exhibits, including an audio tape with street sounds and an online "Dickens on Storify," where people are encouraged to consult one of Dickens's notebooks in which he jotted down ideas for stories and then to complete the story online. There was a film of modern London inspired by Dickens's night walks; an animated version of *Dickens's Dream*, where the characters come alive through visual projections; an "accents and dialects audio interactive"; and various visual re-creations – such as a graphic novel app for iPhone and iPad called "Dickens: Dark London." (See the *Dickens and London* online exhibit listed below for further information.) The accompanying book, *Dickens's Victorian London 1839–1901* by Alex Werner and Tony Williams, is not a catalogue of the exhibition per se, but rather an extensive collection of archive photography from the museum's collections (some prints available for purchase at www.museumoflondonprints.com), which bring to life slums, horse-drawn transport, markets and street life, docks and the river, industry, railways, homes and studios, streets and bridges,

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Figure 30. (Color online) Hablot K. Browne (Phiz), "Unity in Unity (*Martin Chuzzlewit*)." Watercolor drawing. c. 1866. Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library.

suburbs, and old London landmarks, i.e., Gray's Inn Lane c. 1885 and Old Houses, Fleet Street in 1885, and new London landmarks, i.e. two of the excavation for the Metropolitan District Railway at Parliament Square and in Tothill Street by Westminsiter Abbey, c. 1866.

Describing some of the elements of the Museum of London Dickens exhibition is the appropriate end to this review because the answer to the question "what is the best way to make visual the work of a writer of books?" clearly is to contextualize the works.

The Morgan exhibition was least successful in this and the Museum of London exhibition the most ambitious; the Royal Academy of Music provided the most unusual context, but

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all the rest, the Senate House, the Bodleian, the Watts, and the New York Public Library, provided some unexpected exhibits that made the visits, whether actual or virtual, a pleasure.

Lehman College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York

EXHIBITIONS REVIEWED

Charles Dickens: The Key to Character. New York Public Library. Curator William Moeck. 14 September 2012–27 January 2013. http://www.nypl.org/events/exhibitions/charles-dickens-key-character.

Dickens and His World. The Bodleian Library at Oxford. Curator Clive Hurst, Head of Rare Books at the Bodleian Libraries. 2 June–28 October 2012. http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/about/exhibitions/online/dickens.

Dickens and London. Museum of London. Curator Alex Werner, Head of History Collections at the Museum of London. 9 December 2011–10 June 2012. http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Explore-online/Past/Dickens-London/Default.htm.

Dickens and Music. Royal Academy of Music. 2 May–20 December 2012. http://www.ram.ac.uk/dickens-and-music.

Dickens and Popular Culture. Senate House Library, University of London. Curator Michael Slater. 9 January–9 July 2012. http://www.ull.ac.uk/exhibitions/dickenshome.shtml.

Dickens and the Artists. Watts Gallery, Surrey. Curator Mark Bills, Curator of Watts Gallery. 19 June–28 October 2012. http://www.wattsgallery.org.uk/exhibition/gallery-exhibition/2011/11/09/dickens-and-artists.

Dickens at 200. The Morgan Library and Museum. Curator Declan Kiely, the Morgan's Robert H. Taylor Curator and Department Head of Literary and Historical Manuscripts. 23 September 2011–12 February 2012. http://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/defaultPast.asp.

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