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Happy Returns? Lamb, Gray, and Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage*

By DAVID FAIRER

This talk was given at the Society's annual lunch on 19 February 2005.

'MANY HAPPY RETURNS!', WE SAY—almost without thinking. But of course we sense that a birthday, our personal anniversary, does involve a *return*, a looping back to revisit (wherever we are physically) some spot where we feel at home, a mental space where we keep stock of ourselves, and to which we hope for happy returns. The old Elizabethan word for anniversary, a 'year's mind', catches well that mental revisiting which shades into our specific modern idea of commemoration, a *mind* being formerly an *act of memory or recollection*. Well today, though not the actual date, is very much the *year's mind* of Charles Lamb. It is the day we have him in our minds. He comes into our thoughts often, but today, *here, now*, he is in all our minds, and through him we are brought together. The Society has its own regular happy returns to this occasion, a day for meeting old friends and making new ones. Although each annual return is a particular event and highlights difference and change (new outfits, different spectacles, more white in the beard) the prime idea, I would suggest, is one of continuity and connectedness. The return becomes a kind of confirmation, of things we value or take pleasure in, and each return is a re-connection, not to exactly the same thing, but to something that is continuous and evolving.

The idea of renewing communication is part of a group of ideas I want to draw on in talking today about poetic returns, happy and otherwise, in some poems by Lamb and Thomas Gray, and particularly in Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage*, specifically the revised 'D' text, a poem that stages a series of returns, and returns within returns, almost of a compulsive nature.¹ *The Ruined Cottage*, which I'll be looking at in more detail later, fascinates me by the way in which these returnings work to locate something that endures because it evolves. The text creates a counter-movement that sets loss, diminution, and estrangement against gain, growth, and recovery. Ostensibly a poem about ruination, it seems to me to be working to register something of value, to see ruination as part of an endlessly repeated organic cycle. Like a silence that suddenly makes you aware of quietness (the sounds of life going quietly and eternally on), the poem's carefully staged hiatuses allow us to register continuities. This I suppose is a paradox, though I would suggest a Wordsworthian one. The tale is marked by a series of vivid brief moments of return to the 'here' and 'now', but each return, each revisiting of the spot, allows differences to be felt and therefore permits continuities to be traced. Each return becomes a resumption.

In terms of the imagination, this is a pattern evident in *Tintern Abbey*, with its repeated turnings to, re-turnings to, the River Wye: 'How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee / O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, / How often has my spirit turned to thee!' (56-8). The repetition itself marks a return, indeed here a kind of *refrain*—that element of a lyric which becomes familiar, a point of re-connection before we move off again to a new idea or event. At each return a refrain accrues shades of meaning, new ironies or potential; its meaning is enriched or its emotion tapped into: 'My love ys dedde, / Gon to hys death-bedde, / Al under the wyllowe

¹ The 'D' text (1799) of the poem occupies ff.46^r to 56^r of MS D (Dove Cottage MS 16). See *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar by William Wordsworth*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979), pp. 282-325. The reading text is pp. 43-75.

tree' (Chatterton's *Mynstrelles Song*). The word *refrain* in this sense is from the Old French *refraindre*, the Latin *re-frangere*, meaning 'to repeatedly break off or interrupt'—an etymology that seems to confirm how gaps and breakings-off can work to allow repeated satisfying reconnections, and delightful refamiliarisations: 'I walk down the lane / with a happy refrain / oh I'm singin, singin in the rain'.

In terms of their contrasting approaches to the notion of the 'return', and the ideas associated with it, both Lamb and Wordsworth find powerful but incompatible voices. Lamb's handling of this theme is not just unlike, or distanced from, Wordsworth, but almost confrontational, resistant to it. His poetic returns tend not to be happy ones. A place where Lamb might feel at home turns out to be disturbingly unfamiliar, and the revisiting brings a sense of alienation: 'Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?' That poem is less a meditative revisiting than a sudden desperate and frustrating return to his place of origin. As he told Marmaduke Thompson: 'I spent an evening about a week ago with Lloyd. White, and a miscellaneous company was there. Lloyd had been playing on a pianoforte till my feelings were wrought too high not to require Vent. I left em suddenly & rushed into ye Temple, where I was born, you know – & in ye state of mind that followed [I composed these] stanzas'.² The result is Lamb at his bleakest and most powerful, moving like a wraith across a scene with no landmarks, nothing to which he can connect himself:

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces. (17-19)

Suddenly the word *haunts* loses its familiar charm and becomes eery. The location offers nothing to which he might connect—it is imaginatively deserted—indeed as a realised scene it hardly seems to be there at all.

In his poem 'To Charles Lloyd' Lamb returns to their shared special place; but rather than finding something he recognises, a renewed feeling or animating association that might bring his friend to life or confirm his own continuing life, he only finds emptiness:

A stranger, and alone, I past those scenes
We past so late together; and my heart
Felt something like desertion, when I look'd
Around me, and the well-known voice of friend
Was absent, and the cordial look was there
No more to smile on me.³

The line-breaks are almost tantalising, as they cut off potential moves to imagine a presence. But nothing here can counter the overwhelming sense of absence and desertion: 'I thought on Lloyd; / All he had been to me'. The pluperfect tense pushes Lloyd away. The poem's final prayer for his friend is so powerful because it comes out of this emptiness; but Lamb's wish on Lloyd's behalf is a startling one: 'his own thoughts / May he not think – his own ends not pursue – / So

² *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marris, Jr., vol. I (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975), p. 124. The poem, later revised, is quoted from the same letter.

³ *Blank Verse* (1798), p. 75. An earlier version of the poem, entitled 'To a Friend', had appeared in *The Monthly Magazine*, Oct. 1797, p. 288.

shall he best perform Thy will on earth' (19-22) ('his own thoughts / May he not think – his own ends not pursue – it is strangely close almost to the language of the *curse*). This is a selflessness that amounts to self-alienation, a submission to a greater will that seems to bear down on the individual like Fate, rather than work within as a friendly god who guides the human self in thought and action.

Inevitably, Lamb's own most potent anniversary was the frightful 22 September, and his poetic return to that 'day of horrors', 'Written a Twelvemonth after the Events', opens with a disconcerting acknowledgement of his inability to re-live the immediate grief:

Alas! how am I changed! Where be the tears,
The sobs, and forced suspensions of the breath,
And all the dull desertions of the heart,
With which I hung o'er my dead mother's corse? (1-4)

Here it is a double desertion, not being able to connect himself to his earlier emptiness. The *dull desertions of the heart* cannot be re-lived, but belong to the self of a year ago, which he watches bending over his mother, almost as if he is having an out-of-body experience. In this poem, retrospection itself is seen as idolatrous, the recourse of a 'foolish heart steeped in idolatry, / And creature loves'. . . 'I sin almost / In sometimes brooding on the days long past' (36-9). This idea takes its cue from the poem's opening phrase 'Alas! how am I changed!', which recalls the first spoken words of *Paradise Lost*: 'If thou beest he; but O how fallen! how changed' (I, 84). This cry of a fallen being, this sense of irrevocable loss, could not be further from the Wordsworthian registering of change in *Tintern Abbey*, where it becomes a marker that allows him to read his developing identity – 'Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first / I came among these hills . . .' (67-8). The incremental loss and gain of the Wordsworthian self in that poem has the final effect of shaping a continuous organic being who is drawing life from things around him: 'other gifts / Have followed, for such loss, I would believe, / Abundant recompense' (87-9). Loss and gain seem to be part of the same process.

How to live in the fallen world is the issue here. Lamb's cry is for him to be taken out of it: 'Give us new flesh, new birth. Elect of heaven / May we become; in thine election sure / Contain'd, and to one purpose stedfast drawn' (21-3). There is no looking back here, no wish to reconnect with oneself as a growing being. Lamb wants to be contained and pulled onwards. Christian hope has moved centre-stage, displacing retrospection, 'brooding on the days long past'.

Yet Lamb elsewhere feels strongly a longing for a return to prelapsarian innocence. A striking example of this is the scene in *The Tale of Rosamund Gray*, where the narrator, as the tragic events of the book draw to a close, revisits the very bedroom he occupied as a child. The only piece of furniture left in the house is a harpsichord (the echo of Lamb's own flight to the Temple is clear), and as he plays an old tune, 'past associations revived with the music . . . I rushed out of the room to give vent to my feelings'. He makes his way back to his favourite wood, where a change begins to come over him:

all was as I had left it . . . / . . . I prayed, that I might be restored to that *State of Innocence*, in which I had wandered in those shades.

Methought, my request was heard – for it seemed, as though the stains of manhood were passing from me, and I were relapsing into the purity and simplicity of childhood. I was content to have been moulded into a perfect child. I stood still, as in a trance.⁴

Lamb imagines the return to innocence in dream-like terms, as if he is submitting to being re-shaped. Entirely passive, he stands in the wood sensing the *stains of manhood* being lifted off him. The return, in other words, is not a journey, a learning experience, or even a memory, each of which would establish some kind of continuity with his childhood. Instead he uses the word *relapsing*, with its disquieting suggestion of falling back. There is a nagging sense of guilt even at this moment of recovering innocence. The passage is reminiscent of Thomas Gray's return to the scene of his own childhood and lost innocence in the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, where the poem's power comes from the poet's inability to cross the divide. For a moment Gray seems to be conscious of being lifted out of himself:

Ah happy hills, ah pleasing shade,
 Ah fields below'd in vain,
 Where once my careless childhood stray'd,
 A stranger yet to pain!
 I feel the gales that from ye blow,
 A momentary bliss bestow,
 As waving fresh their gladsome wing,
 My weary soul they seem to sooth,
 And, redolent of joy and youth,
 To breath a second spring. (11-20)

At this instant he is passive and receptive, but as his thoughts return, the moment goes, and all he can do is watch as his imagination surrounds the playing children with the ghosts of passions and terrors to come:

Alas, regardless of their doom,
 The little victims play!
 No sense have they of ills to come,
 No care beyond to-day:
 Yet see how all around 'em wait
 The Ministers of human fate . . . (51-6)

In Gray's hands, the return to the loved scene becomes a poem about the inability to retrieve from the past, and his power as a poet lies partly in his recognition of the impotence of nature, even at its freshest and most life-giving, to effect anything more than a *momentary bliss*. The *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* refuses comforts of that kind, and in that poem the 'voice of Nature' is not a solace to the living, but a cry from the dead: 'Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries' (91). In his sonnet on the death of Richard West, the return of spring and

⁴ *The Tale of Rosamund Gray* (1798), pp. 112-13.

all the happy resumptions of nature serve only to emphasise Gray's own inability to recover what he has lost:

The Birds in vain their amorous Descant joyn;
Or chearful Fields resume their green Attire:
These Ears, alas! for other Notes repine,
A different Object do these Eyes require. (3-6)

The indifference of nature's resumptions to the fact of human suffering has been seen as one of the leading ideas of Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage*, a text in which a human tragedy is played out amidst what the poet refers to as 'the calm oblivious tendencies / Of nature' (504-5). There is a persistent critical tradition that focuses on that word *oblivious* and reads nature's detailed activities in the poem as uncaring and implacable. In Jonathan Wordsworth's powerful and influential reading, its processes are from a human point of view 'inexorable', almost as if nature were gaining strength through her weakness: 'active Nature, though if correctly viewed not hostile to Margaret, is at least implacable, and through its encroachment brings about her death'.⁵ Other critics of the poem have taken this further: for Evan Radcliffe, 'nature becomes an obviously destructive force', and Karl Kroeber questions our response as readers to 'the indifferent destructiveness of natural processes'.⁶ Peter Larkin's wonderfully subtle reading speaks of 'the poem's vision of inexorable natural processes calmly (perhaps seductively) oblivious of human suffering'.⁷ His parenthesis is suggestive, and I'm specifically interested here in the text's more literal potential to *seduce*, repeatedly to 'lead aside or away',⁸ in order to stage its returns.

It is true that in elegiac poetry the growth and renovation of nature traditionally highlight the irony of the human being's inability to return to life. The fact of this is indisputable; however, each time I read the 'D' text of *The Ruined Cottage* I feel that such a truism falls short of the complexity of the poem's tone and the intricate care with which it establishes Margaret's landscape, not only its many visual details, but its intangible qualities too. As the old man tells the poet,

I see around me here
Things which you cannot see: we die, my Friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
Dies with him or is changed, and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left. (67-72)

⁵ Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 108, 120.

⁶ Evan Radcliffe, "'In Dreams Begins Responsibility": Wordsworth's Ruined Cottage Story', *Studies in Romanticism*, 23 (1984), 101-119 (p. 114); Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), p. 50.

⁷ Peter Larkin, 'Relations of Scarcity: Ecology and Eschatology in *The Ruined Cottage*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 39 (2000), 345-64 (p. 349).

⁸ *OED s.n. 'seduce'*, 1.

But that is said before he begins his tale of Margaret and her sufferings, and by the poem's close the poet and the reader, at least this reader, feels that something has not only survived, but been transfused and memorialised.⁹ The poem ends being more than the tragedy of an individual called Margaret, and 'indifference' seems such a blank idea for a nature that works its way into every nook and cranny of the poem.

The indifference of nature has been a powerful motif in elegy for centuries, from Moschus' *Dirge for Bion* to Petrarch's sonnet 269, *Zephiro torna* ('the west wind returns'),¹⁰ one of the sources for Gray's sonnet to West. But *The Ruined Cottage* is not elegy, and its elegiac elements are subsumed into a complex descriptive narrative that is mediated to us through the experience of both the old man and the poet. The life of nature reaches us through layers of human consciousness. Not least, the poem's insistent motif of departure and return establishes the natural scene as something interfused with human thoughts and feelings. It is a poem about place as much as about people, in which 'Earth's returns' (to reapply Browning's beautiful phrase)¹¹ accompany the human ones, and draw power, not always ironically, from those connections and continuities.

At first, the restless poet who enters the scene can't find a sure footing on the earth at all. As he makes his way 'across a bare wide Common' his feet are 'baffled' by 'the slipp'ry ground'

and when I stretched myself
On the brown earth my limbs from very heat
Could find no rest nor my weak arm disperse
The insect host which gathered round my face
And joined their murmurs to the tedious noise
Of seeds of bursting gorse that crackled round. (21-6)

So much, too much, life is going on around him; but this restlessness, discomfort and annoyance make the meeting with his friend all the more effective as a kind of calming and settling of himself in a moment of recognition, since it is of course a fortunate *re*-encounter with the man who had been his 'fellow-traveller' two days before. The person who will be the narrator of Margaret's story is offered as a contrasting figure at this point: 'the venerable Armytage' rests in the shade with his eyes closed; and the poet greets him (rather oddly, unless placed in a context of departure and return) as 'a friend / As dear to me as is the setting sun' (38-9). We might expect the *dawning* sun here, given the welcome that the poet is about to make him, but in this poem things become dear by *leaving*. The promise of *return* is the poem's animating principle throughout, and it is through the departures and returns of Armytage, the wanderer-figure, that the poem charts the story of Margaret and her cottage.

The poet has his local returns also, and before the conversation can begin he rises for a second time in order to drink from the well, 'half-choked with willow flowers and weeds'. 'I slaked my thirst', he says, 'and to the shady bench / Returned' (64-5). For these *returns* to have

⁹ I would agree with Jonathan Bate that as readers 'what we do sense is that since the vegetation lives beyond, lives on, her spirit somehow survives too' (*Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 34).

¹⁰ Petrarch, *Rime sparse*, 310. See *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, translated and edited by Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), pp. 488-9.

¹¹ Browning, 'Love among the Ruins', 80.

their full effect, the poem has to locate itself in a *here* and a *now*. The poet, and the reader too, have to feel the rootedness of this spot, and the opening passage of the poem is focused on establishing this idea of increasing familiarisation. As we read on, we too are given details to which we can repeatedly return, so as to build up our own sense of attachment to this place, just as we return to the well a few lines later, this time with the detail of the spider's web that 'hung to the water's edge' (89). In every corner of the scene, life of some kind is continuing.

The poet's, and our, first glimpse of the cottage establishes how the poem will combine a language of alienation and loss with one of organic growth and continuity. The ruined structure is introduced by the words: 'I rose and turned towards'. The words *turned towards* signal that from this point on, each 'turn towards' this spot will be a *return*:

I rose and turned towards a group of trees
Which midway in that level stood alone,
And thither come at length, beneath a shade
Of clustering elms that sprang from the same root
I found a ruined house, four naked walls
That stared upon each other. (27-32)

The contrast between the elms and the house is here a stark one. The elms, viewed at first as standing *alone*, are on closer view seen to be a sociable family, growing together, *clustering*, joined to *the same root*, whereas the cottage, at this stage, appears divided, alienated from itself: 'four naked walls / That stared upon each other', like Adam and Eve after the fall, estranged, staring at each other's nakedness.

But only a few lines later, in Armytage's speech, we ourselves return to the cottage, our first return of many, and there is a moment of recognition, but now the scene has accrued some telling details:

this poor hut,
Stripp'd of its outward garb of household flowers,
Of rose and sweet-briar, offers to the wind
A cold bare wall whose earthy top is tricked
With weeds and the rank spear-grass. (104-8)

The poet, and we, are already seeing things differently, noticing more. As an image of a *poor* human form, *Stripp'd of its outward garb*, the cottage is beginning to develop an *earthy top* that can support life, albeit *weeds and the rank spear-grass*. The word *rank* (meaning 'vigorous in growth') insists on the capacity of things to flourish in the most meagre soil. At this point in the poem we are introduced to what will soon become a familiar scene, at the centre of which is the cottage-garden:

It was a plot
Of garden-ground, now wild, its matted weeds
Marked with the steps of those whom as they pass'd,
The goose-berry trees that shot in long lank slips,
Or currants hanging from their leafless stems

In scanty strings, had tempted to o'erleap
The broken wall. (54-60)

Tempted to o'erleap—the language is that of a violated Eden, its fruit still hanging, but not with the full richness of Paradise. It still offers a temptation, and the wall has been broken down by those who have entered it, with as much ease as Satan in *Paradise Lost* entered the garden: 'at one slight bound high over leaped all bound / Of hill or highest wall' (IV, 181-2).

An important point to make here, therefore, is that the poem's location is not a pastoral one, evoking the temperate poise and innocence of the original garden. There was once an Edenic quality to the place, but as Armitage's story unfolds, the scene moves irreversibly into the challenging landscape of the georgic, a genre located in the fallen world of decay, disease, war and death, the changing seasons, the pressures of time, and the precariousness of human labour.¹² As if to signal this, all those things that the pastoral holds at bay now crowd into the poem: the 'blighting seasons', the 'plague of war':

'Twas a sad time of sorrow and distress:
A wanderer among the cottages,
I with my pack of winter raiment saw
The hardships of that season . . . (138-41)

The convalescent Robert, however, still thinks he is in a pastoral. But it's no good simply standing at the cottage door, whistling 'many a snatch of merry tunes' (163) and carving heads on sticks. In the georgic, as Hesiod and Virgil, and their eighteenth-century successors John Philips, Thomson, Smart and others knew, work has to be regular and well organised, each job completed in the proper season. As Stephen Duck knows in *The Thresher's Labour*:

. . . the same Toils we must again repeat:
To the same Barns again must back return,
To labour there for room for next Year's Corn.
Thus, as the Year's revolving Course goes round,
No respite from our Labour can be found. (275-9)

The yearly *returns* of georgic have to be worked for, within the cycle of the returning seasons. But Robert's casual attitude is just not good enough:

[He] idly sought about through every nook
Of house or garden any casual task
Of use or ornament, and with a strange,
Amusing but uneasy novelty
He blended where he might the various tasks
Of summer, autumn, winter, and of spring. (166-71)

¹² See David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789* (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 84-5, 91-2.

The casualness is insisted on. My point is a serious one, and Wordsworth understands it – *The Ruined Cottage* moves into the rigorous landscape of georgic, but it suspends human labour and reclaims fallen nature as a power in and of itself, no longer harnessed to human energies. In the first of Virgil's *Georgics* the farmer is seen as resisting the general tendency in nature towards degeneration and reversal: 'So it is: for everything by nature's law / Tends to the worse, slips ever backward, backward'.¹³ As the first part of Wordsworth's poem draws to a close, this entropic principle has been set in motion; but against it, another counter-motion will begin to register, and we sense it when Armytage pauses as the poem stages a return to the here and now of the elm trees:

'Every smile,'
Said Margaret to me here beneath these trees,
'Made my heart bleed.' At this the old Man paus'd
And looking up to those enormous elms
He said, "'Tis now the hour of deepest noon . . .'" (183-7)

The narrative breaks just at a moment when our minds are full of impending change and loss. There is a sudden return to the *here* and the *now*, and we are made to look up at an image of endurance, as the elms tower above us. This return is crucial in giving us the continuing life of nature. The buzzing flies also return, but now no longer as an image of discomfort:

At this still season of repose and peace,
This hour when all things which are not at rest
Are chearful, while this multitude of flies
Fills all the air with happy melody,
Why should a tear be in an old man's eye?
Why should we thus with an untoward mind
And in the weakness of humanity
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
And feeding on disquiet thus disturb
The calm of Nature with our restless thoughts?" (188-98)

The questions hang in the air as the First Part ends. By reacquainting us with the familiar spot the poet breaks into the narrative, but only to allow a return, and with it an idea of *resumption*. But before this happens, the poet too has to take a time-out. Yet again there is a rising, a turning away, a look round, then a return, and a resumption—it is a sequence that is at the heart of the poem's narrative procedure:

I rose, and turning from that breezy shade
Went out into the open air and stood
To drink the comfort of the warmer sun.
Long time I had not stayed ere, looking round

¹³ Virgil, *Georgics*, I, 199-200; *The Georgics*, tr. by L.P. Wilkinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 63.

Upon that tranquil ruin, I returned
 And begged of the old man that for my sake
 He would resume his story. (214-20)

There is a fresh urgency, a sharp interest now, as we return to the main body of Armytage's tale, which is structured round four departures and four returns, and after each of them the familiar spot of the cottage, and the elm trees above it, reappear. The first return is briskly done:

It was my chance
 To travel in a country far remote.
 And glad I was when, halting by yon gate
 That leads from the green lane, again I saw
 These lofty elm-trees. Long I did not rest:
 With many pleasant thoughts I cheer'd my way
 O'er the flat common. At the door arrived,
 I knocked. (239-46)

At this first return he learns that Robert has left unannounced, and has gone abroad to fight:

and on that very day
 By one, a stranger, from my husband sent,
 The tidings came that he had joined a troop
 Of soldiers going to a distant land.
 He left me thus . . . (266-70)

The power of this idea is reinforced by the fact that of the poem's many departures, this one has no return. As Armytage's own movements away from and back to the scene, succeed each other, the failure of Robert to return becomes more painful, and Margaret herself begins to wander off from the cottage, and then return, repeatedly re-enacting a departure in order to come back again.

It is a pattern of frustration, of apparently pointless motion, away and back, and one reader found this memorably frustrating himself. It has to be said that Thomas De Quincey didn't really enter into the spirit of this poem. For him, at this point, decisive action was needed to find the truant husband and force him to return. The narrator, he says, instead

of suffering poor Margaret to loiter at a gate, looking for answers to her questions from vagrant horsemen . . . should at once have inquired for the station of that particular detachment which had enlisted him. This *must* have been in the neighbourhood. Here he would have obtained all the particulars. That same night he might have written to the War-Office; and in a very few days an official answer, bearing the endorsement *On H.M.'s Service*, would have placed Margaret in communication with her truant.¹⁴

¹⁴ *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1889-90), XI, 306. Quoted by Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity*, p. 85.

In such a way, says De Quincey, Robert's return might have been achieved, and the tragedy avoided. The poem's many tentative tracings could be replaced by a single determined and practical tracing of the fugitive.

In relation to this matter, I'm happy to announce the existence of a previously unknown manuscript of the poem, the *Leeds typescript* - unaccountably ignored by Jonathan Wordsworth and the Cornell editor. This unique typescript, manuscript 'DF', has seven additional lines at this point, which suggest that Wordsworth saw the force of De Quincey's objections and felt he needed to accommodate them. In this text Margaret seems to possess something of that practical resourcefulness that De Quincey requires of her. The first four lines are also in MS 'D', then MS 'DF' follows (*in italics*):

and on that very day
 By one, a stranger, from my husband sent,
 The tidings came that he had joined a troop
 Of soldiers going to a distant land,
*And that a consciousness of shame had led him
 To adopt a different name. I asked at once
 Thinking to trace him through the service records
 What he now called himself. The stranger sighed
 And told me that his mind was somewhat dimmed
 Since last he travelled in those mighty hills.
 The name he had forgot.*

(Leeds typescript)

That would seem to take care of De Quincey's objection quite nicely, and I hope the variant will be recorded in the next edition of the poem.

The old man's second return occurs after a long and complex journey. It was, he tells the poet, 'o'er many a hill and many a dale . . . / . . . Through many a wood, and many an open ground' (289-91). The sweep is wide, the terms vague and generalised, his thoughts brief and unremembered ('many a short-lived thought that pass'd between / And disappeared', 297-8) until he reaches the spot that has now become home, for him and for us:

When I had reached the door
 I found that she was absent. In the shade
 Where now we sit I waited her return. (301-3)

He notices the honeysuckle crowding round the door, and how

knots of worthless stone-crop started out
 Along the window's edge, and grew like weeds
 Against the lower panes. I turned aside
 And stroll'd into her garden. – It was chang'd . . . (310-13)

In this particular spot every detail registers. Of course the *turn aside*, into the garden, allows him to stage a return: 'Back I turned my restless steps' (321), and we turn with him, this time to encounter a passing stranger with news of Margaret. Each of the poem's returns makes us increasingly observant, ready to notice something. They allow us repeatedly to re-encounter the special place, mark the changes, and appreciate its continuing interest for us as the associations accumulate. We notice also how organic life of various kinds is spreading and reclaiming space for itself. In the garden 'Daisy and thrift and lowly camomile / And thyme – had straggled out into the paths' (318-19).

At his third return, the old man revisits the garden and looks at the weeds and 'knots of withered grass' (415), noticing that a young apple-tree is being nibbled at by the sheep who have found their way in. In the final passage leading up to her death the narrative offers a series of individual glimpses of her, each one placed in relation to a present object:

in that broken arbour she would sit
The idle length of half a sabbath day –
There, where you see the toadstool's lazy head –
 . . . Seest thou that path?
(The green-sward now has broken its grey line)
There to and fro she paced through many a day . . . (450-9)

Of course it makes Margaret's absence the more felt and immediate, but at the same time it offers a living presence too, small signs of life continuing, a toadstool or a patch of grass encroaching onto the path. It is this sense of earth's small returns that gives *The Ruined Cottage* its particular power as a human document. Against those critics who see the poem as recording an indifferent nature, I would argue that for us as readers, by the end of the poem, with all our returns, the scene has become imbued with life, something to which the figure of Margaret has contributed but which continues after her. But the poet has one final turn and return to make:

The old Man ceased: he saw that I was mov'd;
From that low Bench, rising instinctively,
I turned aside in weakness, nor had power
To thank him for the tale which he had told.
I stood, and leaning o'er the garden-gate
Reviewed that Woman's suff'rings, and it seemed
To comfort me while with a brother's love
I blessed her in the impotence of grief.
At length [towards]the cottage [I returned]¹⁵
Fondly, and traced with milder interest
That secret spirit of humanity
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of nature, 'mid her plants, her weeds, and flowers,
And silent overgrowings, still survived. (493-506)

¹⁵ Missing words supplied from the text of MS 'E'. See Butler ed., p. 73n.

It is here, amid the *silent overgrowings*, that the poem's own organisation comes into focus, the way it has explored a living principle that is not in any way mystical or transcendent. It is the ordinary endless process of life, which, with each of our returns to the scene, draws our attention more and more. The poem has been organised around a silent dialogue between the human and the natural, until they begin to speak the same language. To single out one death amidst all this life, pulls against the momentum of the poem. In this context, the notion of 'One Life' Romanticism comes to mind, not as anything metaphysical or divine, but something rooted in the biological facts of existence. The nearest philosophical expression for this sense of what Coleridge calls 'the numberless goings-on of life'¹⁶ is John Locke's discussion of the notion of a continuing human identity, for which he reaches for a botanical image:

That being then one plant which has such an organization of parts in one coherent body, partaking of one common life, it continues to be the same plant as long as it partakes of the same life, though that life be communicated to new particles of matter vitally united to the living plant, in a like continued organization . . .¹⁷

It is towards Locke's image of organic continuity, the sustaining of *one common life*, that we might look for a gloss on Wordsworth's text, rather than to the more metaphysical, pantheistic 'One Life' principle that is often invoked when discussing this poem.¹⁸ In *The Ruined Cottage* a less refined and much less abstract principle offers itself, one that is embedded in physical change, decay and corruption, and which struggles against ideas of entropy, fragmentation and loss. The poem engages with an eighteenth-century tradition that casts Nature in a more recalcitrant role challenging human commitments and energies. Not far behind narratives of spiritual growth are lurking intimations of ruination and decay; but the 'life of things' can be nourished by organic matter of many kinds, and Nature's model has its human equivalent, as Locke suggests. His 'one common life' is an image of vital growth linking past and future, a continual newness that possesses at the same time a continuous meaning. That, he suggests, is how organisms survive. In the late 1790s, for Wordsworth and for Lamb, it was a principle that was being tested in many different ways, on political and personal levels. On this day, Lamb's day, to which our minds return, it seems appropriate to invoke Wordsworth's poem of returns, and to offer, in the final words of the old man, an assertion of how, on a special occasion of meeting, 'the secret spirit of humanity' can draw people together:

. . . what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. I turned away

¹⁶ Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight', 12.

¹⁷ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), II. xxvii. 4.

¹⁸ William A. Ulmer argues that in MS 'D' Wordsworth removed the poem's pantheistic 'One Life' material (associated with the Pedlar) 'due principally to his conviction that pantheism could not realize the purpose motivating its original incorporation in the poem' [i.e. in MS 'B']. See 'Wordsworth, the One Life, and *The Ruined Cottage*', *SP*, 93 (1996), 304-31 (p. 316).

And walked along my road in happiness. (520-25)

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Lamb, *Falstaff's Letters*, and Landor's *Citation and Examination of William Shakspeare*

By DAVID CHANDLER

He who first praises a good book becomingly, is next in merit to the author.
Landor, 'Alfieri and Salomon the Florentine Jew'¹

ONE OF THE FIRST LITERARY WORKS Lamb enthuses about in his surviving correspondence is *Falstaff's Letters* (1796), by his friend, James White. It remained a lifelong favourite. In 1819 Lamb wrote in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* of how White's work had emerged 'from the fullness of a young soul, newly kindling at the Shakspearian [*sic*] flame, and bursting to be delivered of a rich exuberance of conceits,—I had almost said *kindred with those of the full Shakspearian genius itself*'.² Part of Lamb's enthusiasm for *Falstaff's Letters* no doubt derived from what E. V. Lucas termed 'paternal sentiment',³ for John Matthew Gutch, who was well placed to know, claimed that Lamb had supplied White with 'incidental hints and corrections'.⁴ Despite the commercial failure of *Falstaff's Letters* (which never reached a second edition in White's, or indeed Lamb's, lifetime⁵), Lamb always did his best for the book, as Talfourd movingly documented: 'He [Lamb] stuck . . . gallantly by his favourite protégé; and even when he could little afford to disburse sixpence, he made a point of buying a copy of the book whenever he discovered one amidst the refuse of a bookseller's stall, and would present it to a friend in the hope of making a convert.'⁶ If *Falstaff's Letters* was an early enthusiasm, so Walter Savage Landor's *Citation and Examination of William Shakspeare* [*sic*] was a very late one, published in October 1834, just weeks before Lamb's death, but in time for him to take immense delight in it, as John Forster, another enthusiast, reported:

One of the last things said to me by Charles Lamb, a week or two before his death, was that only two men could have written the *Examination of Shakspeare*—he who wrote it, and the man it was written on; and that is exactly what I think.⁷

¹ *The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor*, ed. T. Earle Welby and Stephen Wheeler, 16 vols. (London, 1927-36), iii. 111 (hereafter *Complete Works*).

² *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London, 1903-5), i. 194.

³ *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 2 vols. (London, 1905), i. 86.

⁴ *Falstaff's Letters by James White . . . With Notices of the Author Collected from Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt and Other Contemporaries* (London, 1877), xix.

⁵ A spurious 'Second Edition' of 1797 was simply the unsold remainder of the first edition reissued with a new title page. A pirated American edition was brought out in Philadelphia in 1813. *Falstaff's Letters* became much more popular in the late 1800s after William Carew Hazlitt showed that Lamb himself may have contributed to it. There were new editions in 1877, 1904 and 1924, and between the 1870s and 1930s *Falstaff's Letters* was frequently mentioned and often praised in the extensive literature on Lamb.

⁶ *The Letters of Charles Lamb, with a Sketch of his Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1837), 13.

⁷ *Walter Savage Landor*, 2 vols. (London, 1869), ii. 273 (hereafter Forster).

In 1941 Malcolm Elwin, Landor's biographer, hinted at a resemblance and connection between these two 'Shakespearean' favourites of Lamb's.⁸ The matter has not been further investigated, but the present article argues that there is a profound relationship between the two texts: that *Falstaff's Letters*, and Lamb's enthusiasm for it, was a source of inspiration for Landor, and that Landor deliberately included elements in his text to delight Lamb, and, indeed, any other lover of White's work.

Lamb and Landor were almost exact contemporaries (Landor was eleven days older), though polar opposites in many ways. They met only once. In 1832 Landor made a six-month trip to England, having been living in France and Italy since 1814. On 28 September Henry Crabb Robinson took him and Thomas Worsley to see Lamb, duly reporting the event in his diary:

. . . we drove down to Edmonton and walked over the fields to Enfield, where Charles Lamb and his sister were ready dressed to receive us. We had scarcely an hour to chat with them but it was enough to make Landor and Worsley express themselves afterwards delighted with the person of Mary Lamb and pleased with the conversation of Lamb, though I thought Lamb by no means at his ease, Miss Lamb quite silent—nothing in the conversation recollectable. Lamb gave Landor White's *Falstaff's Letters*.⁹

Robinson may have missed something. John Forster's account is far more positive: Landor, he says, considered his hour spent with Lamb 'one of unalloyed enjoyment' and adds that 'before they parted they were old friends'.¹⁰ It is certain Landor was exceedingly impressed by Lamb, and he responded with all the enthusiasm of his energetic nature. After Lamb's death Landor commemorated him in a poem:

ONCE, and once only, have I seen thy face,
Elia! once only has thy tripping tongue
Run o'er my breast, yet never has been left
Impression on it stronger or more sweet. (lines 1-4)¹¹

And the same level of appreciation emerged in a letter to *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*:

The *Essays of Elia* will afford a greater portion of pure delight to the intellectual and the virtuous, to all who look into the human heart for what is good and graceful in it, whether near the surface or below, than any other two prose volumes, modern or ancient.¹²

⁸ In *Savage Landor* (New York, 1941), Elwin suggested that 'The imaginary conversation introducing Shakespeare, begun in 1825, had been developed into another form, probably as a result of reading the "Falstaff Letters" given to him by Lamb . . .' (272). In his later *Landor: A Replevin* (London, 1958) (hereafter Elwin) Elwin merely says that reading *Falstaff's Letters* 'revived' Landor's plan of 'writing an imaginary conversation introducing Shakespeare' (268). He says nothing further concerning the relationship between the texts. I dispute the idea that Landor was simply 'reviving' an old project below.

⁹ *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley, 3 vols. (London, 1938), i. 410.

¹⁰ Forster ii. 242, 243.

¹¹ *Complete Works* xv. 145.

¹² 'Language and Orthography', *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* 2 (1835), 220. (Not in *Complete Works*.)

But perhaps Landor's greatest tribute to Lamb was his enjoyment of *Falstaff's Letters* and imaginative response to this neglected work. Of all the copies of White's book Lamb dispensed, it was the one he gave Landor which 'fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit'. There is an intriguing possibility that Landor believed Lamb to have coauthored *Falstaff's Letters* with White: in that case, given his great enthusiasm for Lamb, he would have been particularly keen to pay the book the compliment of imitation.¹³

Little is known about the composition history of the *Citation*. A possible reference to Landor's interest in such a project appears in a comment he made in a letter to his sisters, probably of 1831, which Forster paraphrases: '*what would the Lucys think if he [Landor] were to introduce into a dialogue Shakespeare's old Sir Thomas?*'¹⁴ This suggests that Landor was considering the possibility of introducing Sir Thomas Lucy, from whom, legend had it, the young Shakespeare had stolen deer, into one of his 'Imaginary Conversations', though the comment may be merely playful, as it apparently followed a general observation on the old Warwickshire families, of which the Lucys were one. Landor came from Warwickshire, and seems to have delighted in ridiculing the Lucys, for he had already made fun of an imaginary fourteenth-century member of the family, Sir Magnus Lucy, in his 'Imaginary Conversation', 'Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Petrarca' (published 1829). Whether Landor thought Shakespeare himself might be a protagonist in a 'dialogue' involving Thomas Lucy at the time he made the above remark is impossible to determine, but we know that he had, with some trepidation, begun an 'Imaginary Conversation' including Shakespeare as a speaker as early as 1824.¹⁵ This was destroyed in one of Landor's regular fits of disgust at the literary and publishing world. Forster states that 'The [imaginary conversation including] Shakespeare took ultimately another shape', that is, he assumes it developed into the *Citation*, and Landor's later biographers, Super and Elwin, make the same assumption.¹⁶ It is clear, though, that Forster knew nothing of the contents

¹³ On 2 February 1836, in a letter to Edward Moxon, Southey wrote of White: 'He and Lamb were joint authors of the Original Letters of Falstaff'. See *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols. (London, 1849-50), vi. 287. Among Landor's literary contemporaries, Southey was his closest friend, and he visited Southey soon after visiting Lamb. It seems reasonable to conjecture that Landor would have mentioned being given *Falstaff's Letters* by Lamb, and that Southey would have reported what (he thought) he knew of the book's authorship.

¹⁴ Forster ii. 235. The original letter seems to be lost. Forster ii. 234-5 is very confused: Forster claims to be summarising and quoting from Landor's letters to his sisters of February and March 1831, but A. Lavonne Ruoff's edition of the family letters of this period shows that Landor was quoting from letters of May and November 1831 as well, mixing the contents up in such a way that the original sequence and context of Landor's various remarks is almost completely lost. See Ruoff, 'Walter Savage Landor's Letters to his Family, 1830-1832', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 58 (1975-6), 467-507. None of the letters located by Ruoff includes the statement concerning '*old Sir Thomas*'. I consider it certain, though, that the letter in question had nothing further to say regarding a literary work involving Sir Thomas Lucy. Forster was a great admirer of the *Citation*, as documented above, and would undoubtedly have published anything he had found concerning its *prima stamina*. His italicising the passage quoted here reveals his eagerness to promote the statement as relevant to the *Citation*.

¹⁵ Forster ii. 148. At the time Landor wrote to Southey: 'Here for the first time I shrink and shudder' (ibid), and Forster adds that he had 'frightened himself' (ii. 232). Landor's problem was that he had an extraordinarily exalted view of Shakespeare, of which there are many eloquent expressions in his writings. In the 'Imaginary Conversation', 'The Abbé Dellile and Walter Landor', for example, Landor has himself say of Shakespeare: 'Glory to thee in the highest, thou confidant of our Creator! who alone hast taught us in every particle of the mind how wonderfully and fearfully we are made' (*Complete Works* vii. 245).

¹⁶ Forster ii. 148; R. H. Super, *Walter Savage Landor: A Biography* (New York, 1954), 175 (hereafter Super, *Biography*); Elwin 268.

of the destroyed conversation, and there is no evidence that it had any connection with the later *Citation* beyond the obvious fact of including Shakespeare as a speaker. There are no further references to the Thomas Lucy project in Landor's published correspondence, but on 8 April 1834 he wrote to Lady Blessington, who was effectively acting as his London agent, that 'For some time' he had been 'composing' the *Citation*,¹⁷ and it was with her assistance that the work was published later in the year. All that can be said with certainty is that before his 1832 trip to England Landor probably had an idea of writing an 'Imaginary Conversation' including Sir Thomas Lucy, and when he finally produced the *Citation* in 1834—a sort of book-length 'Imaginary Conversation'—it was, in part, a response to *Falstaff's Letters*, which he had been given in September 1832. With so little to build a case on any conclusion must be tentative, but in my view the *Citation* was substantially composed after Landor's trip to England, with White's work, and Lamb's enthusiasm for it, in mind.

It is time to turn to the texts. *Falstaff's Letters* presents a series of purportedly contemporary documents illustrating and amplifying the Gloucestershire scenes in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* and the entire action of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It is, primarily, an imaginative response to the latter play. Nearly three-quarters of *Falstaff's Letters* is concerned with the incidents and situations of *The Merry Wives*, and the opening situation of that play—Shallow's arrival in Windsor to accuse Falstaff of poaching his deer—is anticipated from the beginning. At the very beginning, Falstaff writes: 'Robert Shallow, esq; hath sent thee a haunch of Gloucestershire venison, Hal . . .'.¹⁸ A few pages later there is a reference to Bardolph stealing Shallow's hens, and the first letter written by Shallow is directed to Davy and concerns the management of his estate: 'How do things go on, Davy? Are the sheep-stealers taken? Marry, bid Robin Bratton look to the deer [. . .] We must enlarge the deer-feld—sir John loves venison.'¹⁹ Davy's reply records that Clement Perkes (mentioned in *2 Henry IV*) had been apprehended for 'knocking your Worship's deer in the head', and the transfer to the situation of *The Merry Wives* is swiftly completed as Falstaff writes to Antient Pistol:

We will to Master Shallow's in Gloucestershire—he hath a deep Deer-feld—'tis a county of a clamorous rut—We did borrow his monies by day; but we must make bold with his bucks by night— [. . .] We will line our shambles with venison, and then, my lads, to Windsor again—²⁰

Altogether there is considerably more emphasis on the deer-stealing than there is in *The Merry Wives*, though White followed Shakespeare in forgetting the event as soon as it had served its purpose of affording some pretext for Shallow and Slender to follow Falstaff to Windsor.

Landor's *Citation* takes the form of a legal document recording Sir Thomas Lucy's examination of the young Shakespeare on the charge of poaching deer. The legend of Shakespeare's getting into trouble for stealing deer from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, and being forced to depart Stratford for London, was first published by Nicholas Rowe in 1709; Rowe added that it was 'upon this Accident, that he [Shakespeare] is said to have made his first

¹⁷ R.H. Super, *The Publication of Landor's Works* (London, 1954), 50 (hereafter Super, *Publication*).

¹⁸ *Original Letters, Etc. of Sir John Falstaff and His Friends*, ed. Charles Edmund Merrill, Jr. (London and New York, 1924), 51 (hereafter *Falstaff's Letters*).

¹⁹ *Falstaff's Letters* 69-70.

²⁰ *Falstaff's Letters* 72, 77-8.

Acquaintance in the Play-house'.²¹ As the most colourful episode in Shakespeare's slim biography it was made much of in the century before Landor wrote, though Edmond Malone, with a great show of scholarship, rejected it as apocryphal in his posthumous variorum *Shakspeare* of 1821. The *Citation* is, like *Falstaff's Letters*, an exercise in Shakespearean wit and humour that mimics the stylistic mannerisms of Shakespeare's age. Like White, Landor has great fun with Biblical language and allusions, and introduces some strong bawdy undercurrents. Moreover his comic materials are closely related to White's because of the relationship both texts have with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. *Falstaff's Letters* and the *Citation* are, as it were, connected *via* Shakespeare.

This connection was possible because of the tradition claiming that Shallow, at least in his *Merry Wives* incarnation, was a satirical portrait of Sir Thomas Lucy. This too was a tradition first published by Rowe:

. . . in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he [Shakespeare] has made him [Falstaff] a Dear-stealer[sic], that he might at the same time remember his *Warwickshire* Prosecutor, under the Name of Justice *Shallow* . . .²²

The connection between the Justice and Sir Thomas was, suggested Rowe (and he has been widely followed), established by a rather gratuitous reference to Shallow's heraldic device in the opening scene of *The Merry Wives*.²³ Rowe was not, in fact, the first to make the connection. In 1821 Malone published some jottings on Shakespeare made by one Richard Davies, probably (Malone concluded) 'about the year 1690'. These included the statement:

he [Shakespeare] was much given to all unluckinesse, in stealing *venison* and *rabbits*; particularly from Sir Lucy, who had him *oft whipt*, and sometimes *imprisoned*, and at last made him fly his native country, to his great advancement. But his reveng was so great, that he is his *Justice Clodpate*; and calls him a great man, and that, in allusion to his name, bore three *lowses* rampant for his arms.²⁴

The Shallow = Sir Thomas Lucy reading had been standardized in Shakespeare scholarship by the time Landor came to compose his *Citation*. It is referred to, with remarkably cryptic humour, in *Falstaff's Letters* when Davy reports Slender's (final) illness to Shallow: 'Robin says, a' [Slender] sometimes looks, marry, just as your Worship did, when your Worship went mad about

²¹ *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* (sic), 6 vols. (London, 1709), i. vi.

²² *Ibid.* i. xviii.

²³ After Shallow has boasted about the importance of his family, Slender says, 'They may give the dozen white luces [pike] in their coat', a statement which leads to a delightful misunderstanding with Sir Hugh Evans, who hears 'louses' (lice). The Lucy family bore three luces on their coat of arms, but other heraldic devices bore luces too, and it seems most unlikely, at least to the present writer, that Shakespeare intended a 'hit' at Sir Thomas. The introduction of the dozen luces enabled two jokes, one on luces / louses, one on fresh fish / salt fish, and that was probably all Shakespeare cared about. The scene has been over-interpreted in the past, partly because of the supposedly 'independent' accounts of Shakespeare's own poaching, and partly because it contains a much disputed crux: see my 'The 'Salt-fish' Crux in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *English Language Notes* 42 (March 2005), 1-14.

²⁴ *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, ed. Edmond Malone and James Boswell, 21 vols. (London, 1821), ii. 123. Justice Clodpate was a character in Thomas Shadwell's *Epsom-Wells* (1672).

the Coat of Arms at old Sir Thomas's death'.²⁵ Landor was perfectly aware of the connection and noted in his introduction that 'The reader will form to himself, from this *Examination of Shakspeare*, more favourable opinion of Sir Thomas than is left upon his mind by the Dramatist in the character of Justice Shallow.'²⁶ Just to complicate the textual relationships even more, the young Shakespeare of the *Citation* is imagined as having already composed an early version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.²⁷

If Landor, in 1832, already had some idea of dramatising the legal encounter of Shakespeare and 'his *Warwickshire* Prosecutor', he must have been immediately impressed and encouraged by the correspondence between White's project and his own. If, on the other hand, he only had a vague plan to dramatise Sir Thomas Lucy, *Falstaff's Letters* is likely to have encouraged his eventual focus on the deer-stealing episode. Either way, his attention would have been claimed in particular by one of the most amusing documents in White's work, a 'Deposition Taken Before Master Robert Shallow, and Master Abraham Slender, at Windsor', as given the Shallow = Lucy link this already made fun of Sir Thomas acting in his legal capacity. Much of the humour of White's 'Deposition' turns on the tendency of all those present to be exceedingly digressive, and this is the main comic device in Landor's work, too. More importantly, though, I argue that Landor built two deliberate echoes of White's 'Deposition' into his *Citation*: the sort of echoes that any lover of *Falstaff's Letters*, like Lamb, would be sure to recognise and appreciate. (There may, of course, be more that I have missed.)

First, the 'Deposition' records Shallow's examination of a 'Fellow', a peasant, who claims to have seen 'a Caitiff-monster', 'a large creature' emerge roaring from the River Thames.²⁸ The reader of Shakespeare knows this 'monster' to be Falstaff, deposited in the river after his first misadventure with Mistress Ford, and is highly diverted by Shallow's conclusion that it is Owen Glendower involved in a plot to kill the king. In the *Citation* there is a striking repetition of the motif. Here two peasant witnesses, Euseby Treen and Joseph Carnaby, appear against Shakespeare, claiming that late one night they saw him with two companions by the river at 'the bottom of Mickle Meadow'. Treen, reports Joseph

Said unto me, 'What a number of names and voices! And there be but three living men in all! And look again! Christ deliver us! all the shadows save one go leftward: that one lieth right upon the river. It seemeth a big squat monster, shaking a little, as one ready to spring upon its prey!'

Sir Thomas jumps to a conclusion:

²⁵ *Falstaff's Letters* 140.

²⁶ *Citation and Examination of William Shakspeare . . . [etc.]* (London, 1834), viii-ix (hereafter *Citation*); *Complete Works* x. 264. Landor lightly revised and also made some rearrangements of his material when he republished the *Citation* in his *Works* of 1846, and in this revised form it has been republished since. As the present article is concerned with the original conception and making of the work it has seemed appropriate to quote the first edition here, but, for convenience, I reference the Welby-Wheeler *Complete Works* as well.

²⁷ One of his friends is reported as saying to him 'Willy! Willy [. . .] thou divertedst us from our undertaking [the poaching] with thy strange vagaries; thy Italian girls' nursery sighs; thy Pucks and pinchings, and thy Windsor whimsies.' *Citation* 35-6; *Complete Works* x. 287.

²⁸ *Falstaff's Letters* 84, 88.

A dead man in his last agonies, no doubt! Your deer-stealer doth boggle at nothing. He hath alway the knife in doublet and the devil at elbow.²⁹

Sir Thomas suspects that one of his keepers has been killed, a suspicion which somehow survives the revelation that the 'big squat monster' is in fact a punt(!), the vehicle Shakespeare and his friends will use to move the stolen deer. Landor surely pays White the compliment of imitation: it cannot be mere accident that each text involves a peasant reporting a 'monster', who is then interpreted as a man, on or in the local river to Shallow / Sir Thomas, or that Shallow / Sir Thomas misunderstands this as evidence of some plot to assassinate, or actual assassination.

The second specific echo of White's 'Deposition' in Landor's *Citation* is even more pointed, and setting this out also allows me to present a more substantial taste of the wonderful nonsense to be found in both texts. In the 'Deposition', the 'Fellow' who is examined explains that as he was walking home for dinner the previous day he was ruminating on how to feed his family, and considering that though he had a quince tree, 'quinces are very windy and griping to the belly'. This prompts the following exchange:

Shallow. Stand away, further, fellow.—By the mass, a foul varlet.—You smell, fellow—get ye gone.

Slender. Truly, Cousin—

Shallow. O' my conscience, 'tis the arrantest—Foh! Get ye gone, knave; get ye gone—

Slender. Truly, Cousin, our Gloucestershire quince does not reek thus—Indeed, la, you do him wrong.—Have you no pippins for your children, good youth? My Cousin could never away with a quince.—Your county hath good pears, too.

Fellow. I han't a single one, your Worship; not an atomy of any thing, only one quince-tree, as lonesomely as any yew.³⁰

In the *Citation*, in the course of a great deal of advice he gives to William about writing poetry(!), Sir Thomas remarks that all great poets begin 'with small subject-matters, gnats and the like'. He explains that he himself chose fruit, and continues with the following exquisite piece of inanity:

Willy! my brave lad! I was the first that ever handled a quince, I'll be sworn.
Hearken!

Chloe! I would not have thee wince,
That I unto thee send a quince.

²⁹ *Citation* 31-2; *Complete Works* x. 285.

³⁰ *Falstaff's Letters* 85-6.

I would not have thee say unto't
Begone! and trample't underfoot,
 For, trust me, 'tis no fulsome fruit.
 It came not out of mine own garden,
 But all the way from Henly in Arden,—
 Of an uncommon fine old tree,
 Belonging to John Apsbury.
 And if that of it thou shalt eat,
 'Twill make thy breath e'en yet more sweet;
 As a translation here doth shew,
On fruit-trees, by Jean Mirabeau.
 The frontispiece is printed so.
 But eat it with some wine and cake,
 Or it may give the belly-ake.
 This doth my worthy clerk indite,
 I sign,

SIR THOMAS LUCY, Knight.³¹

The coincidence here is again too striking to be accidental, and Landor surely had Slender's 'My Cousin could never away with a quince' in mind when he playfully made *his* 'Shallow' the poet of the quince. Both he and White presumably knew that the quince was a traditional symbol of love.

On the evidence presented thus far I would rest my case for the close, 'Shakespearean' relationship between *Falstaff's Letters* and the *Citation*, and Landor's decision to specifically echo the former work. But it is worth adding that the elaborate supplementary materials Landor included with his *Citation* may have been suggested by *Falstaff's Letters*, too. White, responding to William Henry Ireland's forgeries of Shakespearean documents, the great literary scandal of the mid-1790s, added a preface to his work detailing the papers' provenance and explaining their present appearance. This includes an elaborate and very funny apology for the incompleteness of the collection, explaining that the papers had once been in the possession of 'an elderly maiden sister'³² of Mrs Quickly (Shakespeare's character) and that she made depredations in their number by using them for culinary purposes (this last description later became the most popular part of the book, as it was thought to have an Elian ring to it). Preceding the preface White added a 'Dedicatyon, To Master Samuel Irelaunde' (Ireland's father), written in an absurd exaggeration of Ireland's own 'olde' English, in which the editor associates his work with that of Ireland and Chatterton and deplors the skepticism of the modern age: 'The tyme dothe faste approche, nay even now is close at honde, when the overcharged cloudes of scepticysme muste incontinentlye vanish before convictione's serener Welkin, and Edmonde shall in vayne resume hys laboures'.³³ 'Edmonde' is Edmond Malone, who had exposed the Irelands' fraud earlier in the year. Landor's 'Editor's Preface', which precedes the *Citation*, goes over very similar ground. He takes up the question of authenticity almost immediately:

³¹ *Citation* 185-6; *Complete Works* x. 345.

³² *Falstaff's Letters* xxxvi.

³³ *Falstaff's Letters* xxxii.

The malignant may doubt, or pretend to doubt, the authenticity of the *Examination* here published. Let us, who are not malignant, be cautious of adding anything to the noisome mass of incredulity that surrounds us: let us avoid the crying sin of our age, in which the *Memoirs of a Parish Clerk*, edited as they were by a pious and learned dignitary of the established church, are questioned in regard to their genuineness . . .³⁴

Again the 'malignant' critic glanced at here is Malone, who had rejected the deer-stealing legend. At the end of the *Citation* Landor included an 'Editor's Apology' which is another elaborate explanation of incompleteness, in this case detailing why 'facsimiles (as printers' boys call them, meaning *specimens*) of the handwriting of nearly all the persons introduced' had not been included; alas, the editor could not obtain a complete set and 'both he and the Publisher were of opinion that the graphical part of the volume would be justly censured as extremely incomplete'.³⁵ The book concludes with a lengthy 'Memorandum' in stilted sixteenth-century English made by Ephraim Barnett, the clerk responsible for taking down the 'Examination' in the main work, which reports some bits of gossip concerning Spenser and Shakespeare he had heard from his 'kinsman, Jacob Eldridge', before the latter proceeded to 'matter of wider and weightier import, namely [. . .] the price of Cotteswolde cheese, at Evesham fair' (the sort of delightful detail that seems to come straight out of the world of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*).³⁶ *Falstaff's Letters*, then, may have suggested to Landor how the humour of the main document(s) presented could be extended and developed in various supplementary materials and editorial interventions, and pointed to the sort of themes and jokes that could be introduced. Landor's only previous effort in this line had been a destroyed comedy, *The Charitable Dowager* (1814), which pretended to be an edited version of a seventeenth-century play.³⁷

The *Citation* represents the high-water mark of Landor's turn towards comedy and humour in his works of the 1830s. Prior to its publication he described it as 'full of fun, I know not whether of wit. It is the only thing I ever wrote that is likely to sell', and again, on a separate occasion, 'It is the only thing I ever wrote that can ever be popular. I will venture a wager that two thousand copies are sold in six months.'³⁸ He was, unfortunately, wrong. The humour of the *Citation*, which is of a very mixed variety, from the schoolboyish to the affectedly pedantic, from the farcical to the satiric, has never found many admirers. In his popular 'English Men of Letters' volume on Landor, Sidney Colvin characterised the *Citation* as 'cumbrous'; the effect of its 'vein of fun' 'to oppress rather than to exhilarate'.³⁹ R.H. Super and Malcolm Elwin, the great twentieth century Landorians, described it, respectively, as 'one of Landor's greatest failures' and 'among the least worthy of Landor's writings'.⁴⁰ Geoffrey Carnell has recently dismissed it as 'diffuse and long-winded'.⁴¹ These are all harsh judgments and since John Forster the *Citation* has not found a critic able to respond sympathetically to its idiosyncratic silliness and comic

³⁴ *Citation* vi-vii; *Complete Works* x. 263-4.

³⁵ *Citation* 243, 245; *Complete Works* x. 265.

³⁶ *Citation* 282; *Complete Works* x. 272.

³⁷ Super, *Biography* 121.

³⁸ Super, *Publication* 50.

³⁹ Landor (London, 1881), 149.

⁴⁰ Super, *Biography* 246; Elwin 19.

⁴¹ 'Walter Savage Landor' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004), xxxii. 395-402, at p. 401.

range (hardly surprising, given the extraordinarily little attention paid to any part of Landor's masterful *oeuvre*). Among contemporary works, it has something in common not only with *Falstaff's Letters*, but with *Elia*, Southey's *Doctor* (which coincidentally commenced publication in 1834), and the paintings of Wilkie and Mulready. It is regrettable that Lamb was not able to review it, as Landor hoped he would, for he could doubtless have done justice to Landor's comic inspiration and attracted more readers to the *Citation*.⁴² As argued here, a strong case can be made for Lamb as the ideal reader of the *Citation*, because of his indirect, unwitting but important influence on its composition.

Landor chose to publish the *Citation* anonymously, and without a dedication. Had it been dedicated, it must be considered extremely likely that Lamb would have been the dedicatee, and that the shared sense of humour of these two great writers would have been eloquently publicised.

Doshisha University, Kyoto

⁴² In March 1835 Landor wrote to Henry Crabb Robinson and commented on John Forster's review of the *Citation* in the *Examiner*, adding 'Poor Charles Lamb could have done the same thing'. Super, *Publication* 52.

Reviews

KATHY WATSON. *The Devil Kissed Her: The Story of Mary Lamb*. Bloomsbury, 2004. Pp. 248. ISBN: 0-7475-7109-0. £16.99.

ONCE YOU HAVE PASSED the dreadful title (yes, I know, it may be a straight quotation from Charles Lamb but it is worth emphasising and how far will it attract the average punter?), the ghastly dust-jacket (of which, more later), and the curious binding (an oddly grubby off-white, printed in black but with chocolate end-papers giving a strangely green ‘after-sight’), this book begins delightfully.

The first six pages offer a *pointilliste* sketch of what you need to know about Mary Lamb, her relationship with Charles, the Lamb household, and Mary’s illness and how it would be dealt with today. There is an illustration, new to me at least, of the Ashmolean’s Fuseli print [*sic*] of a woman brandishing a stiletto, with the name ‘Mary’ or ‘Maria Anne’ and a possible ‘L’. Is it? Isn’t it? And there is a reference to a copy of another disputed picture, which is unlikely to be of Mary Lamb ‘but there it is in the [C.L.S.] archives, just in case’.

Sometimes these pleasant opening pages *almost* made me laugh out loud and I certainly did not want to stop reading to make notes. The book was wonderfully approachable. Sarah is a ‘dotty aunt’, only five lines away from Mary as a ‘raging maenad’. Kathy Watson investigates the major shortcomings in madhouse-keeping which Mary must have suffered and which I think we should now almost certainly regard as fact. She also tells us perhaps more than we need to know about the atomic structure of lithium carbonate.

Suddenly the freshness of the ‘easy read’ begins to grate and the clouds start to draw in. We assume that the book is serious but we must read too many contractions: *didn’t* (p. 52), *they’d* (p. 86), *hadn’t* (p. 183), *she’d*, and so on. Unhappy usages abound; places at Christ’s Hospital were *wangled* (surely a dated usage for a young writer?) and the army *kicked out* Coleridge. On page 36 we have ‘to *relieved* him’ and a word is repeated on page 47. ‘[They] could *start over*’ on page 86 and ‘no act *diffident*’ (p. 94) is not shown as a quotation but may be. On page 95 Mrs Parsons ‘tried to *fix* Sarah [Shoddart] *up*’ with a husband; her own husband may be *the Reverend Parson* (p. 95), which may be a typo, but not necessarily, since *the Parsons* is a plural (p. 96). *In no way* appears (p. 112) as *no in way*. Hazlitt writes a *grammer* (*sic*: p. 121) for Godwin and a typo stands in the middle of the crucial quotation from *All’s Well That Ends Well* (p. 127). Charles’s play, *after being on the backburner for months* (p. 128), turns on Mr. H’s *full moniker* (p. 129). Thomas Hood visits at least *three evenings week* (*sic*: p. 198). *Pear* rhymes with *girl* (p. 207). Like her aunt, Mary is also *dotty* (p. 225). Becky the servant *bossed* [the Lambs] *about* and economies of scale *kick in* somewhere.

The book began to seem like a long and unusually worthy article in a non-specialist magazine. At that point I read the blurb, which appears twice. Kathy Watson graduated from Oxford, worked for the BBC, then as a journalist and editor in national magazines. She is currently a freelance journalist and lives in North London with her husband and two small children.

Some silly errors occur. Mary’s *moithered brains* (p. 14) seem to be referred to by her mother not her grandmother, or Lucas has been wrong for a century. It may be doubted that brother John brought a large party of *his* colleagues from the East India House to *Mr. H* (p. 129), though the confusing possessive is obviously a critical crux. Lucas is happy to suppose that John

Lamb brought his colleagues from the South Sea House and that Charles's friends came unaccompanied. Kathy Watson writes as if Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, 1778, was the only epistolary novel written before 1806 (p. 116). We might set a C.L.S. quiz on the matter, but I would offer Richardson's *Pamela*, 1740-1, and his *Clarissa Harlowe*, 1747-8. Bryan Waller Procter appears, I think invariably, as *Proctor* and, in the book's closing pages, he and his alias *Barry Cornwall* seem to be regarded as different people (pp. 235-6).

The Lambs are described as poor in 1792-3 (pp. 35-6) and about 1809 (p. 111), which was what finally encouraged me to draft a brief study of their finances (*Bulletin*, N.S. No. 129, January 2005, pp. 23-4).

So how far has Kathy Watson written a serious book? She acknowledges (p. 243) Duncan Wu's advice to 'dump the myth' and I think she has done so. Parts of the book, like the curate's egg, are excellent. Most of the facts seem to be present. There is a fine and helpful analysis of *Mrs Leicester's School* (pp. 134-145). A flood of light suddenly falls on Mary: already described as 'no genteel lady' (p. 94), she now (p. 148) invites the comment 'Such plain living [drinking only water] was never likely to suit a woman who enjoyed a stiff brandy'. Her recipe (p. 96) was also enjoyed by Sarah Stoddart. Reading about the future Mrs Hazlitt is always fun, especially as one of the chief sections leads into a discussion of the single men whom Mary might like to have married (pp. 94-5 and 99ff). Fanny Kelly, the unusually well-behaved actress, is reported (p. 175) as having seen off the Earl of Essex, when he offered to make her his mistress, *with a flea in his ear* as well as with a *stinging letter of rebuke*. Kathy Watson shrewdly summarises that lady as an intelligent career woman who did not want to be taken away from the acting which she loved and did well and did not wish to leave for marriage or any form of male protection (p. 182). What a pity that two major proof errors, *as/sent* and *interest/s*, occur (p. 179) in the middle of Charles Lamb's great proposal letter of 20 July 1819 to her.

Kathy Watson reports Mary as able, at sixty-five, to 'manage her twelve hours a day', apparently country walking (p. 211) and comments interestingly on the later years. By the time of the move to the Waldens' house at Edmonton 'a neighbour' is quoted as saying that 'the reputation of insanity' was associated with the brother as well as the sister (p. 215). She alludes to the crushing boredom of the final years and thinks (p. 221) how the lives of the Lambs were intertwined with death. She even manages to explain the details of erysipelas to my satisfaction (p. 222). Finally (pp. 229-30), a pleasantly elegiac passage shows Mary, at peace at last, living with her nurse Miss James's married sister.

I had not realized, before reading this book, that Mary's life after Charles's death was more than vegetativeness. At the very end, however, as Crabb Robinson said (p. 232), 'No sadness was assumed. We all felt her departure was a relief'.

Some shortcomings in the book must clearly be blamed on the publisher. There is no bibliography—no notes—no acknowledgements worth having—*no index!* That has resulted in the numerous page numbers given here, for I am not entirely flinty-hearted towards the problems of an author's corrections for a second edition. 'John Lamb' (p. 10) might have been confirmed as 'the elder'. Mary's fine letter on page 114 has been cropped disgracefully: a 5% reduction would have made it perfect. What song the syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women . . . are [as we know] not beyond all conjecture. I do think, therefore, that an illustration of Charles and Mary Lamb, apparently from the long covered (whitewashed over?) wall-painting at Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London W.C.1. and so, unlike

the other illustrations, not from life, should have been granted a better source-attribution than E.V. Lucas's *Lemon Verbena and Other Essays*, 1932.

With a tiny handful of exceptions, all these illustrations are appalling. Not black and white but rather grey and grey, they generally emerge in all their smallness from a Dickensian pea-souper fog. Cary's famous double-portrait is reproduced in black and black (sic: p. 218) but even that is an improvement on the dust-jacket. I do not know how many type-faces, sizes, and Roman and Italic forms are used, but it is too many. The double-portrait is printed there in what look like syrupy bodily fluids—you may recall that Charles Lamb was criticized by Godwin for using the term *giant's vomit*—and it and the postage-stamp-size yellow face of poor Mary on the spine make her look like the ancestress of all the Simpsons.

Anyway, there are clearly other opinions. The blurb describes *The Devil Kissed Her* as 'superbly researched, beautifully told' and Amanda Foreman (um . . .?) is quoted on the front of the dust-jacket with the words 'A wonderful, moving and vivid book'. D.E. Wickham

Society Notes and News from Members

We are pleased to be able to print the following report written for The Alliance of Literary Societies.

THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES WEEKEND HELD AT THE SWEDENBORG HALL IN LONDON ON 21/22 MAY 2005, HOSTED BY THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY

A blustery day saw us gather in the Swedenborg Hall for the annual meeting of the ALS. Just by way of interest and since we spent a good deal of time in the hall, Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish mathematician, scientist and theologian, who was influential on a generation of writers in Charles Lamb's day, not least Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Nicholas Reid, Chairman, opened the Annual General Meeting by welcoming the delegates present; a special welcome was extended to The Dubliners Society who had made the journey from Eire. The members of the committee then gave their reports. Rosemary Culley, Secretary, announced the addition of two new societies, the Ruskin and the H E Bates which, allowing for fluctuations, means that there are approximately 109 member societies in all. As our Internet expert, she was extremely encouraged by increasing use of our web site. Julie Shorland, Treasurer, reported a healthy balance in accounts, and in view of this suggested that travel costs be reimbursed in total; the proposal was accepted. Thelma Thompson, Editor of the *Open Book* has decided to stand down, but was thanked for all her hard work; a new editor will shortly be appointed. It was suggested that the *Open Book* could be put on line to overcome distribution problems. Robin Healey, Publicity Officer, asked for further press cuttings; he is particularly interested to hear of any building or land with a literary connection under threat, such as the land around Coate, birthplace of Richard Jefferies, which may be used to site part of the University of Bath. He also questioned the issue of copyright as regards letters, which was debated at some length. Other items mentioned were the reported closure of Thomas Carlyle's birthplace in Ecclefechan,¹ the possibility of the opening of the home of Emery Walker during the summer which has yet to be clarified, and the opening of Dylan Thomas's birthplace in Swansea which has been granted a lease of 15 years. The Jane Austen Society will host the AGM on 13/14 May 2006 in Bath. The business meeting concluded, we then handed over to our hosts.

The Charles Lamb Society is celebrating the 230th anniversary of the birth of Charles Lamb, whose reputation rests on his essays written under the pen-name Elia, or A liar as Charles liked to pun, and a child's guide to Shakespeare written with his beloved sister Mary.

We were given a warm welcome by Nick Powell, Chairman of the Society, followed by a brief introduction to Charles Lamb by David Wickham, which was followed by a short but lively account of Lamb's significance as a writer from Professor Duncan Wu. David Wickham read a revealing extract from the *City Recorder* marking the 150th anniversary of Lamb's death. From this, we gleaned that Lamb was not only a perfectionist in prose, but a consummate letter writer, poet and critic. As to the character of the man himself we learned that he was good to his friends, devoted to his family, witty, a hater of pretension in any shape or form, a little over fond of the odd tippie and given to giggling in inappropriate places; his build was slight, he dressed rather quaintly and talked with an engaging kind of stammer. He was also a shy man, who revealed little of his true feelings except through his writings; there was something of a thin shell about him which few were able to penetrate. Maybe it was his knowledge of the thread of insanity that ran in his family that caused him to seek protection behind such a carapace.

His father John was clerk to the lawyer Samuel Salt, Charles being born within the somewhat rarefied

¹ It is now known that Carlyle's birthplace has not been closed, although the opening hours have been restricted, i.e. Mon, Fri & Sat 1-5. Visits can also be arranged outside these hours.

atmosphere of the Inner Temple on 10 February 1775; Salt is affectionately remembered by Charles in his essay *Old Benchers*. Charles was one of three surviving children, the other two being John (1763-1821) and Mary Ann (1764-1847) who was eleven years older than himself. Aged seven he was sent to Christ's Hospital to be educated, wearing the traditional blue gown and yellow stockings of a Blue Coat boy. Here he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was to become his lifelong friend. In 1791 he left to take up a position as clerk at South Sea House, remaining there a short time, before he was transferred to take up employment with the East India Company where he stayed for the remaining 33 years of his working life. His sister Mary was a very competent dressmaker, or what was then known as a mantua maker and was able to employ a female apprentice.

Almost from the cradle Charles Lamb was addicted to literature and his association with Coleridge only served to foster this love. Apart from Coleridge, his circle of like-minded friends included Southey, Wordsworth and Hazlitt. But work had to come first, always first, his literary ambitions being confined to what periods of leisure were at his disposal. He had little time for writers of his own age, reserving all his praise for those of the past; in some respects such praise was excessive and he has been criticised for it. 'Damn the Age! I'll write for antiquity', he wrote.

On 21 September 1796 came the tragedy that was to have such a lasting effect on his life and that of his sister Mary. It took place at dinner time when Mary was in one of the peculiar moods to which she was subject: only this time it was much worse than usual. She had picked up a knife and was pursuing her terrified apprentice round the table, and when her mother, who was more or less an invalid, told her to desist she turned upon her and stabbed her to death. The jury brought in a verdict of lunacy, and rather than seeing her detained in an asylum, Charles took it upon himself to look after her. Such fits of insanity were not confined to Mary alone, Charles and his father having inherited the same instability, but it was Mary who was to manifest the worst of its symptoms. Moving home frequently, Charles was now everything to Mary who in between her periodic madness, was sane and well balanced. It was during these interludes of sanity when she was not so much a burden as a genuine comfort that sister and brother were able to collaborate in producing various works, the best known being their *Tales from Shakespeare*, for which Mary wrote the comedies and Charles the tragedies; indeed, Charles was to remark to Dorothy Wordsworth that whenever Mary was ill, he felt 'like a fool bereft of her co-operation; so used am I to look up to her in the least and the biggest perplexity . . . I can conceal nothing that I do from her. She is older and wiser and better than I . . . She lives but for me'. Noble though these sentiments were, they virtually prevented Charles from marrying, though throughout his life he was to form a number of sentimental attachments. In his youth there was a girl called Anne whose father discouraged the relationship from blossoming due to the Lambs' known history of madness. Then there was the little Quaker, Hester Savory, who died tragically young; she lived at the end of his street, and being familiar with the Witch of Endor in the Book of Samuel Charles referred to her as the 'Witch of End-door'. Anne is immortalised in *Dream Children* and Hester in *When Maidens such as Hester die*. There was also the much adored Fanny Kelly, an actress at Drury Lane, to whom he made a proposal of marriage which was graciously declined.

From 1820 Charles began his essays for *The London Magazine* under his pseudonym Elia which had been the name of an old Italian clerk with whom he had worked at the South Sea House. The first 28 of these essays were issued in book form in 1823 as *The Essays of Elia* followed in 1833 by *Last Essays of Elia*.

Having been given this metaphorical flavour of Lamb, the afternoon saw us divide into three groups to be taken on a guided tour of Lamb's London. Edward Preston of the Dickens Fellowship was the leader of our group and in squally conditions, with umbrellas held high, we made our way to various points of interest. Lamb's birthplace of 'kindly engendure' (as he called it) is no longer standing, but a plaque has been placed on the newly built Crown Office Row. We looked at Temple Church, restored after bomb damage during the war; Charles loved the Gothic heads to be seen inside the church. Many of the buildings associated with Lamb have disappeared altogether or have been much altered, such as Bartlett's

Passage where he attended school as a very small boy with Mary. Imagination has to play its role in appreciating the London Charles so fondly records, but the Inns of Court do appear to retain much of that special world within a world to which he refers. The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, much loved by Lamb, was to stage his signally unsuccessful play *Mr H*, which was so booed and hissed that Lamb himself felt obliged to join in the general condemnation. It was here that his delectable Fanny Kelly performed.

Those delegates who chose not to walk were taken to The Foundling Museum, re-opened last year after an extensive renovation, where we looked at an account of life in the Foundling Hospital in Lamb's day—not so very far removed from his own experiences at Christ's Hospital—paintings by Hogarth, whom Lamb greatly admired, and a marvellous room devoted to Handel; followed by a visit to the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum. The party enjoyed spotting some of the more unusual literary points of interest en route, not least the remarkably named 'Virginia Woolf Burger Bar' in the Russell Hotel!

The rain now becoming heavy, we returned to Swedenborg Hall where we took our seats to watch the one-man play 'Lamb's Tale or My Gentle-Hearted Charles' written and performed by G. Leslie Irons, who took on the character of a man for whom he obviously has a deep affection. As Charles looked back on his life with his publisher Edward Moxon, we sat like eavesdroppers on their imaginary conversation. It was Coleridge who called him 'gentle hearted', though Charles was anything but flattered. 'For God's sake, don't make me ridiculous any more by terming me gentle-hearted'. Edward Moxon was to marry Emma Isola, the little girl whom Charles and Mary had taken under their wing at the age of 11; Emma brightened their lives considerably, both Mary and Charles loving to surround themselves with young people and children. Many of Charles' friends and relations were mentioned at some point in the play and it is to Mr. Irons' credit that he made Charles come alive for us in a uniquely special way.

Dinner was at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street, noted for the literary/artistic luminaries that have gathered there over the centuries. There were pictures of them on the dark panelled walls; what rollicking times they must have enjoyed. All we could do was capture a little of the atmosphere of that bygone time.

On the following day we boarded a coach for a tour of Enfield and Edmonton. It was around 1823 that Charles and Mary decided to move away from the centre of London in search of somewhere a little more peaceful. They began their travels in Islington, lodging at a cottage adjacent to the New River which had been constructed in the 17th century to alleviate the shortage of water. At that time Islington was a leafy suburb and Charles was delighted with the novelty of 'a spacious garden, with vines, pears, strawberries. . .'. In his own words he 'planted, pruned and grafted'. It was here that the eccentric George Dyer, a friend of long-standing, walked out of the house and straight into New River, whether due to tipsiness or absent-mindedness is open to question. In 1825 after 33 years of working for the East India Company Charles was able to retire with a reasonable pension; moving from Islington and further into the country, he and Mary took up residence with a Mrs. Leishman at Clarendon Cottage. This was the first house we stopped to look at, a lovely Georgian house, once again bordering New River; the sun was shining and there were geese and goslings on the river. It did indeed look more country than town. Mary and Charles stayed with the Leishmans from 1825-1827; we then walked on to 87 Chase Side, only a short walk, where Charles and Mary resided for a further two years before moving next door to lodge with the Westwood family, or in Lamb's words 'only twenty four inches further from Town'. Contented initially, they decided to move again when the Westwoods began to take advantage by charging them excessively for their services, e.g. being asked for an extra sixpence to cover the cost of Wordsworth taking 'such a quantity of sugar in his tea'. Westwood Cottage is not so much a cottage as another fine Georgian house with a plaque to the Lambs hiding beneath a wealth of wisteria. After breaking for lunch, we boarded the coach to Edmonton where Charles was to spend the remaining years of his life.

By the time of this move in 1833 the novelty of the rural idyll had long worn off. Mary was worse and not better, her attacks of insanity becoming more frequent, and Charles, ever a city man at heart, was bored and depressed. He wrote to his nature loving friend Wordsworth of 'intolerable dullness' and of the

danger of believing in poets who ‘entice men from the cheerful haunts of streets’, but with Mary growing ever more unstable, there was little possibility of returning to London. The house they rented was known as Bay Cottage and was run as a private asylum by Mr. & Mrs. Walden who had taken care of Mary before. Hardly visible from the road, and having a long and secluded front garden, Bay Cottage (now called Lamb’s Cottage) was ideally situated. Opposite Bay Cottage was the Girls’ Charity School fronted by the sculpture of a little girl dressed in blue which is still in existence and much as Lamb would have known it. Here we were met by the verger of All Saints Church, who gave us a brief history of the school which was founded in 1778. For girls, who had little in the way of education, this was a rare opportunity to learn the three R’s and other accomplishments befitting their sex.

Crossing the road to Lamb’s Cottage we were warmly welcomed by George Willox and Sandra Knott who allowed us to wander freely round their lovely home and garden which is not normally open to the public. It is thought that Bay Cottage was built around 1680 or even earlier, but such have been its manifold alterations that even the experts remain baffled as to its actual history. Suffice it to say that George and Sandra have worked effortlessly to retain its unique character, every room bearing witness to the care they have lavished upon it. Indeed, we felt privileged to peek into every nook and cranny and see how an old house can be made warm and comfortable without losing anything of its old world charm. Low ceilings are a feature of the house, easy to paint as someone said, as are the fireplaces which can be seen in nearly every room. In the dining room we were shown the Bedlam cupboard which was used as a lock-up to restrain dangerous patients. Mary herself was said to have spent periods in this cupboard. A door in the kitchen leads into the informal garden of old cottage flowers, rambling roses and ancient trees; there are several water features, including a pond where the household cat likes to spy on the fish.

Charles’ time at Bay Cottage was to be of short duration. The move to Edmonton took him further away from London, and he spent much of his time looking mournfully along the London Road. On one of these melancholy walks he fell and grazed his face. The wound did not heal, resulting in erysipelas and then septicaemia, from which he died on 27th December 1834. He and Mary, who survived him by 13 years, are buried together in the churchyard of All Saints which is only a short walk away. After visiting the church we returned to Bay Cottage where Sandra and George had provided a memorable afternoon tea of home made cakes and pastries. What a lovely way to end our weekend.

A big ‘thank you’ to all those involved in making this Charles Lamb weekend, one to remember.

Helen D. Newman

CHAIRMAN’S NOTES

In Memoriam

Sadly, we have to report the death of Judith Wilson, widow of the Society’s former chairman, Dr. Tim Wilson. Judith was a stalwart member of the Society, with a wry sense of humour which was very Elian. A fuller note will appear in a subsequent *Bulletin*.