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A PERSONAL NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The new-style Bulletin has now been in existence for nearly five years. At the time I took over the editorship in 1972 (following that excellent editor and man, Mr H G Smith), I did so in every confidence that I should find the energy and stamina for what is quite an exacting task. Alas, like so many people in later middle-age I fell into a period of ill-health which has tended to hinder the proper performance of my duties (and in fact I was obliged 18 months ago to retire from my job in the British Post Office on health grounds).

However, I am very glad to be able to report that help is not simply on the way: it has arrived. At the Annual General Meeting in April the Society accepted with acclaim a proposal that Mrs Mary Wedd should be appointed Joint Editor. Mrs Wedd is an old friend, a Principal Lecturer in English at Goldsmiths' College, London, and has every possible qualification for the job, which I am quite sure she will accomplish with distinction.

The arrangement which we have agreed among ourselves, and which was endorsed by the AGM, is that we should cooperate as closely as possible on the remaining issues for 1977, and that Mrs Wedd should undertake full responsibility for numbers of the Bulletin appearing in 1978 and 1979, thus giving me a period of sabbatical leave during which I can be relieved of all responsibility and can concentrate, not on recovering my health, which seems now to be well on the way, so much as to make up the back-log of tasks which have built up. I cannot promise to stay clear entirely of CLS affairs, but it will be helpful to know that I can do so if circumstances require.

I cannot end this note without expressing my gratitude to all those very distinguished contributors who have come forward to make the Bulletin the valuable publication that it is; and I trust they will give special support to Mrs Wedd in the coming two years. My personal thanks are also due to all those members whose encouragement has meant so much to me in what was almost an entirely new venture, and also to those who are actually involved in getting the Bulletin to members: Miss Betty Stephenson, who types the copy for reproduction; The Stanhope Press, our printers, who make light of difficulties and have often come to the rescue when copy has been late and we have a deadline for distribution; and last, but by no means least, to Miss Vi Ezard, who does all the work of sending the Bulletin out to members once it is printed. We have a good team, and the recruitment of Mrs Wedd can only strengthen it. I personally should like to welcome her, and to express confidence that the Bulletin is in for a distinguished phase of its history.

Basil Savage

## DIALECTS OF HUMOUR - LAMB AND WORDSWORTH

Mary R Wedd

If, in 1940, D W Harding felt the need to rehabilitate Jane Austen from the impeachment of "cosiness" by drawing attention to the "regulated hatred" in her humour, how much more necessary is it to put the guts back into Charles Lamb. His protest to Coleridge, though often quoted, has gone almost unregarded to this day, at least in his own country, and has indeed often proved prophetic: "The meaning of gentle is equivocal at best, and almost always means poor-spirited".

What splendid over-simplification literary criticism from time to time falls into! It has been fashionable, for example, to regard Jane Austen as an eighteenth century writer. In a certain London University degree examination, at one time, questions on her work were placed in the paper dealing with the period 1660-1780, completely disregarding her involvement, amused but by no means entirely unsympathetic, with the concerns of the Romantic movement - admittedly rather after she was five years old. In the same way, Lamb has been represented as writing a poor-spirited pastiche of some of his predecessors, especially the eighteenth century essayists, as though he had not utilized these loved earlier writers often by turning them on their heads in true Romantic fashion. G D Klingopulos in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature* (1957), comparing passages of Addison and Lamb, admits an "important difference of intention and manners", but goes on:

"Addison, though a little ingenious, is making what he hopes will be interesting, objective conversation. Lamb is self-consciously ingratiating; in Birrell's phrase, he 'plays the fool'."

In the three pages, which are all that are devoted to Lamb in this survey, he condescends thus: "Some of the Essays are indeed amusing, though they tend to seem rather thin fare even in the schoolroom".

Similarly over-simplifying, critical assessment of Wordsworth for long enough saw him as the Romantic revolutionary par excellence, writing, in the Lyrical Ballads, poetry that "marked a complete change from anything that had appeared before", whereas in reality he also had his roots deep in the eighteenth century and even the Ballads, as Robert Mayo has shown, "conformed in numerous ways to the modes of 1798".

The truth is that, with differences of emphasis and style, all these writers are, equally, both legitimate offspring of a "great tradition" and innovators in a new and growing movement. In 1932, Edmund Blunden said: "in naming Charles Lamb with regard to the romantic stage of the world's development I have an under-plot: I have formed a notion that he begins to be neglected". George L Bartlett in the Bicentenary number of the Bulletin declares that "by the late 1940s 'the new critics' had become old". I wish someone would bring the news to certain English academics who are still so strangulated by that ancient novelty that, compared to them, Laocoon was a free man. It seems a pity that, in order to establish the merit of a favoured few and fit them into a comfortable critical niche, so many babies that we could ill spare seem to have vanished down the academic plug-hole. Such, to a large extent, seems in England to have been the fate of Charles Lamb. (The honourable exception, of course, is the Society that bears his name, founded just at the time when it was most needed.) "Thy wit is a

little gone by in these fastidious days - thy topics are staled by the 'new-born gauds' of the time". Perhaps, though, those condescending critics did not read him with sufficient attention or perhaps they have not fully understood his language or learnt to interpret it correctly.

When I was a very young child, like Lamb at the pantomime "as grave as a judge", an old gentleman used to appear in our drawing-room. He had Dundreary whiskers and would stand in a pose reminiscent of that of Tenniel's lobster in *Alice in Wonderland* - which my father was reading to me at the time - with coat-tails raised in front of the fireplace. This gentleman, who turned out to be my grandfather, frightened me very much by poking me in the chest with a large forefinger and talking to me in a foreign language. My mother later informed me that it was called "Joking". There was a story in our family that my other - maternal - grandfather, thinking he was speaking to my mother, had complained, "The trouble with you is that you have no sense of humour". Looking up, he found that he had been addressing my father, against whom such an accusation could never have been made. On consideration, however, I decided that it was not true of my mother either. She had her own kind of humour. My father's elicited a spurt of laughter, though there was often a grim or macabre undertone to it, as was common in the Victorian age in which he grew up. My mother's brought an indulgent smile that lingered in the eyes after the lips had done with it. Thus I learnt not only that humour is a language that has to be interpreted but also that it has its dialects.

It has never been denied that Charles Lamb had a sense of humour, though the variety of dialects he could command has perhaps not been entirely appreciated. Wordsworth, on the other hand, has often been regarded as "humourless", despite Hazlitt's evidence of "a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth". Although Lamb was well aware of Wordsworth's failings and expressed impatience with his egotism on receiving unfavourable criticism (a contrast this with Lamb's hissing his own play - but then which of us has Lamb's nobility in the face of adverse fate?), yet he did not underestimate his humour or the "spirit of beautiful tolerance in it". Nor did Wordsworth, though he called Lamb "the frolic and the gentle", miss the double-edged nature of much of his wit: "tell Lamb that his works are our delight, as is evidenced better than by words - by April weather of smiles and tears whenever we read them". Hazlitt said of him, "His jests scald like tears".

Perhaps my childish fear was not entirely because of non-comprehension but also, at least in part, because the quick intuition of childhood sensed that humour may be a way of dealing with the unbearable. It can be an evasion of painful reality - and the charge of escapism has been one of the chief accusations against Lamb, though such evasions are not always reprehensible - or it can be an open-eyed defiance of it:

"Needful when o'er wide realms the tempest breaks  
Needful amid life's ordinary woes."

Unbearable reality may be of the kind that Lamb had to face in his individual life, the sudden devastating blow, and its continuing consequences, after which life can never be the same again: but it is also the universal experience, which has always been the concern of literary artists, of man's inhumanity to man, of human suffering, of time and transience, memory and anticipation, childhood and death.

"Ah no; the years, Oh!  
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall."

Both Lamb and Wordsworth were deeply concerned with all these things. Like Mr Ramsay's, their work was about "Subject and object and the nature of reality". Neither of them was a philosopher in the sense that their friend Coleridge was, and would perhaps have had them be, but their concerns were philosophical in its broadest - and maybe truest - sense. Leigh Hunt said, "Charles Lamb had a head worthy of Aristotle" but, in a Quaker phrase he would have appreciated, he "had a testimony against" pretentiousness. Would there were more like him to-day! We seem to have lost the discrimination to see that humour, modesty and a personal approach are not necessarily incompatible with wide learning and deep understanding. Crabb Robinson reports: "I looked over Lamb's library in part. He has the finest collection of shabby books I ever saw; such a number of first-rate works in very bad condition is, I think, nowhere to be found". Haydon hit on an apt comparison when, in his account of that immortal dinner, he likened Lamb to Lear's fool, whom no one but a fool indeed would fail to recognize as the voice of harsh truth itself. Instead of Lily Briscoe's scrubbed kitchen table, he found his "objective correlatives" in a game of cards, the ruins of an old house, superannuated actors, forms of food and drink, the dry ghosts of lawyers long dead: as he said, "subjects serious in themselves but treated after my fashion, non-seriously".

We need to remember this when we are tempted to see him as poor-spirited. In 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers', the humour of "Apparition of a child crowned, with a tree in his hand, rises" may seem callous at first sight. Why, we wonder, is he not indignant? And we contrast his "peep peep of a young sparrow" with Blake's "weep, weep", in no very favourable spirit. That old spectre of present amelioration weakening the chances of more fundamental reform appears. Why did he salve his conscience by helping with a feast once a year rather than by dipping his pen in vitriol at such cruel exploitation of children? If you were a chimney-boy, unlikely to live to see any change, which would you prefer, indignation or a hot dinner? Perhaps you could have both; for is his pen so innocent? "He too much affected that dangerous figure - irony". That the chimney-boy at Arundel should have had the temerity to sleep "like a young Howard" ostensibly leads on to Lamb's assumption that he must indeed have been originally a "young nobleman". But in the climax to this passage what a vision of homesickness and despair is conjured up. The "black head upon the pillow" is that of any human child hardly removed from "infancy, when he was used to be lapped by his mother, or his nurse, in just such sheets as he there found, into which he was now but creeping back as into his proper incunabula, and resting place". The fiction of the lost lord points up the false values of a society which cannot see that such was indeed the "proper incunabula and resting place" of any child. In fact, we know that Lamb sent Blake's poem "the 'Sweep's Song' for an album which James Montgomery edited in the interests of a philanthropic effort to ameliorate the lot of the climbing boys".

One is reminded of Dr Burney's converse comment on Wordsworth's 'The Last of the Flock': If the author be a wealthy man, he ought not to have suffered this poor peasant to part with the last of the flock". Though not a wealthy man, Wordsworth gave freely and on one occasion in old age, when a beggar asked for money, was vexed to find his pockets already empty from previous such applications. Neither Lamb nor Wordsworth lacked social conscience either in word or deed. John Danby showed persuasively how Wordsworth used irony in 'Simon Lee' and comedy in 'The Idiot Boy' for serious purposes. In the case of 'Simon Lee', I think there is no doubt that Wordsworth, in the words

of Ford Swetnam, used "deliberate violations of decorum". The bathos, which is characteristic of this poem and recurs almost until the deeply touching conclusion, was intentional and not, as used to be thought by many, accidental. After all, at the period when he wrote this poem Wordsworth was perfectly capable of writing unexceptionable verse. In a lecture at the Wordsworth Summer School at Ambleside in 1975, Dr Angus Easson, following Professor Danby's lead, demonstrated in even further detail the literary skill with which Wordsworth manipulated concept, syntax, metre and rhyme so as to "agitate and provoke" the reader by challenging his sense of poetic propriety into a new perception both of literature and life. Ford Swetnam, relating Wordsworth's "idea of humour and comedy" to his reading of Barrow, quotes "an affected simplicity" and "a presumptuous bluntness" as two of the rhetorical devices Barrow lists and goes on: "First, he suggests that being affected and being amused are not incompatible: love and laughter can co-exist". This is proved elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry: in this poem, while one can see what he was attempting, it is difficult to be convinced that he succeeded. One may accept the studied simplicity: "An old Man dwells, a little man, - 'Tis said he once was tall" -; the comic, often feminine, rhymes - "merry...cherry", "Ivor...survivor", "wean them...between them", "weighty...eighty", "endeavour...ever"; even much of the "presumptuous bluntness" - "And often, ere the chase was done/ He reeled and was stone-blind" or even "And he is lean and he is sick;/ His body dwindled and awry..." But surely - *pace* Danby - Wordsworth misjudged and allowed the thing to topple over into the ludicrous, in spite of the very real sadness of it when he wrote:

"Few months of life has he in store  
As he to you will tell,  
For still, the more he works, the more  
His poor old ankles swell."

In a later version he did alter the last line to "Did his weak ankles swell", but one cannot feel that it was much of an improvement. Yet, as the de Selincourt - Darbishire note says, "on the text of no other short poem did Wordsworth expend so much labour as on 'Simon Lee'." In one of the passages often quoted, either favourably or unfavourably, as betraying Jane Austen's "astringency" as opposed to "cosiness", we hear about Mrs Musgrove's "large fat sighings over the destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared for". Jane Austen continues: "Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions... But fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain, - which taste cannot tolerate, - which ridicule will seize". Of course this was just what Wordsworth was attempting to disprove but it is true all the same. Swollen ankles are no joke when you have them but, unfair or not, like fat people, they belong in another dialect of humour from that in which "love and laughter can co-exist". Surely this is not so much eighteenth century decorum as common sense.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice the many alterations he made in the effort to perfect the poem and in particular "to broaden and emphasize the contrast between Simon's radiant youth and decrepit age", a contrast summed up in the elegiac phrase he took from Lycidas, "But O the heavy change!" Wordsworth is trying to make us aware, by the use of a kind of comedy, of the cruelty and indifference of a social system that obliged men and women in old age to work beyond their strength and to eke out their last days in acute poverty, just as Lamb drew our attention to the plight of the chimney-sweeps. In addition, Simon Lee's gratitude leaves us

mourning for the universal human fate,

"How Mutability in them doth play  
Her cruel sports, to many men's decay".

Such an open-eyed facing of "a very disagreeable reality" can be found among Lamb's works in the most surprising places. In the essay on Roast Pig, for instance, in the midst of such pleasures as the splendid skit on pseudo-scholarship and the manuscript-discovering industry, the light-hearted exposure of political conservatism and corrupt law-givers, comic social history and simple, high-spirited fun, suddenly we are brought up short by glimpses of what we should now call black humour. Donald Reiman touches on this in his article in the *Bulletin* of July 1976. He has also suggested that there may be some sort of counterblast here by Lamb to Leigh Hunt on Isaac Walton, which may help to explain but can hardly diminish the shock.

"To see the extreme sensibility of that tender age! he hath wept out his pretty eyes - radiant jellies - shooting stars. -"

Already the comparison with a human baby has been strongly suggested. The jest of "his voice not yet broken", about a creature that is being roasted, is one of those that "scald like tears". We feel we are not so far removed from the *Modest Proposal* as our stereotypes of "gentle-hearted Charles" and "savage Swift" would indicate.

This impression is reinforced as the passage progresses. "See him in the dish, his second cradle, how meek he lieth!" All sorts of associations, of Moloch-worship, of Christmas, of sacrifice and martyrdom come with apparent inappropriateness unbidden into the reader's mind. Yet, just as Wordsworth's poem of deliberate bathos was most meticulously framed, so one must suppose that Lamb knew what he was doing here. Recently, American critics, repairing our English neglect, have demonstrated how the seeming inconsequence of the *Essays of Elia* turns out on closer scrutiny to have been carefully shaped and sometimes with a sophisticated use of imagery. So, seemingly, Lamb planted these curious associations with intent and, amid his "funning" condemnation of the pious consolations given for infant mortality, quoted (or slightly misquoted) Coleridge's 'Epitaph on an Infant'. The mock Passion in the interests of gastronomy - "he hath a fair sepulchre in the grateful stomach of the judicious epicure - and for such a tomb might be content to die..." - is represented as innocent. The ingestion so like "sinning that really a tender-conscienced person would do well to pause" is transferred to the pineapple - because it bites back.

While the identification of the pig with a child - precursor of the Duchess's baby which Alice was saddled with? - is still fresh in our minds, "that dangerous figure, irony" comes into play again. After the incident of his aunt's cake and the jibe at "my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness", we are brought up again with a jolt by this.

"Our ancestors were nice in their methods of sacrificing these tender victims. We read of pigs whipt to death with something of a shock, as we hear of any other obsolete custom."

On the whole he does not favour it. "It looks like refining the violet". Though a parody, the academic disputation which follows, complete with Latin tag, again suggesting Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, upon the degree of suffering it is legitimate to inflict for the greater pleasure of the torturer is surely worthy of the Marquis de Sade.

As Fred Randel neatly puts it, "appetites are a function of animality. The delightful pig Elia wishes to assimilate is inside man before he eats the pork on the table." Or, as William Golding makes another pig say, "Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! ...You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you".

Lamb knew this all right and acknowledged it. Unblinking, like the Fool in *Lear*, he accompanied "unaccommodated man" down quick into hell - and back. Even his beloved Elliston, "(O ignoble levelling of Death)", was condemned to be stripped "of histrionic robes, and private vanities". "Off, off, ye lendings!" and then what a "poor bare fork'd animal" he is. "But, bless me, how *little* you look!" Like Wordsworth, Lamb saw that

"The Clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality."

E V Lucas speaks of Lamb's "high moral courage and indignation" and of Charles' and Mary's "extraordinary honesty".

"They never permitted themselves to deceive. They instantly detected what was genuine both in their fellow creatures and in art, and never wavered in their fidelity to it."

John Mason Brown reminds us that "In his letters, as in his talk, a spade was a spade..." and quotes, "Coleridge is settled with his wife (with a child in her guts)."

Yet, despite his disclaimers in 'Imperfect Sympathies', Lamb was closer to Sir Thomas Browne's tolerance than he would admit. As Lucas points out, Hazlitt "was inclined to despise Lamb's tolerance as weakness", yet himself benefited by it: "No he is not a bad man, but he commits bad actions". Lamb was a realist. He saw his brother, for instance, exactly as he was and did not soften the facts in describing him.

"With great love for *you*, J.E. hath but a limited sympathy with what you feel or do. He lives in a world of his own, and makes slender guesses at what passes in your mind."

How many James Elia's there are about! Like Lamb, one may love them and delight in their idiosyncracies but one would be an ass to expect anything from them in time of need or indeed any true reciprocity at that time - and Lamb was not an ass. Similarly, he could like and admire an individual Scotsman such as Edward Irving, "a most amiable, sincere, modest man in a room, this Boanerges in the temple", while acknowledging the intolerable boredom of those qualities of mind that he associated with Caledonians, and that we perhaps have met in a certain sort of plodding scholar.

It is as unreasonable to demand of Lamb as it is of Jane Austen that they should always transcend the social mores of their day, though both often do. We can set the Jews in 'Imperfect Sympathies' against the notes on Marlowe's and Shakespeare's Jews, the Quakers against 'A Quakers' Meeting', but, if we look for mitigation of the passage on negroes to Othello in *The Tragedies of Shakespeare*, our modern consciousness will not be much consoled. Lamb is honest to the last. On the whole, however, he is tolerant of faulty humanity but does not shut his eyes to the pain and tedium of living with it. "I never could hate any man that I have once seen," said Lamb. He could as easily have written, "I have ever hated all nations, professions and communities; and all my love is towards individuals." Or

"But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. This is the system upon which I have governed myself many years (but do not tell), and so I shall go on until I have done with them". Above all, he loved idiosyncrasy.

"...I had an eye  
Which in my strongest workings evermore  
Was looking for the shades of difference  
As they lie hid in all exterior forms..."

Wordsworth also valued individuality, though in a different way, and it is significant that both 'Simon'Lee' and 'The Idiot Boy' arose out of and included the exact words spoken by real, particular people. The old huntsman, who lived by the waterfall on Holford Common had said to Wordsworth, "I dearly love their voices", and Poole had reported to him "The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo, And the sun did shine so cold". In 'The Idiot Boy', as Danby and subsequently Mary Jacobus have eloquently shown, Wordsworth does demonstrate by means of comedy, "the strength, disinterestedness and grandeur of love", in a dialect of humour in which "love and laughter can co-exist". He deals with other forms of madness in other ways elsewhere, for example in 'The Thorn' and in 'The Mad Mother', which Lamb singled out for praise, but never more successfully than in 'The Idiot Boy', with humour for a weapon. He was content to deal, "as a man speaking to men" with "What on the earth is doing". When he used the language of humour to aid him in this purpose, he was not always equally successful, as we have already seen. About *Peter Bell*, with its mock-heroic, its burlesque of the Gothic supernatural and its improbable conversion, opinions always have differed and still do. But, at its best, Wordsworth's comedy in this vein, like Lamb's in his, does avoid the direct lecture and its message does "slide into the mind of the reader, while he is imagining no such matter". The kindly humour is entirely acceptable in 'The Waggoner', Lamb's copy of which was "very ill put up in boards, at least it seems to me always to open at the dedication - but that is a mechanical fault". Lamb writes later in that same letter: "I do not know which I like best, the prologue (the latter part specially) to P. Bell, or the Epilogue to Benjamin. Yes, I tell stories, I do know".

So far, the humour we have been examining has been rather of my father's variety, a skeleton hiding within the motley. Though no less ambivalent, perhaps we should not entirely neglect my mother's more delicate touch, at which both Lamb and Wordsworth were past masters. In their protest against mutability, both writers called upon memory, particularly of childhood, and looked back from their adult status:

"...so wide appears  
The vacancy between me and those days  
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind,  
That sometimes, when I think of it, I seem  
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself  
And of some other Being."

Or, as Lamb put it, "Do I advance a paradox, when I say that, skipping over the intervention of forty years, a man may have leave to love *himself*, without the imputation of self-love?"

In their tender look back at the past, a gentler sadness informs the dialect of humour they adopt. Thus Wordsworth, remembering the boy out snaring woodcock, smiles indulgently.



"...In thought and wish  
That time, my shoulder all with springes hung,  
I was a fell destroyer."

The point of this little joke is brought home by Lamb in 'All Fools' Day': "It is observed that 'the foolisher the fowl or fish - woodcocks - dotterels - cods'-heads, etc., the finer the flesh thereof'." The disparity between the child's heroic fantasy of himself and the ease with which the stupid bird could be caught, is cause for rueful and affectionate amusement to the grown man. Similarly the "shepherd's boat" becomes an "elfin pinnacle". Wordsworth's "sooty knaves" and "monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained /By regal visages" must surely have come from a brother pack to that held by Martin Burney when Lamb said, "Martin, if dirt were t-trumps, what a hand you would hold!"

With what delight does Elia tell us of the tricks he played with the fountain, "to the astoundment of the young urchins my contemporaries, who, not being able to guess at its recondite machinery, were almost tempted to hail the wondrous work as magic"! How deliciously he chooses his words in describing the tapestried walls at Blakesmoor "at which childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly)": "Actaeon in mid sprout, with the unappeasable prudery of Diana; and the still more provoking, and almost culinary coolness of Dan Phoebus, eel-fashion, deliberately diverting of Marsyas"!

But the joy is fleeting. For Wordsworth,

"The days gone by  
Come back upon me from the dawn almost  
Of life: the hiding-places of my power  
Seem open; I approach, and then they close;  
I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,  
May scarcely see at all..."

For Lamb, the fountain is immediately followed by the sundial - "Adam could scarce have missed it in Paradise" - which measures the very time that destroys the Golden Age. Man is banished from Eden, Blakesmoor is a ruin, and Lamb turns the knife in the wound when he meditates that "Death does not shrink up his human victim at this rate. The burnt ashes of a man weigh more in their proportion".

When they turn their eyes from the past to the future they find, in Samuel Beckett's words, "no lack of void". Yet neither do they, for any length of time "avert their ken / From half of human fate". They look at it squarely and force us to do so too.

Disease and Death and bewildering Terror, in Athenian garments, are endurable, and come, as the delicate critics express it, within the 'limits of pleasurable sensation'. But the scenes of their own St. Giles's, delineated by their own countryman, are too shocking to think of.

Lamb and Wordsworth do not dress reality in the dignified vestments of Greek tragedy. They give us Simon Lee, Betty Foy, Peter Bell, Benjamin the Waggoner, the Old Benchers, Elliston the actor, George Dyer, Captain Jackson and many another, beside the writers' own youthful and ageing selves. Ordinary people, like you and me, clothed in the language of humour, serve to remind us of the common concerns of human life, the deepest universal loves and hates, joys and fears.

"In the perusal of a book or of a picture, much of the impression that we receive depends upon the habit of mind which we bring with us to such perusal. The same circumstance may make one person laugh, which shall render another very serious..."

At school, as a child, one may laugh when reading, "There is a flower, the lesser Celandine" and even write cheekily in the margin, "You don't say!" But it is a different matter later on.

"O Man, that from thy fair and shining youn  
Age might but take the things Youth needed not."

One may learn to say with Lamb, "The humour of the thing, if there was ever much in it, was pretty well exhausted": or

"My scalded eyes no longer brook  
Upon this ink-blurred thing to look -  
Go shut the leaves, and clasp the book."

Or one may, on the contrary, return to those two brave jokers, noting Wordsworth's bold uncompromizing incongruities, Lamb's tolerant yet unflinching irony - and find April weather again, of laughter and tears. For, as Lamb said of Hogarth's "Harlot's Funeral", hardly the thing to appeal to the poor-spirited,

"It is easy to laugh at such incongruities as are met together in this picture - incongruous objects being of the very essence of laughter - but surely the laugh is far different in its kind from that thoughtless species to which we are moved by farce and grotesque..."

and he goes on, referring to part of a novel by Smollett,

"...we smile at the exquisite irony of the passage - but if we are not led on by such passages to some more salutary feeling than laughter, we are very negligent perusers of them in book or picture."

#### CHARLES LAMB ON BENSLEY

Wayne McKenna

In the essay 'On Some of the Old Actors' Lamb commented upon Bensley's acting of Iago and Malvolio, and Sylvan Barnet claimed in his 'Charles Lamb and the Tragic Malvolio' that the interpretation of Malvolio belonged solely to Lamb and not at all to Bensley: 'The evidence of Bensley's contemporaries clearly suggests that the actor's Malvolio was not that which Lamb depicted twenty-six years after Bensley had retired'.<sup>1</sup> I shall begin with some comments on Bensley's acting of Iago and Malvolio, and I shall try to explain why I do not find Barnet's evidence fully convincing.

Bensley's acting displayed those qualities which Lamb connected with natural acting. He was 'totally destitute of trick and artifice. He seemed come upon the stage to do the poet's message simply, and he did it with as genuine fidelity as the nuncios in Homer deliver the errands of the gods'.<sup>2</sup> In the essay on 'Stage Illusion' Lamb stressed that this technique was essential for the successful performance of characters in tragedy, since 'In tragedy - in all which is to affect the feelings - this undivided attention to his stage business, seems indispensable' (II, 163). Bensley maintained scenical illusion by a strict attention to his role, and as Iago he did not engage in any 'by-intimations to make the audience fancy their discernment so much greater than that of the Moor' (II, 134). Artificial

acting, in which the actor 'without absolutely appealing to an audience,... keeps up a tacit understanding with them; and makes them, unconsciously to themselves, a party in the scene' (II, 163), would have debased the grandeur of the struggle between Iago and Othello. Lamb regarded Bensley's Iago as 'the only endurable' performance of that character which he had seen, and this judgement perhaps snubbed Kean, who enjoyed a good reputation at that time. Lamb remained virtually silent about Kean, but from Hazlitt's account of Kean's Iago it would appear that a gap existed between Lamb's conception of the ideal presentation of the character and Kean's manner of acting it. Despite his admiration for Kean Hazlitt reproached him for actions which were 'not the text of Shakespear' and for 'the extreme alteration' of 'the essence of the character'. Hazlitt expressed reservations on the 'pattern of comic gaiety and good-humour' which Kean introduced, and he argued that the weakest points of the performance appeared 'in the third act with Othello, where "comes the tug of war"'. He regretted that the 'deep internal working of hypocrisy under the mask of love and honesty, escaped us on the stage'.<sup>3</sup> Thus Kean did not realize Lamb's 'consummate villain entrapping a noble nature into toils, against which no discernment was available, where the manner was as fathomless as the purpose seemed dark, and without motive' (II, 134), which was how Bensley acted the character.

Lamb did not distinguish between the acting techniques which Bensley used in the roles of Iago and Malvolio, and the essay suggested that Bensley's style of natural acting also influenced his performance of Malvolio. Thus Bensley treated the role of Malvolio as 'serious acting' (II, 133), and performed the character 'with a richness and a dignity' (II, 134). Lamb's argument depended upon his sense of Malvolio's worth. His belief that the man commanded a certain respect formed the essence of his interpretation of the character, and a large part of the essay aimed at substantiating that belief. He argued that Malvolio was not a 'buffoon' but rather a man who had earned responsibility and a measure of respect from his social superiors: 'He is a master of the household to a great Princess;...Olivia, at the first indication of his supposed madness, declares that she "would not have him miscarry for half of her dowry"' (II, 134-5). Lamb insisted that Malvolio should not be confused with the 'eternal old, low steward of comedy' (II, 134). The true clown' (II, 136) in the play was Feste who jested for his living. Malvolio occupied a serious position.

Although Lamb respected what he believed to be Malvolio's 'estimable qualities' (II, 135) he did not regard him as a pleasant character. On the contrary, Malvolio was 'at the best unlovely'. He was 'cold, austere, repelling;... of an over-stretched morality...a sort of Puritan' (II, 134). Lamb fully realized that Malvolio behaved in a manner which was quite out of place in the world created by the inhabitants of Illyria, but that did not make Malvolio contemptible. His weaknesses were not affected, 'his superstructure of pride seemed bottomed upon a sense of worth. There was something in it beyond the coxcomb. It was big and swelling, but you could not be sure that it was hollow' (II, 135). Lamb did not consider Malvolio to be suitable for evoking laughter, because his pride was 'inherent, and native to the man, not mock or affected, which latter only are the fit objects to excite laughter'. He did not believe that comedy should ridicule an otherwise worthy man's incorrigible weaknesses, and so Malvolio 'becomes comic but by accident'. Thus Lamb did not argue for the complete exclusion of a comic response to Malvolio but he did insist that he was not 'essentially ludicrous' (II, 134). His attitude can be clarified by

reference to Congreve's letter to the 'Earl of Mountague' which prefaced *The Way of the World* (ed J Barnard, Fountainwell Drama Texts, Edinburgh, 1972, p.16).

Those Characters which are meant to be ridiculous in most of our Comedies, are of Fools so gross, that in my humble Opinion, they should rather disturb than divert the well-natured and reflecting part of an Audience; they are rather Objects of Charity than Contempt; and instead of moving our Mirth, they ought very often to excite our Compassion.

This Reflection mov'd me to design some Characters, which should appear ridiculous not so much thro' a natural Folly (which is incorrigible, and therefore not proper for the Stage) as thro' an affected Wit.

By these criteria Lamb's Malvolio became a compassionate rather than a properly comic character. Lamb found that when Malvolio was at the height of his deception concerning the Countess's love,

you were infected with the illusion, and did not wish that it should be removed! you had no room for laughter! if an unseasonable reflection of morality obtruded itself, it was a deep sense of the pitiable infirmity of man's nature, that can lay him open to such frenzies - but in truth you rather admired than pitied the lunacy while it lasted - you felt that an hour of such mistake was worth an age with the eyes open. (II, 135-6)

Lamb gave moral support to Malvolio's struggle to realize his dream and he could not patronise him. He acknowledged that feelings of pity were 'unseasonable' and thus inappropriate to this comedy, but rather than laughter he substituted admiration. Respect for Malvolio committed Lamb's sympathies: 'Who would not wish to live but for a day in the conceit of such a lady's love as Olivia?' (II, 136). The word 'conceit' suggested, on the one hand, the pride which he could not condemn in Malvolio, and on the other hand, the fine conception, the imaginative idea of such a love which he enjoyed and which Bensley's abilities as an actor well suited - at least as Lamb described those abilities: 'Bensley had most of the swell of soul, was greatest in the delivery of heroic conceptions, the emotion consequent upon the presentment of a great idea to the fancy. He had the true poetical enthusiasm - the rarest faculty among players' (II, 133).

Both Lamb and Hazlitt took Malvolio seriously, and in Hazlitt's response a close link existed between the respect and the sympathy which he had for Malvolio: 'we feel a regard for Malvolio, and sympathise with his gravity, his smiles, his cross garters, his yellow stockings, and imprisonment in the stocks' (IV, 315). As Barnet suggested, Hazlitt maintained the play on the level of comedy by his judgement that poetic justice finally reigned: 'If poor Malvolio's treatment afterwards is a little hard, poetical justice is done in the uneasiness which Olivia suffers on account of her mistaken attachment to Cesario, as her insensibility to the violence of the Duke's passion is atoned for by the discovery of Viola's concealed love of him' (IV, 318). Lamb did not admit poetic justice and so without this counterbalancing idea his emotional sympathies became deeply involved and prompted him to the declaration of a 'kind of tragic interest' in Malvolio's catastrophe'. The context clarified the idea since 'fate and retribution' will not permit Malvolio's usurped position to endure, and "'thus the whirligig of time...brings in his revenges'" (II, 136). The notion of time here perhaps determined Lamb's recognition of the potentiality of tragedy in Malvolio. Northrop Frye suggested in his *Fools of Time: Studies in*

*Shakespearean Tragedy* that the 'basis of the tragic vision is being in time', and this 'being in time is not the whole of the tragic vision: it is, in itself, the ironic vision. Because it is the basis of the tragic vision, the ironic and the tragic are often confused or identified' (Toronto and London, 1967, pp 3-4). Lamb acknowledged that *Twelfth Night* did not develop into a tragedy, and that comedy maintained its rightful place, for if Malvolio threatened the comic world of Illyria, he did not succeed in upsetting it. 'He is opposed to the proper *levities* of the piece, and falls in the unequal contest' (II, 134). Malvolio met not a tragic but an ironic fate.

Lamb claimed to derive this interpretation of Malvolio from Bensley's acting, but he was only twenty-one years old when Bensley retired from the stage in 1796 and thus his memory was obliged to go back at least twenty-six years. The question of how much responsibility for the interpretation belonged to Lamb and how much to Bensley cannot be easily resolved, since few contemporary accounts of Bensley's acting exist. The earliest commentator whom Barnet quotes was M J Young, whose *Memoirs of Mrs Crouch* appeared in 1806. Young was the only one of the writers whom Barnet quoted who wrote before Lamb's essay appeared in 1822. Barnet contrasted Lamb's Steward of 'richness and dignity' with Young's 'Mr Bensley, in the vain fantastical Malvolio, was excellent' (p.184), but this comparison can be misleading because Lamb recognized that at a certain point in the play Malvolio lost much of his dignity:

but when the decent sobrieties of the character began to give way, and the poison of self-love, in his conceit of the Countess's affection, gradually to work, you would have thought that the hero of La Mancha in person stood before you. How he went smiling to himself! with what ineffable carelessness would he twirl his gold chain! what a dream it was! (II, 135)

This was a 'vain' and a 'fantastical' Malvolio, and in these comments Lamb showed no real dissimilarity with the judgement of Young.

Barnet also quoted from the works of George Colman the Younger, John Taylor, and John Genest, who published their comments on Bensley in 1830, 1832, and 1832 respectively. All of these writers limited themselves to observations which concerned Bensley's physical attributes and their suitability for the role of Malvolio. Barnet wrote:

John Taylor observed that 'his voice was rough, and had no variety' and its tones were 'grave and often nasal'. Bensley's stiffness was also mentioned frequently, but most commentators add that although he triumphed over these handicaps, they were not always liabilities. Genest wrote that 'his voice and manner were well suited to Malvolio', and Taylor said that all his peculiarities 'operated in his favour in the part of Malvolio'. Similarly, George Colman the Younger held that Bensley's stalk, stiffness, and nasal twang aided him in 'his personification of Malvolio, the starch and conceited Steward' (p.185).

Bensley's reputation for stiffness existed before he had ever played Malvolio. Some verse in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of January 1772 included the line: 'B was for Bensley, as stiff as you please'. Some of the comments which Barnet quoted bore an extraordinary resemblance rather than a contrast with those of Lamb. Lamb wrote that Bensley's 'gait was uncouth and stiff', that he was 'starch, spruce, opinionated', and that his 'voice had the dissonance and at times the inspiring effect of the trumpet'. But more

important, and not quoted by Barnet, were Lamb's 'the thoroughbred gentleman was uppermost in every movement' (II, 133) and Colman's comment in his *Random Records* that 'Bensley, who always maintain'd an upper rank upon the stage, both in Tragedy and Comedy, was respectable in *all* the characters he undertook' (London, 1830, II, 7). Here there was more than a glimpse of Lamb's dignified Malvolio. In 1839 Adolphus referred to Bensley's 'solemn deportment' (Barnet, p.184) which echoed Lamb's comment: 'His bearing is lofty... He looked, spake, and moved like an old Castilian' (II, 134-5). These comments did not contradict Lamb.

Barnet argued that the 'dignity which Lamb felt invested Bensley, Bensley's contemporaries often felt was comic' and he quoted Adolphus and James Boaden to support this statement. Adolphus wrote of Bensley's 'ludicrous gullibility in Malvolio', and Boaden commented:

Bensley and Aiken were both manly; but for pleasantry, alas! it became *satire* in passing their lips. I never laughed with Bensley but once, and then he represented Malvolio, in which, I thought him perfection. Bensley had been a soldier, yet his stage walk eternally reminded you of the '*one, two, three, hop*' of the dancing-master; this scientific progress of legs, in yellow stockings, most villainously cross-gartered, with a horrible laugh of ugly conceit to top the whole, rendered him Shakespeare's Malvolio at all points (pp. 184 and 186).

These subjective responses differed from Lamb's, but Boaden wrote thirty-five years after Bensley's retirement and Adolphus forty-three. In the absence of a sufficient quantity of other evidence, their statements did not disprove Lamb's. Lamb supported his recollection of the essential dignity of Malvolio by pointing out that when Bensley could not act the role he was replaced by John Philip Kemble, an actor more respected for his tragic than for his comic acting. Lamb implied that Kemble, an actor of natural dignity, could most easily take over the role and play it in the manner established by Bensley. Kemble did not act buffoons. The only genuinely contemporary comment which I have found on the comic nature of the part appeared in *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser* of 23 September 1782, where the reviewer wrote that 'Bensley happily hit off the dry and costive humour of Malvolio'. The words 'dry' and 'costive' did not imply that an audience experienced great amusement during Bensley's performance of Malvolio.

I have discovered only one instance in which another critic's comment on Bensley directly contradicted the objective attributes described by Lamb. In *The Gazetteer* of 27 June 1791 the theatrical reviewer claimed that Bensley had spoilt 'a performance otherwise good by concluding his sentences with a rant, and a look at the gallery (i.e. to invite applause)'. If Bensley did act in this manner then Lamb falsely praised his lack of 'trick and artifice', and the acting techniques consistent with Lamb's interpretation did not find their expression in Bensley. This supports Barnet's argument, and despite his lack of real evidence he perhaps reached the correct conclusion. I suggest that Lamb described Bensley with sufficient accuracy in respect of the well-known characteristics of the actor to disguise a possibly personal interpretation of Malvolio. Here Lamb combined theatrical and literary criticism, so that his imagination embodied a whole acting performance at the same time as his mind reasoned its critical analysis of the character.

1 *PQ*, 33 (1954), 178-88 (p.187). Further references are given after

quotations in the text.

- 2 *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E V Lucas, 7 vols (London, 1903-5), II, 133. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
- 3 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P P Howe, 21 vols (London 1930-4), V, 219-21 and IV 17. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

#### CHARLES AND MARY LAMB IN RUSSELL STREET

Basil Savage

I have always been a little puzzled when I read that from 1817 to 1823 Charles and Mary lived at No. 20 *Great* Russell Street; for as all scholars know Great Russell Street is the one which runs in front of The British Museum. The confusion, if confusion there be, seems to have arisen from a note by E V Lucas in his 1935 edition of the *Letters* on a letter to Dorothy Wordsworth dated 21 November 1817 (*see note below*). Mary had written:

We have left the Temple. I think you will be sorry to hear this. I know I have never been so well satisfied with thinking of you at Rydal Mount as when I could connect the idea of you with your own Grasmere Cottage. Our rooms were dirty and out of repair, and the inconveniences of living in chambers became every year more irksome, and so at last we mustered up resolution enough to leave the good old place that so long had sheltered us - and here we are, living at a Brazier's shop, No. 20, in Russell Street, Covent Garden, a place all alive with noise and bustle, Drury Lane Theatre in sight from our front and Covent Garden from our back windows. The hubbub of the carriages returning from the play does not annoy me in the least - strange that it does not, for it is quite tremendous. I quite enjoy looking out of the window and listening to the calling up of the carriages and the squabbles of the coachmen and linkboys. It is the oddest scene to look down upon, I am sure you would be amused with it. It is well I am in a cheerful place or I should have many misgivings about leaving the Temple.

And Charles added:

Here we are, transplanted from our native soil. I thought we never could have been torn up from the Temple. Indeed it was an ugly wrench, but like a tooth, 'tis now out and I am easy. We never can strike root so deep in any other ground. This, where we are, is a bit light of gardener's mold, and if they take us up from it, it will cost no blood and groans like mandrakes pull'd up. We are in the individual spot I like best in all this great city. The Theatres with all /a few words cut away: Talfourd has 'their noises. Covent Garden'/ dearer to me than all the gardens of Alcinous, where we are morally sure of the earliest peas and 'sparagus. Bow Street, where the thieves are examined, within a few yards of us. Mary had not been here more than four and twenty hours before she saw a Thief. She sits at the window working, and

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Lucas's note reads: "The Lambs' House in Russell Street has been rebuilt. Russell Street, Covent Garden, in those days was divided into Great Russell Street (from the Market to Brydges Street, now Catherine Street) and Little Russell Street (from Brydges Street to Drury Lane). The brazier, or ironmonger, was Mr Owen, Nos. 20 and 21 (Vol. II. 219)

casually throwing out her eyes, she sees a concourse of people coming this way, with a constable to conduct the solemnity. These little incidents agreeably diversify a female life.

The first point to notice is that Mary, who was not given to careless ways, refers to Russell Street and not *Great* Russell Street.

We are all, of course, indebted to Lucas for his *Life*, his editions of the *Letters* and for many other delightful writings about Lamb, but we must remember that around the turn of the century interest and accuracy did not always march together, and the literary scholar of today would be unlikely to accept without careful scrutiny what had been edited or annotated at that time. While acknowledging our debt to Lucas's pioneering work, therefore, we owe ourselves the duty - as Professor Marrs is teaching us with his new edition of the *Letters* - to test Lucas at various points to see whether his conclusions will stand scrutiny in the light of modern knowledge.

Almost all the information I have gained on this subject comes from the "new" *Survey of London* initiated by the London County Council and since continued by its successor, The Greater London Council. Of the 38 volumes now issued I am indebted to Vols. V (The Parish of St Giles in the Fields, Vol. II), XXXIII (The Parish of St Anne, Soho), XXXVI (The parish of St Paul, Covent Garden), and XXXV (The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane; and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden). I am most grateful for the permission of the GLC to quote from these volumes.

The main thing to remember is that the London estates of the Dukes of Bedford comprised two portions, stretching roughly from the Strand in the south to somewhere near Euston Road in the north; and from Tottenham Court Road in the West to Drury Lane in the East. This, of course, has given rise to a crop of family names as the streets and squares developed; for example Russell Square, Bedford Square. The Covent Garden part of the estate was the first to be developed, and the two parts of the Covent Garden Russell Street were at first known as Great and Little Russell Street, as Lucas says. However, in the 1630s the 4th Duke of Bedford built himself a mansion, almost a palace, the site of which had as its southern boundary the present Great Russell Street. In Morden and Lea's map of 1682 the only other buildings shown on the fields comprising the northern end of the estate (Cowles Field and Cowles Pasture) are a few at the south end of Tottenham Court Road. Great Russell Street had, however, already been formed and houses were in existence on the south side (Vol. IV. 147). In 1761 Speaker Onslow gave up his office in the House of Commons, and moved from Fauconberg House in Soho Square to a house in Great Russell Street in order, so it was said, to be near to the British Museum, of which he was a trustee (Vol. XXXIII. 69, citing C E Vulliamy's *The Onslow Family*). Christopher Wren's son, Stephen, is also said to have written letters from a house in the street, afterwards known as No.32, headed "Great Russell Street" (Bedford Estate Accounts cited in V. 147).

That is the evidence that what we may call the British Museum Street was established and known as Great Russell Street for nearly two centuries before the Lambs arrived in the house at Covent Garden; and my thesis is that the name of the Covent Garden street began to be changed to plain Russell Street sometime in the 17th century. In support of this I can cite seven maps with dates ranging from 1673 to 1877 which all call the street running eastward from the Piazza in Covent Garden towards Drury Lane as plain Russell Street, although it is true that Plates 8 and 9 (one map) do



mark the eastern end of Russell Street as "Little Russell Street". In Vol. XXXV there is also a plan dated 1661 of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, which clearly shows houses to the south side of "Russell Street" as its north boundary.

Lucas's confusion may have been caused by the fact that of the houses built in the 1630s round the Piazza - the open square where the buildings of the former Covent Garden fruit and vegetable market now stand - those with an aspect to the north side of Russell Street were known as "The Great Piazza" and those with an aspect to the south side as "The Little Piazza". The builder's accounts for the erection of three houses in the Piazza in 1635 refer to:

"making the side of the Seller Stayres out of Russell Street into Sr Edmund Varneyes Seller, and for the like out of Mr Sidnams yard into his Seller (£)01.10.00

and to:

"Pauiers work" done "in Russell Street next to Sr Edmund Varneyes house 247 yards at xid. the yard (£) 05.04.06

In the later history of the area the survey refers to the social decline of the Piazza and to the 5th Duke being commended in 1793 because he "did away with that abominable nuisance, the picture-stall at the corner of Russell Street - possibly that stall where a shopkeeper called Reed displayed obscene prints 'attracting the idle'" (XXXVI. 83). This seems much more like Lamb's London.

Of great interest is the special section in Volume XXXV.192-195 specifically on Russell Street, which London readers, at anyrate, can call for and read in the reference department of the local public library. I cannot forbear to report a footnote about the Lambs on p.193:

No.20 is the house-number both Charles and Mary give in their letters, but their friends refer to their living at the corner house (No.21, Plate 53a). Both houses belonged to the same landlord and probably, as in the days of Will's coffee house (see p.185), communicated above ground level. This is borne out by Crabb Robinson, who gives the Lambs' address as 'at Mr Owen's, No.20 and 21 Great Russell Street, Drury Lane'.

Well, by this time you will have seen my drift. Charles and Mary at no time regarded themselves as living in Great Russell Street, Crabb Robinson notwithstanding; and since Charles was several times in his life, if not constantly, a regular reader at the British Museum, he must have been aware of the distinction to be drawn. There is nothing in his letters, and if he thought of himself as living in *Great* Russell Street he could not have resisted a joke about people thinking he lived in the more rarefied air in the northern part of the Bedford estate. Dr Francis Sheppard, present General Editor of the *Survey of London*, tells me that the use of street names in the 17th and 18th centuries was much looser than it is now; but it is still true that the name of the Covent Garden street was changed over the years from Great Russell Street to plain Russell Street and my contention is that this change took place at some time before Charles and Mary's arrival. There may still have been one or two old-fashioned people who perpetuated the usage Great Russell Street, but the Lambs were not among them. May I not now suggest that we should regard Lucas as having been misled on this particular point, and that Lamb had no illusions about the quite plain and ordinary Russell Street, Covent Garden?

## THE BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

About 100 members and guests gathered at Simpson's in the Strand on 12 February to celebrate Charles Lamb's birthday. Our President was in the Chair, and the Guest of Honour was Professor Lionel Elvin, latterly Director of the University of London Institute of Education.

Professor Elvin reminded his audience of a curious connection between Charles Lamb and Australia. Lamb was the first English writer to review a book of Australian poetry. Barron Field published a slim volume in 1819, 'for private distribution' in Sydney. There are two poems, both on appropriately antipodean themes, 'Botany Bay Flowers' and 'The Kangaroo'. Professor Elvin has a copy of this book, from Lamb's library, with the author's bookplate.

Barron Field (1746-1846) is mentioned in the Elian essay "Mackery End in Hertfordshire" under the initials "B F". He is also the subject of Lamb's essay "Distant Correspondents", because, as a young lawyer, he sailed to New South Wales in search of more work than he could find in Britain. He was an admirer of Wordsworth, and belonged to Lamb's circle. He sent a copy of his poems to Lamb, who reviewed them in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* (Jan. 16th 1820).

As Professor Elvin pointed out, a problem for a pioneering antipodean poet is the difficulty of fitting "Australia" into rhyming verse. Field makes two attempts:

If therefore She and her regalia,  
Have never yet been in Australia. (Botany Bay Flowers)

Kangaroo, Kangaroo,  
Thou spirit of Australia,  
That redeems from utter failure, (The Kangaroo)

'Botany Bay Flowers' is a verse meditation on a single flower, *epacris grandiflora*, which is not even a native of Australia. What would poets like Shakespeare have said about this flower "born to blush unseen"? Field reflects. There is very little that relieves the banality of this poem, though the poetical footnotes have an Elian touch. Lamb is more enthusiastic about the second poem, 'The Kangaroo'. The mock-Miltonic erudition is particularly Elian,

...Sphynx or mermaid realised,  
Or centaur unfabulous  
Would scarce be more prodigious  
Or Pegasus poetical,  
Or hippogriff-chimeras all.

There are attempts at metaphysical conceits;

Thou canst not be amended; no  
Be as thou art; thou best art so.

Though this poem could not be said to be inspired, the liveliness of the rhythm, combining with a fertility of invention on a popular theme, make this an enjoyable poem. Dr Johnson, who imitated the motions of a kangaroo in Inverness, like Lamb, would have enjoyed this description.

Dr Rich proposed the toast of the provincial and overseas members, and the response was made by Dr Wayne McKenna of the University of Newcastle, New

South Wales, who is the author of one of the articles in the present number of the Bulletin.

As usual, Simpson's provided us with an excellent luncheon, including Crown Roast of Lamb and Bramble Apple Pudding; and representatives of the Christ's Hospital Schools at Horsham and Hertford were present to say grace and to grace the occasion with their presence. As always, they received copies of the Elia essays, suitably inscribed, from the President.

B Fletcher

#### THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This took place on 2 April, and a Report and Accounts were circulated with the April Bulletin. Mr Fletcher was formally appointed Minutes Secretary after having served in that capacity for some months. Mrs Day retired from the Council, and Mr Lonsdale and Miss E V Hunt were appointed. Mrs Wedd, as noted elsewhere, was appointed Joint Editor of the Bulletin, with the right to attend Council meetings.

The question of the Society's library was discussed, and it was agreed that the Chairman, Mr Branchini and Mr Savage should be authorised to bring to a satisfactory conclusion, if possible, negotiations which had already been started on an informal basis with a view to transferring the collection to The Guildhall Library in the City. It would be much more accessible there, and although open access would not be possible, nor the borrowing for home reading of any of the volumes, every effort should be made to complete the catalogue which had been started so that members could know what they may requisition for consultation at the Library itself. Mr Savage agreed to take this on once again.

The Crowsley Memorial Lecture on Saturday 1 October was to be given by Dr John Stevens of Magdalene College, Cambridge. It was agreed that the Mary Ward Centre did not provide a suitable milieu for the lectures, and that a more suitable place should be sought: the Chairman was authorised to decide upon this point after considering the alternatives; it was accepted that we should have to pay for any other accommodation but on balance it was thought well worth it.

B S

#### BOOKS

We have received from Miss Eve Buzath, our member in Budapest, the kind gift of a volume of *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare* in Hungarian.

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Fred V Randel: *The World of Elia: Charles Lamb's Essayistic Romanticism* Port Washington, N Y and London: Kennikat Press, 1975 xii+170pp. \$9.95

To many there seemed to be a scarcity of publications and publicity to honor Charles Lamb during 1975, the bicentenary of his birth, and this dearth seemed even more pronounced when contrasted with the outpouring of material during 1934, the centenary of his death. There can be no question that the English Romantic essayists, along with other essayists old and new,

have suffered a decline in popularity and interest during the last forty years. But, at the same time, a fortunate redirection in literary criticism has taken place during these years, one manifestation being (at last) the serious consideration of the contribution to literature of the Romantic essayists and the development of important criticism concerning Charles Lamb. This redirection is well illustrated through a 1975 publication by Prof. Fred V. Randel, a Lamb Society member. *The World of Elia* is not only a sound and worthy addition to the canon of scholarship on the essays, but is an interesting and elucidating book for those who want to learn more about Lamb's essays. Scholars will find it useful; academic libraries will find it a necessity. Moreover, the book's purpose is partly to justify the reading and interpreting of Lamb's essays in our time: "They eminently deserve it," writes Prof. Randel in the Preface, "and now that two hundred years have elapsed since Lamb's birth in 1775, the time is overdue for a full statement of the case for the greatness of his essays to be made in terms that are meaningful for the twentieth-century reader."

Little more can be done here than to give a hint of the book's subject matter, methodology, and approaches. But one can be sure that upon reading the text, not only will he or she find the essays discussed in new ways, but that the place of the essays within British Romanticism is presented in thought-provoking contexts. Prof. Randel's learning is vast, Renaissance and eighteenth-century works are alluded to, the better to trace analogues in the essays of *Elia*. The theme and method of the book can be inferred from the opening sentences of Chapter One, "Imitation, Originality, and Identity":

Lamb's essential artistic achievement was to merge some of the characteristic impulses and schemas of English Romantic poetry with some of the attitudes and techniques of the familiar essay tradition and to effect this combination in a way that asserted his individuality as a maker. At the same time that he resisted, but assimilated, the domineering thrust of the spirit of his age and the history of his genre, he also grappled with more private threats to his identity. (p.3)

And so, within the context of the poets Blake, Shelly, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, as well as the eighteenth-century tradition of the essay, Lamb's essays integrate Romantic values with patterns apparent in the genre of the familiar essay. The essays in many ways parallel Romantic poetry, Prof. Randel indicates; indeed, the style and content of the Romantic essay as analogous with the Romantic lyric is an area of rich possibilities.

Chapter Two, "The Discontinuity of Duration," takes its title partly from De Quincey, who used the word "discontinuity" to describe Lamb's essays and Lamb's refusal of his greatest potentialities; Prof. Randel, however, argues "that the inner necessities of Lamb's imaginative world make a discontinuous manner an expressive form," citing numerous examples of Lamb's using the power of time and the function of memory as important aspects in certain essays. Chapter Three, "The Shape of Time," deals with Lamb's attempt to discover the meaning of time, since he cannot escape from it. The motif of the fortunate fall and its consequences are detailed here, revealing in the essays an archetypal mode of confronting life; the idea of progress as a kind of dialectic is also apparent, and Prof. Randel effectively shows the relationship between the two concepts.

In the fourth chapter, "The Space of Consciousness," two most interesting subjects are explored, those of space and distance. Again Lamb is placed in the context of the literature of his time, but of more importance perhaps

is the symbolic nature of spatial awareness as a recurring idea in the essays. Chapter Five, "Eating and Drinking," may seem like an obvious subject to pursue in Elia's essays, and Prof. Randel does it justice, not only citing literary influences and analogues, but tracing the motif in Lamb and integrating the ideas of nourishment, relationships, orality, organicism, in what the author quite properly indicates as "two kinds of Eliaian trivia" that in the end are not trivial. Prof. Randel is quite at his best when he explores the suggestive possibilities of this and other recurring ideas. Chapter Six, "Playing," deals not so much with Lamb's playfulness as with the ideas of playing games and acting and role playing, all of which share a common impulse.

A concluding note, "The Identity of Elia," reveals what the careful reader will have ascertained, that Prof. Randel's study treats the essays as parts of a whole rather than simply as isolated units. The organic quality of the essays reflects an organic quality of thought and life. It has been Prof. Randel's task to identify for us figures in the carpet, at least some of the figures that we may have missed. And after reading the book, one may find that the unity in *The Essays of Elia* emerges unexpectedly and yet quite naturally.

Duane Schneider

John Beer: Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence London: Macmillan, 1977  
pp. xiv, 318 £8.95

In these inflated times another book on Coleridge? Just over 170 years ago he himself confided to a notebook his determination to write "as truly as I can from *Experience* actual individual *Experience* - not from Book-knowledge." The dictum might be used as a test. How well does John Beer's new book stand up to it?

A meticulous worrying away at the precise twists and shifts of S T C's thought is Dr Beer's method. This clogs the prose but illuminates the thought. A reader is constantly stopping to think; to consider, for example, the comments on S T C's use of the word "genial" and its association for him with feelings of warm touch and creativity (here a link comes to mind between the *Dejection* line "My genial spirits fail" and S T C's recollection of sitting with the Hutchinson sisters in the warmth of illicit contentment); or, again, to follow out thoughts roused by Dr Beer's discussion of the importance of circling and spiralling movements for S T C from the dynamic pattern they give to the Conversation Poems on to the horror of the nightmare Maelstrom that haunts his later recognitions of compulsive convolutions. (For good measure here Dr Beer adds a coda, pointing out the importance of spiral forms for scientists from Coleridge's day until the discovery in our own time of the D N A's double helix.)

The great and appropriate strength of John Beer's book lies in the inclusive intelligence it employs and the steady purpose of its application to S T C's "actual individual Experience". This is the work of a man who has lived close to Coleridge's mind for many years. All he writes bears witness to that acquaintance. Therefore, his discussion of S T C's interest in such issues of his day as Mesmerism and animal magnetism, the contemporary discoveries of electricity or oxygen, the work of young Humphry Davy who shared with Coleridge his new laughing gas as well as his wider speculative thinking, all this has an authority about it that offers genuine insights. The book is broadly about the way Coleridge thought, it offers "to show

Coleridge's ideas in the process of their gradual unfolding".

The growth points in scientific investigation seemed to lie in those areas where magnetism, electricity, the recognition of gasses suggested that animate and inanimate nature interacted. Humans, held Coleridge, had a primary consciousness which linked them with the basic life force, a fearful as well as joyful level of experience. To order and understand this a man needed to employ his secondary consciousness. Yet, on its own, without the vitalising primary force, this consciousness was no more than life-in-death, cold head without heart ("the mere *reflective* faculty partook of DEATH"). John Beer succeeds in relating such ideas to the great poems and his interpretation of *The Ancient Mariner* is particularly persuasive as a result. There are helpful comments on the Conversation Poems and the *Letter to Sara Hutchinson*, too.

This, then, is a worthy successor to *Coleridge the Visionary* (1959), the product of the finest English Coleridge scholar of his generation. It is a book which - oh, dear, yes - even in these inflated times all true Coleridgeans will have to read. It will take them closer to the movement of S T C's mind. But there, it seems to me, lies its single flaw. While listening to S T C meander on about the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Charles Lamb once turned and whispered that he wasn't merely talking about her, he was talking like her. Perhaps a man who lives long with Coleridge needs the sharpness of a Lamb to keep his own mind clear and at an appropriate distance from the Coleridgean Penumbra. It is a hard example to follow. Near the close of his book Dr Beer quotes the celebrated anecdote in which Lamb and his fellow "Crug", James Leigh Hunt, were walking home after a heavy hearing of S T C's discourse on matters theological: "What makes Coleridge talk in that way about heavenly grace and the holy church, and that sort of thing?" asked Hunt. "Ah!" replied Lamb, "there's a great deal of fun in Coleridge."

Reginald Watters

#### NOTES

Mr A M Davidson writes: In my article "From a Scottish Elian's Notebook" in the April issue I incredibly omitted to tell of my finest literary find in an Aberdeen market stall around 1930 when I bought a small book of *facsimile* autographs of famous people.

On thumbing it over at home out fell a half sheet of notepaper with a couple of lines written in slightly faded ink

Wm. Wordsworth,  
Rydal.

I could hardly believe my eyes, so, to make doubly sure the autograph was genuine, I sent it for professional examination when it was confirmed that it was the handwriting of the poet.

Sometime after becoming a Member of our Society in 1963 I sent it to be shown at one of our Meetings and thereafter I presented it to the English Department of my old school, Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen, where it was accepted with enthusiasm.

If only the autograph had been Lamb's!

Mr Davidson also asks, as several others members have asked since its first use in January 1973, what is the source of the picture of Lamb used on the front cover of the Bulletin. Miss Reeves sent a print (they are quite common) to the National Portrait Gallery, who told her that as far as they had been able to discover it was first engraved by Francis Croll (1823-1854) for a number of Hogg's Weekly Advertiser (not the Hogg who wrote *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and *Tales of an Ettrick Shepherd*, but the one who published a collected edition of De Quincey's works in the 1850s and 60s). The original artist is not known, nor the whereabouts of the original painting. If any member can add to this information, we shall be most pleased to receive it and to include it in a later number of the Bulletin.

Readers will have noted that we are tending to stray over our upper limit of 20 pages for each number of the Bulletin. Strictly that is, on economic grounds, all that we can afford ourselves, but Mrs Courtney's important finds in *The Albion* have proved so interesting that they have tended to crowd out other material. To redress the balance somewhat we have deferred the final instalment until our October number, and offer in this one a sort of shower of editorial contributions - and of course Dr Wayne McKenna's important article on "Charles Lamb on Bensley". This is the sort of number we should like to offer from time to time, although of course when longer contributions come along they must be treated on their merits, and if they are a contribution to what we know about Lamb or any member of his circle they *must* be published, either in full, or in instalments. We have for next year a contribution on De Quincey, which we are presently discussing with the author and which might well run to two or three instalments. But we are still most strongly interested in contributions of from 2,000 to 5,000 words (one of our pages holds about 600 words) and hope that we shall continue to receive contributions of this length.

We have a fairly large number of some back issues, and we should be particularly glad to send them to those who have contributed material to them. Because of the financial situation of the Society we cannot offer them for nothing, but we shall be content with a voluntary donation at the discretion of any contributor (or other member) who wishes to have further copies. Applications should be sent to Miss Reeves or Mr Savage.

Following on the decision to discuss the possibility of the removal of the Society's books to the Guildhall Library, the question has arisen what to do with the various pictures owned by the Society. As a start, an inventory is being made, which will be published in the Bulletin. Already we have been glad to discover that we have a portrait in oils of George Dyer by Jackson RA, which was presented by Dyer to William Frend (1757-1845); the same Frend of Jesus College, Cambridge, at whose trial in the Vice-Chancellor's Court for publishing "a scandalous book or pamphlet" Coleridge made himself, as James Dykes Campbell says: "dangerously conspicuous". We also have, of course, the portrait of Mary Lamb which has been restored and which was exhibited to members at the Crowsley Memorial Lecture of October, 1973. The general feeling of the Council was that the pictures, of which there are many of one sort or another, should not just be put by, and that the principal ones, at least, should be shown in some suitable place. Any suggestions members may have about this should be sent to Basil Savage, who

will place them before the Council when it next considers the matter.

A pictorial review of another sort is provided by the printers' blocks which have been made for the Bulletin at some time or another in the past. There are twelve of them, and each will be used again in the Bulletin at some future time. The one below is, of course, of Button Snap.



#### OBITUARY

##### KATHLEEN ASQUITH

The Society has suffered a sad loss in the untimely death earlier this year of Kathleen Asquith. A member for over thirty years, she was the driving force behind the alas! now vanished Bradford Branch. Equally at home in the Yorkshire worlds of the woollen industry and farming, she had an infectious enthusiasm for everything that concerned her home county. Any Elian venturing North could be sure of a warm welcome at her home in Otterburn, near Bell Busk (how Lamb would have relished that name!) with much talk of books and hearty Yorkshire fare. She and her husband were regular attenders at the Lamb Birthday Celebration and she had dearly wished to be with us at the 1977 luncheon. Friendships were kept in good repair through lively letters - another Elian characteristic.

We extend our deep sympathy to her husband and family in their bereavement.

MRH

We are also sad to hear of the death of Mr L B Faraday, one of our oldest members, who joined the Society in 1936.