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DID LAMB UNDERSTAND COLERIDGE?

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A lecture given at the Day-Conference to celebrate the Society's Golden Jubilee at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution on 11 May 1985.

In a space of about twenty years at the end of the eighteenth century one particular English school, Christ's Hospital, produced three of the best-known figures in literary history: Coleridge, Lamb and Leigh Hunt. Leigh Hunt arrived in the school just too late to see Coleridge, and must always have thought of himself as belonging to the next generation: certainly his sympathies and convictions were to lie rather with Keats and Hazlitt, poets committed to the liberal movement which Wordsworth and Coleridge were thought by them to have betrayed. When, in later life, he expressed admiration of Coleridge it would be tempered by the judgment that he was 'too content with things as they were.-- at least too fond of thinking that old corruptions were full of good things, if the world did but understand them':

> With the same subtlety and good-nature of interpretation [he continued] Coleridge would persuade a deist that he was a Christian, and an atheist that he believed in God: all which would be very good, if the world could get on by it, and not remain stationary; but, meanwhile, millions are wretched with having too little to eat, and thousands with having too much; and these subtleties are like people talking in their sleep, when they should be up and helping.
>
> However, if the world is to remain always as it is, give me to all eternity new talk of Coleridge, and new essays of Charles Lamb. They will reconcile it beyond all others; and that is much.(1)

In those years Hunt saw Coleridge at Highgate, where he would sometimes encounter the old man in his walks and hear him talking; it is not surprising, therefore, to find him valuing his talk more in that tribute, placing it alongside the essays of Lamb.

It was no doubt natural for Hunt to think of Coleridge and Lamb in the same breath, but he has not been alone in doing so. Over the years a number of critics have found it profitable to set their works side by side: Lamb has been seen as a perceptive critic of Coleridge's early works, Coleridge as a creative presence in Lamb's prose.(2) The juxtaposition is always illuminating. Here, however, I am concerned with a slightly different question: how far were Lamb and Coleridge themselves ever of one mind?

They were, after all, very different people: Lamb always vividly alive in the present situation and looking to the human element, Coleridge always looking beyond, searching for ultimate meanings. When Coleridge thought of reconciliation he was seeking a universal harmony, reconciling all things in heaven and earth; Lamb, one feels, would be quite content if everyone went home at the end of the evening agreeing that it had been a marvellous party--though it would be a better one if Coleridge had been there.

Coleridge's consuming ambitions were also associated with a readiness for rash ventures. Mary Evans, his early sweetheart, wrote to him, 'There is an Eagerness in your Nature, which is ever hurrying you into the sad Extreme'.(3) Lamb, who always took his immediate responsibilities more seriously, was quizzical about Coleridge's tendency to embark on such schemes; and while finding him deeply attractive, was aware of a dangerous element. In the very first letter to him that survives he recorded that he had spent six weeks of the previous winter in a madhouse at Hoxton, and went on, 'Coleridge it may convince you of my regards for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness as much almost as on another Person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy'.(4) The 'other person' was presumably Ann Simmons, but we should not overlook the fact that Lamb still had some doubt as to whether it might not have been Coleridge who occasioned this fit of madness. There was a touch of the daemonic in the young Coleridge, which was only exacerbated by the fact that he seemed so ready to aspire to the angelic. When Lamb later caught a whiff of disloyalty in his reported remark, 'poor Lamb, if he wants any *knowledge*, he may apply to me', he sent him a set of theses for him to 'defend or oppugn' during his visit to Germany, beginning with the question 'Whether God loves a lying angel better than a true man?', continuing by way of others such as 'Whether the higher order of Seraphim Illuminati ever *sneer*?' and concluding with 'Whether an "*immortal & amenable Soul*" may not come to be damn'd at last, & the man never suspect it beforehand?'(5)

Coleridge in those years was not only omnific but omnivorous: hence some of the disasters which overtook him--including his addiction to opium. Twenty years later, when Coleridge was trying to settle in London, Lamb wrote to Wordsworth, 'Nature who conducts every creature by instinct to his best end, has skilfully directed Coleridge to take up his abode at a Chemists Laboratory in Norfolk Street. She might as well have sent a Helluo Librorum [a book glutton] to the Vatican.--God keep him inviolate among the traps & pitfalls'.(6)

Soon, however, he had rather better news and could report to Wordsworth that Coleridge was 'under the medical care of a Mr Gillman /'Killman?' he puns doubtfully/ a Highgate Apothecary, where he plays at leaving off Laudanum. I think his essentials not touched, he is very bad, but then he wonderfully picks up another day, and his face when he repeats his verses hath its ancient glory, an Arch angel a little damaged.--' Highgate, though about the right distance, was still disturbing. 'Coleridge is absent but 4 miles, & the neighbourhood of such a man is as exciting as the presence of 50 ordinary Persons. Tis enough to be within the whiff & wind of *his* genius, for us not to possess our souls in quiet. If I lived with him, or the *Author of the Excursion*, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, & be dragged along in the current of other peoples thoughts, hampered in a net'.(7)

Coleridge's move to Highgate turned out to be a wise one--all the more so since it involved his being raised physically to a higher eminence. If one has to go uphill to visit someone it is always difficult to resist the impression that he or she has somehow become more important, and for years afterwards visitors to London would make that upward pilgrimage, feeling as they did so that they were not only escaping from the smoky pollution of the metropolis (the American visitors were reminded of small communities in New England) but achieving a kind of spiritual elevation as well in their encounter with Coleridge's eloquence.

Surprisingly few accounts of Coleridge's everyday life in Highgate (as opposed to records of his conversations there) have survived. We know of the occasion when he met Keats in a lane nearby and discoursed on many subjects, including different levels of consciousness and the singing of nightingales;(8) but often in his later years he left the house only to walk in the garden or at best back and forth among the trees on the green. When G.L. Prentiss, an American admirer, visited Highgate after Coleridge's death he met the sexton in the churchyard who told him: 'He used to walk by the hour at a time under those trees (pointing to a row of fine old trees across the street) with his hat off and a book in hand; and he was the greatest talker in the world'. 'Well', asked Prentiss, 'What did he talk about?' 'Oh, about the Supreme Being, religion, eternity and such things', was the reply.(9) It was particularly exciting to be a local child on such occasions, since if you were lucky he would produce sweets from his capacious pocket; there was also, however, the possibility that he might engage you in conversation, so that a certain amount of seeking and hiding among the trees was involved. He was not totally incomprehensible on such occasions, nevertheless. On one occasion, when he had button-holed the baker's boy, he was overheard telling him that he had never known anyone to be good because he was religious, but that he believed it possible to be religious because one was good.(10)

Not everyone, of course, responded to Coleridge with veneration in those years. Carlyle, who visited him once or twice in 1824 and who was less impressed, painted an immortal picture of the flabby, shuffling figure whom he found at the Gillmans, holding forth to what he felt to be an over-reverent audience.(11) Yet even Carlyle shows some affection, and even respect, for his victim, presenting him in his opening sentence on the brow of Highgate Hill, 'like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle', and going on to give a lengthy and vivid account of the view from his attic room, which began with a pastoral view of fields and houses and ended with a distant olive-green haze in which swam 'the illimitable limitary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul's and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all'. It is a marvellously evocative account of London as seen from Highgate, so compelling that it comes as a shock to realize that Carlyle never actually saw that view from Coleridge's window. Coleridge had indeed sat at such a window for many years, when he lived in Moreton House, but when Carlyle met him in the summer of 1824 he and the Gillmans had already moved to The Grove, just across the way but facing differently, so that the view from Coleridge's attic window was now across the peaceful fields of Hampstead Heath.

That odd little piece of misplaced information by Carlyle is not the only distortion in his chapter. When he comes to describe John Sterling's first visit to Coleridge he quotes from a letter that Sterling wrote at the time: 'Our interview lasted for three hours, during which he talked two hours and three quarters'. Carlyle then continues by giving an account of Coleridge's talk as he had heard it, including the sentence 'I have heard Coleridge talk, with eager musical energy, two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers'. No doubt this gives Carlyle's own impression accurately; he does not, however, quote the next sentences in Sterling's letter:

> I was in his company about three hours; and of that time he spoke during two and three quarters. It would have been delightful to listen attentively, and certainly easy for him to speak just as well for the next forty-eight hours. On the whole his conversation, or rather monologue, is by far the most interesting I ever heard or heard of. Dr Johnson's talk, with which it is obvious to compare it, seems to me immeasurably inferior.(12)

Nor does Carlyle mention Sterling's account of Coleridge's conversation on that occasion, in which, so far from communicating no meaning whatsoever, he discussed Luther, comparing him with Calvin, and went on to give his views on the proper uses of landscape gardening and the evils of commerce and industry ('The division of labour has proceeded so far even in literature that people do not think for themselves; their review thinks for them'). He also outlined a new theory of laughter, discussed the role of Christianity in the modern state and appraised the style of Edward Irving the Scottish preacher--all, it seems, with the utmost lucidity.

Carlyle does acknowledge something of Coleridge's brilliance; the difficulty is that he is so much better at catching a gesture and etching it in acid that that is what remains in the reader's mind. He was, of course, bitterly disappointed with Coleridge, in whom he had hoped to discover a heroic philosopher for the new century. Above all his attitude was one of impatience: like Leigh Hunt he felt that the demands of the age were too pressing to allow for such leisurely and extended discourses. He said on one occasion that he never saw Coleridge without wanting to worship him and toss him in a blanket.(13)

At this time, also, Carlyle was a young man with his career to make, unlikely to show indulgence towards older men who did not live up to his own idea of what the age required. It has to be remembered that he was one of the few people who ever managed to dislike Charles Lamb, whom again he met on only one or two occasions: 'a miserable, drink-besotted, spindle-shanked skeleton of a body', he wrote, 'whose "humour", as it is called, seemed to me neither more nor less than a fibre of genius shining thro' positive delirium and crackbrainedness, and would be to me the most intolerable of nuisances'. And, he went on to complain, 'He also loudly criticized our Scotch porridge'.(14)

Carlyle, it is clear, did not understand Lamb, let alone Coleridge. But then who did understand Coleridge? Sir William Rowan Hamilton told him on one occasion that there were some passages in his prose works that he did not quite understand. 'The question', replied Coleridge amicably, 'is whether I understand them myself'.(15)

We turn, rather diffidently, to Lamb, his oldest friend. Did *he* understand what Coleridge was about? Did the length of his acquaintance give him any greater insight into that complex nature?

Let us examine one of the most pointed exchanges between Lamb and Coleridge. It is familiar, but it is not often heard in its full context, which brings out further aspects of their relationship. Soon after Coleridge arrived in Highgate he got to know Charles Mathews the actor and his wife and often visited them at their house. (Mrs Mathews records that in their drawing-room they had installed a panel of glass at one end to make the room seem twice as long, and this created a problem, since Coleridge, in the abstracted state of mind in which he always found himself after a long discourse, would try to leave the room by walking through the glass. As soon as he rose, therefore, someone had to be stationed there to guide him to the real exit.) Pleased with the Mathewses, Coleridge was anxious that they should meet Lamb and invited them to dine at the Grove. When the day came, however, Lamb refused to live up to Coleridge's expectations of him. (It is possible that his behaviour on this occasion may have had something to do with the fact that Mrs Mathews was the half-sister of Fanny Kelly, to whom he had unsuccessfully proposed two years earlier, but that is only a guess). Mrs Mathews records the occasion at length:

> On our reaching Mr. Gillman's house, we found Mr. Coleridge anxiously waiting for Lamb's arrival . . . . At last Mr. & Miss Lamb appeared, and Mr. Coleridge led his friend up to my husband with a look which seemed to say, 'I pray you, like this fellow'. Mr. Lamb's first approach was not prepossessing . . . . Guessing that he had been extolled, he mischievously resolved to thwart his panegyrist, disappoint the strangers, and altogether to upset the suspected plan of showing him off. The lamb, in fact, would not consent to be made a lion of, and it followed that he became puerile and annoying all the day, to Mr. Coleridge's visible mortification. Before dinner he was suspicious and silent, as if he was taking measure of the man he came to meet, and about whom he seemed very curious. Dinner, however, opened his lips for more than one purpose; and the first glass of wine set his spirit free, and he became quite impracticable. He made the most absurd puns and ridiculous jokes, and almost harassed Coleridge out of

> his self-complacency, though he managed to maintain a tolerable degree of evenness with his tormentor, now and then only rebuking him mildly for what he termed 'such unworthy trifling'. This only served to exasperate the perverse humour of him it was intended to subdue; and once Mr. Coleridge exclaimed meekly, after some very bad joke, 'Charles Lamb, I'm ashamed of you!'--a reproof which produced only an impatient 'You be hanged!' from the reproved, and another jest, 'more potent than the former', was superadded to his punning enormities.
>
> Mr. Lamb's last fire, however, was at length expended, and Mr. Coleridge took advantage of a pause to introduce some topic that might divert the party from his friend's determined foolery. He chose a subject which he deemed unlikely, if not impossible, for Lamb to interrupt with a jest. Mr. Coleridge stated that he had originally been intended for the pulpit, and had taken orders--nay, had actually preached several times. At this moment, fancying he saw something in Lamb's face that denoted a lucid interval, and wishing to turn him back from the nonsense which had so 'spoiled the pleasure of the time', with a desire also to conciliate the 'pouting boy', as he seemed (who, to our observation, was only waiting for an opportunity to revenge himself upon his friend for all the grave checks he had given to his jocular vein during dinner), Coleridge turned benignly towards him, and observed--'Charles Lamb, I believe you never heard me preach?' As if concentrating his pent-up resentment into one focus, and with less of his wonted hesitation, Lamb replied, with great emphasis, 'I ne-ever heard you do anything else!'(16)

One aspect of the relationship between Lamb and Coleridge emerges clearly and dramatically here, with Lamb resenting and resisting a certain moral unctuousness on Coleridge's part. So far as Lamb's understanding of Coleridge's ideas is concerned, on the other hand, it tells for little either way. I should now like to draw attention to another such account, however, which indicates a similar divide between the two men, but is more puzzling. This is by Sarah Flower Adams, who became a well-known nineteenth-century religious writer, best known for her hymn 'Nearer, my God, to thee.' On being invited as a young woman to visit Charles Lamb's house when Coleridge was to be there, she was excited and clearly in the mood to attend closely throughout the evening. Among other things she commented on the difference between Coleridge and Lamb as conversationalists:

> In Coleridge might be detected a certain consciousness of being listened to, and at times an evident getting up of phrases, a habit almost impossible to be avoided in a practised conversationalist. In Charles Lamb there was a perfect absence of this; all that he said was choice in its humour, true in its philosophy; but the racy freshness, that was like an atmosphere of country air about it, was better than all; the perfect simplicity, absence of all conceit, child-like enjoyment of his own wit, and the sweetness and benevolence that played about the rugged face, gave to it a charm in no way inferior to the

> poetical enjoyment derived from the more popular conversation of his friend. Another difference might be observed; that Coleridge's metaphysics seemed based in the study of his own individual nature more than the nature of others, while Charles Lamb seemed not for a moment to rest on self, but to throw his whole soul into the nature of circumstances and things around him . . . .

She continues,

> Coleridge, on the evening in question, spoke of death with fear; not from the dread of punishment, not from the shrinking from physical pain, but he said he had a horror lest, after the attempt to 'shuffle off this mortal coil', he should yet 'be thrown back upon himself'. Charles Lamb kept silence, and looked sceptical;and, after a pause, said suddenly, 'One of the things that made me question the particular inspiration they ascribed to Jesus Christ, was his ignorance of the character of Judas Iscariot. Why did not he and his disciples kick him out for a rascal, instead of receiving him as a disciple?' Coleridge smiled very quietly, and then spoke of some person (name forgotten) who had been making a comparison between himself and Wordsworth as to their religious faith. "They said, although I was an atheist, we were upon a par, for that Wordsworth's Christianity was very like Coleridge's atheism; and Coleridge's atheism was very like Wordsworth's Christianity'. (17)

At first sight this reads like something from Peacock, or even from *Tristram Shandy*. The remarks do not seem to hang together: the two men seem to be moving off at successive tangents, pursuing private obsessions of their own. It is, of course, possible to produce an interpretation on the lines of the preceding one. Lamb, one might say, hears a note of unctuous melancholy creeping into Coleridge's voice and so tries to think of something blasphemous to say. Coleridge then comes back with a rather anodyne pleasantry in order to set things on an even keel again.

That may be all that is going on, but if so it still has a rather strange flavour and I am inclined to think that it is not the whole story; that beneath these alterations of tone there is a further and deeper exchange, of which both men were aware.

Lamb, after all, had heard Coleridge talking for longer than anyone else: he had heard him expounding the neoplatonists in the cloister at Christ's Hospital and holding forth night after night in the parlour at the Salutation and Cat in those days when Southey came from Bristol to preach his moral duty to go back and marry Sara Fricker while the landlord, it is said, offered him free rooms if only he would stay and go on talking (--possibly the best tribute Coleridge ever received as a conversationalist). From the first, Lamb must have known that Coleridge did not simply want to save the world but to solve the universe into the bargain, and that he believed one could only do that by understanding more about human nature. In fact, so far as Coleridge was concerned, there was no hope of a social revolution or of political reforms unless the nature of man could be known to its depths: the primary task was to discover the nature of ultimate Being and so reveal the true connections between nature, man and God. It was a heady prospect, all the more attractive because it allowed one to explain some of the luxuries of sensuousness as part of the quest. So Coleridge could write his early poem 'The Eolian Harp', with a line such as 'The stilly murmur of the distant sea / Tells us of silence', or describe the pleasures of climbing a hill near his cottage when the scene that opened out seemed like a revelation of divine omnipresence:

> the whole World
> Seem'd *imag'd* in its vast circumference:
> No *wish* profan'd my overwhelmed heart,
> Blest hour! It was a luxury,--to be! (18)

Coleridge himself always recognized that there was a danger of self-indulgence in entertaining such speculations: the lines I have just read are followed by an account of his reaction against the permanent cultivation of delicate feelings and self-dedication to an active life. But throughout his subsequent life such decisions alternated with reversions to this larger quest, involving the belief that in examining the inner life one might come at a key to the permanent in human nature-- and perhaps the divine as well. Lamb was not unaware of this. After the terrible and tragic murder of their mother by Mary Lamb he wrote to Coleridge asking him to write 'as religious a letter as possible'.(19) Coleridge did so and he was pleased, but later he criticized some of the things he had said: 'we are offended occasionally with a certain freedom of expression, a certain air of mysticism, more consonant to the conceits of pagan philosophy, than consistent with the humility of genuine piety: "it is by the press, that God hath given finite spirits both evil and good... (I suppose you mean *simply* bad men and good men) a portion as it were of His Omnipresence!" Now, high as the human intellect comparatively will soar...is there not, Coleridge, a distance between the Divine Mind and it, which makes such language blasphemy? Again, in your first fine consolatory epistle you say, "you are a temporary sharer in human misery, that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine Nature". What more than this do those men say, who are for exalting the man Christ Jesus into the second person of an unknown Trinity,--men, whom you or I scruple not to call idolaters?' (20) In reply Coleridge pointed out that the phrase about being partakers of the divine nature came from the Second Epistle of Peter, (21) but Lamb was not satisfied, and the reason evidently was his recognition of a language, related to 'mystic notions' and the 'pride of metaphysics', that Coleridge was fond of using. In his eyes such philosophy lacked humility; at the same time it was opening the way to assertions about the divinity of Christ which Lamb as a good unitarian could not accept.

But if Lamb was not willing to pursue Coleridge's ideas about the possibility of partaking of the divine nature, Wordsworth *was* attracted, and during the following decade there was to be a good deal of interplay between Wordsworth and Coleridge involving the question of 'Being'.

Coleridge's interest in the question led him in various directions; he could also take a slightly sceptical view of the whole question. As he wrote to John Thelwall a year after Lamb's tragedy:

> My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something *great*--something *one & indivisible*--and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!--But in this faith *all things* counterfeit infinity!--'Struck with the deepest calm of Joy' I stand
>
> Silent, with swimming sense; and gazing round
> On the wide Landscape gaze till all doth seem
> Less gross than bodily, a living Thing
> Which acts upon the mind, & with such Hues
> As cloath th'Almighty Spirit, when he makes
> Spirits perceive his presence!--
>
> It is but seldom that I raise & spiritualize my intellect to this height; & at other times I adopt the Brahman Creed, & say--It is better to sit than to stand, it is better to lie than to sit, it is better to sleep than to wake--but Death is the best of all!--I should much wish, like the Indian Vishna /Vishnu/, to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos, & wake once in a million years for a few minutes--just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more. (22)

Coleridge here displays the range of his speculations, which have already taken him into Indian philosophy. He evidently discussed them with Wordsworth, also, to judge from the passages where, from now on, the word 'Being' stands out prominently. Wordsworth can, for instance, listen to the sound of the sea, and write

> Listen! the mighty Being is awake
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder--everlastingly . . . (23)

The parts of *The Prelude* written first, likewise, contain passages such as this:

> I was only then
> Contented when with bliss ineffable
> I felt the sentiment of being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still...
> O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
> Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
> Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
> And mighty depth of waters.(24)

It was a feature of the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge that Wordsworth would sometimes take an idea of Coleridge's and develop it, endowing it in the process with greater grandeur. It was also sometimes the case that Coleridge himself would go on examining the same idea--from a negative point of view as well as a positive. And it was so with the nature of Being. While Wordsworth was taking off into *The Prelude* Coleridge was looking hard into his own being, and not always liking what he saw there. Sometimes he simply felt a physical despondency:

> I have, at times, experienced such an extinction of *Light* in my mind, I have been so forsaken by all the *forms* and *colourings* of Existence, as if the *organs* of Life had been dried up; as if only simple BEING remained, blind and stagnant!(25)

There was also a moral repugnance, however. Over the years his 'Being' came to seem less like a godlike presence, a repetition in the finite mind of the infinite I am, and more like a shrivelling entity that stood in need of an influx of grace from the absolute being of God if it was to survive at all. When he was young his sense of ultimate being found its appropriate imagery in water-snakes flashing here and there in the ocean, or in the sight of his children dancing and eddying in their play in the garden; later he came to assert that that central being in humanity could only survive and flourish by opening out to the illumination and mercy of God.

When Sarah Flower Adams heard Coleridge and Lamb conversing that evening, then, she may have been listening not to a pair of slightly crazy old men going off at tangents, but to two men who had known each other so long that they could engage in a familiar debate without filling in all the connections. Coleridge was again exploring the horror he sometimes had of the nature of his own being--but as soon as he did so Lamb recognized an old theme which, whether it presupposed that we could become partakers of the divine nature or threw one's Being on the mercy of the redeemer, still led back to assertions about Christ himself, in whom the nature of divine Being was believed to be most fully manifest. Following that train of thought, Lamb was led to point to the strange flaws in the idea of such a divinity. And then Coleridge, recognizing the series of connections that had led Lamb to make this point and to bring the conversation back to a human level, was in his turn reminded of that earlier time, when he and Wordsworth were exploring the nature of being in a less orthodox way--when indeed it was unclear whether either of them was an atheist or a Christian.

Lamb, of course, had always distrusted Coleridge's adulation of Wordsworth, particularly when he saw him being drawn away to live in the Lakes and so isolate himself from the literary community that was growing up in London during those years. When he did once go to stay with Coleridge there, he was forced to acknowledge the splendour as he drew near to Keswick in the midst of evening sunshine and saw the mountains first turned into colours, and then, in the dusk from Coleridge's study, 'all dark with clouds on their heads'. 'We thought we had got into Fairy Land', he wrote, 'Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose that I can ever again'.(26) (The form of that statement is worth attention, since it recurs at the end of Lamb's career, as we shall see.) In spite of such glories, however, he preferred London. When he felt depressed he could not draw consolation from the sight of mountains and lakes; instead he needed to go out into the streets and watch the throng of people: that, he knew, would soon put him to rights. (27)

You would not find Lamb investigating the sources of man's being as Coleridge and Wordsworth were doing: he wished rather to keep in touch with the current of human existence as it showed itself in the crowds of London. He was also afraid that Wordsworth, by the very absoluteness of his identity might swallow up Coleridge's altogether. (He was not alone. Years later Crabb Robinson wrote of the pleasure of seeing the two great geniuses, Coleridge and Wordsworth, together at a party in London, with Coleridge at one end of the room reciting Wordsworth's verses, and Wordsworth at the other--also reciting Wordsworth's verses).(28) In the midst of his abstract thought, his illnesses, his opium-taking and his tendency to pursue his thought to an extreme, regardless of the level of abstraction he might reach, there was a danger that Coleridge might lose that old flow of discourse where heart and imagination ran together in a recognizably human way. Lamb would not allow Coleridge to be too solemn; he would not even (and this was a more momentous feat) let Wordsworth be too solemn. When he was in London at the end of 1817 there was a party at Haydon's at which Wordsworth, who was in great form, held forth on the subject of great poetry. 'Lamb got excessively merry and exquisitely witty', writes Haydon, 'and his fun in the midst of Wordsworth's deep & solemn intonations of oratory was the fun & wit of the fool in the intervals of Lear's passion ...' (29)

Meanwhile, as I have said, Coleridge himself had changed, passing through a period of spiritual crisis from which his theories emerged intact yet strangely transformed. When he spoke or wrote now of 'Being', it was to emphasize not its glory but its need to be reconciled to the Absolute Being of God--a need which must be recognized by human beings, but which could be met only by God himself. To those who had not known Coleridge earlier it must have sounded very much like a familiar orthodox Christianity, but if so there remained a puzzle--a puzzle which one could only begin to solve if one understood that in the midst of his religious talk there still subsisted the Coleridge who believed in a divine thread of illumination, passing between man, nature and God--if it could only be glimpsed. That was the ultimate point of his book *Aids to Reflection*, which sounds on the face of it like one of those moral and improving books beloved by the seriously devout--and is indeed so for some of its pages--but which rests for its ultimate point on the supposition that the mirror in the mind does not simply reflect but opens out into another room, which you can see but never get into, that you cannot fully appreciate reflections on the waters of the mind unless you learn to look into the depths of the waters as well; and that the reflection in the world that best corresponds to the human psyche is that of the moon, which draws all its illumination from a hidden sun.

After the storms and anxieties of his middle years Coleridge had found a point of balance for himself in the poise between Christianity and his philosophy of being which led him still to draw continual distinctions between normal everyday being and absolute being, between personality and personëity, as he called it. And in the expression of his conviction he was acquiring at last a more recognizable persona. 'What a benign smiling face it was!' wrote Thomas Hood, 'What a comfortable, respectable figure! What a model, methought as I watched and admired the "old Man eloquent", for a Christian bishop! But he was, perhaps, scarcely orthodox enough to be entrusted with a mitre'.(30) And Lamb, hearing about the same time that Coleridge was compiling his 'Aids to Reflection' out of the writings of Archbishop Leighton, wrote of his hope that there would be 'more of Bishop Coleridge than Leighton, for what is Leighton?'(31) This is the Coleridge of the pious portrait of 1814 by Washington Allston that hangs in the National Portrait Gallery; it is also, more immediately, the Coleridge of the lesser-known portrait that hangs in the Literary Institute at Highgate and which helps to indicate why people sometimes found Coleridge rather maddening.(32) It suggests a strange, oblique light in Coleridge's eyes--the light that everybody who met him noticed, but which different people saw differently. Lamb probably interpreted it best, for he had seen it longest. He recognized it, I suspect, as the light that had come into Coleridge's eye when he began discoursing on Plotinus at Christ's Hospital, or indulged his latest intellectual speculations at the Salutation and Cat. But its operation was unpredictable. Coleridge himself told the story of how, as a young man, when he set off on a tour to find subscribers for his weekly newspaper *The Watchman*, he was induced after dinner in Birmingham to smoke a pipe of tobacco, which he was not used to doing, and passed out for a time. When he came to, he found himself on the sofa surrounded by gentlemen anxious for his health, one of whom, to relieve the embarrassment asked, 'Have you seen a paper today, Mr Coleridge?'--to which he had replied, 'Sir, I am far from convinced, that a christian is permitted to read either newspapers or any other works of merely political and temporary interest!'.(33)

Coleridge's psyche had an extraordinary power of accommodating opposites--often, it seems, without his noticing it. One of his notebooks contains a long and rather gloomy entry in which he describes how throughout his early life he was always preyed upon by some dread or other; after running through a list of these dreads, he goes on to relate how they then turned into horrific dreams that still haunted him, and continues,

> & since then every horror I have committed, has been the immediate effect of the Dread of these bad most shocking Dreams--any thing to prevent them/--all this interwoven with its minor consequences, that fill up the interspaces--the cherry juice running in between the cherries in a cherry pie/procrastination in dread of this--(34)

Who, except Coleridge, would ever have thought of illustrating the workings of fear, guilt and anxiety by means of the cherry juice in a cherry pie? So, again, in the last years of his life he would send vivid descriptions of his latest illness to his disciple Joseph Henry Green. One of these begins:

> My dear Friend
>
> On Tuesday morning, after a tolerable night of tape-worm

> Sleep, i.e. made up of many joints, I found my breakfast appetite again, and eat the two chops with much gust--But about an hour afterwards and as soon as the digestion began in the upper bowels--*pray, if you think of it, bring me a 3s. 6d. packet of Perryisian Pens, or any equivalent, when you next come*--the storm of agitation and nervous excitement rushed on me, head as well as Bowels, and from Noon till past six o'clock I never *once* sate down, but continued pacing to the tune of my own prayers & groans from the window of my own to that in the Room opposite! (35)

Few people would describe the state of their bowels so vividly, or at such length; fewer still would be so obsessed by their own writing processes that they would ask for steel pens in the very middle of a sentence. It is also one of the acutest paradoxes of Coleridge's later writing that it is never quite so vigorous or vivid as when he is embarking upon the narrative of his latest ailments.

Paradoxes such as this, which have their comic overtones, are matched by others of a more serious and far-reaching nature, particularly in his religious thought. What sounds at first like ordinary Christian devotion will turn out not to make sense unless one is aware that within the dominant sense of the hollowness of his being there is still the ghostly sense of a different thread, which Lamb, I think, could recognize.

It is a familiar experience that as one gets older, one becomes aware that one's old friends can be greeted by new acquaintances only through the carapace that old age has put on them, while we see them still as we first knew them. One day Leigh Hunt, who, as I mentioned had only recently got to know Coleridge, was walking with Lamb under the trees at Highgate when they were joined by Coleridge, who passed into a long discourse on the blessings of faith which Hunt found it difficult to distinguish from evangelical cant. When Coleridge left them, he said to Lamb rather desperately, 'What makes Coleridge talk in that way about heavenly grace, and the holy church, and that sort of thing?' Lamb's reply was unexpected. 'There's a g-great deal of fun in Coleridge!' he said. (36)

Once again I would suggest that he was not just being witty. When he heard Coleridge taking off into a train of ideas on any subject his tone linked immediately for Lamb with all the other such discourseshe had heard, so that a discourse on the Supreme Being would recall all the other discussions of being that he had heard from his lips, so that the elevated sense of the Being that sustains the moral universe would be connected with the nature of dreams and the sight of water-snakes flashing and all the lively energies of human play. Invocation of the need for heavenly grace and the sacraments might seem to be moving against such other layers of discourse but only if one did not know about the abysses of human need that Coleridge had had to span with his acceptance of Christianity. Reaching for Christianity as a lifeline he had not relinquished his sense of the ultimate continuity of all Being, so that it remained to him as a constant resource, which the very energy of his own conversation was likely to reawaken in his hearers.

This animation, which made Coleridge persistently fascinating to those who came to hear him, was counterpointed by a rather complacent tendency to rest in his own being, which maddened visitors such as Carlyle. Yet just as his philosophy of Being has an interest which is independent of his own particular career, or his own version of Christianity, so even his underlying self-composure is relevant to an age where the ontological insecurity of human beings has become a disturbing feature of life. It is one of the most striking facts in Coleridge's career, indeed, that the increasing sufferings of his old age were nevertheless surrounded by a strange peacefulness--best captured, perhaps, in the portrait painted by Moses Haughton in 1832, two years before his death.(37) Young Henry Gillman, who grew up in the company of Coleridge, also commented on this childlike quality: 'No portrait or bust can give you any just impression of his face. Look at that of a fat, chubby boy a few months old and you will have the best impression of it. His countenance was marked by an infantine simplicity and sweetness; except when lighted up by his brilliant conversation'.(38) A final paradox here, perhaps: after a lifetime of uttering his self-contradictions, Coleridge, in the midst of his later suffering, had the ontological security of a human being who has not yet learned to talk.

Casual visitors such as Carlyle could not perceive the full processes of daring and suffering which might give that security an authority for others. Few, indeed, saw that there was a problem: most were content to hear the greatest talker of the age once or twice and to go away marvelling and shaking their heads. Yet in his old age there were one or two who listened for longer. The most notable was Arthur Henry Hallam, whose grasp of what Coleridge was about emerges briefly in his poetic account describing how those who listened to such a talker

drank
The sweet, sad tones of Wisdom, which outran
The life-blood, coursing to the heart, and sank
Inward from thought to thought, till they abode
Mid Being's dim foundations ... (39)

Hallam evidently communicated something of his excitement at Coleridge's ideas to others of the Cambridge Apostles, and I think one can still trace the effects of their discussions in the poem which Tennyson dedicated to Hallam's memory. There too the idea of Being recurs at important moments. Hallam's death left Tennyson in the same state of negation which Coleridge came to know well: a depression which was the antithesis of that just quoted, a state

When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
And tingle; and the heart is sick
And all the wheels of Being slow.(40)

He could also, in consolation, discover that Hallam's philosophy was after all showing unexpected potency: 'I felt and feel, though left alone,/ His being working in mine own,/ The footsteps of his life in mine'.(41)

But Hallam had died in fact before Coleridge himself, and so had not been there to continue the working out of that idea in his own terms, which would no doubt have involved further exploration of the relationship between being and the human heart. Like Tennyson and Hallam, like Wordsworth also, Coleridge felt that connection to be central. To live by the heart could be dangerous or foolhardy, yet it was the place where human beings communicated with one another most profoundly. And here the Lambs mattered. Just before his death Coleridge received a copy of the 1834 edition of his *Poetical Works*, and when he came to the introduction to 'This Lime Tree Bower my Prison', describing the visit of Charles Lamb to Nether Stowey in 1797, he wrote in the margin 'Charles and Mary Lamb--dear to my heart, yea, as it were my Heart.--...1797-1834 = 37 years!'.(42)

In a poem dedicated to the memory of Charles Lamb, Wordsworth was more traditionally pious:

> Still, at the centre of his being, lodged
> A soul by resignation sanctified. (43)

True, no doubt: yet if so Lamb's resignation was never more severely shaken in his later years than by the death of Coleridge. Friends who visited him afterwards recalled how his speech was constantly interlaced with the sentence 'Coleridge is dead', repeated over and over again, sometimes in tones of wonder, sometimes of astonishment, sometimes of humorous melancholy--almost, perhaps, as if he could not find a tone which would be adequate to the statement it tried to carry. (44) It was not until four months later that he could bring himself to set down his full reaction, which he then wrote in the album of a friend:

> When I heard of the death of Coleridge, it was without grief. It seemed to me that he long had been on the confines of the next world,--that he had a hunger for eternity. I grieved then that I could not grieve. But since, I feel how great a part he was of me. His great and dear spirit haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men or books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touchstone of all my cogitations. He was a Grecian (or in the first form) at Christ's Hospital, where I was deputy Grecian; and the same subordination and deference to him I have preserved through a life-long acquaintance. Great in his writings, he was greatest in his conversation. In him was disproved that old maxim, that we should allow every one his share of talk. He would talk from morn to dewy eve, nor cease till far midnight, yet who ever would interrupt him,--who would obstruct that continuous flow of converse, fetched from Helicon or Zion? He had the tact of making the unintelligible seem plain. Many who read the abstruser parts of his "Friend" would complain that his works did not answer to his spoken wisdom. They were identical. But he had a tone in oral delivery, which seemed to convey sense to those who were otherwise imperfect recipients. He was my fifty years old friend without a dissension. Never saw I his likeness, nor probably the world

> can see again. I seem to love the house he died at more passionately than when he lived. I love the faithful Gilmans more than while they exercised their virtues towards him living. What was his mansion is consecrated to me a chapel. (45)

At last, as we read this, Lamb's irreverence in the presence of Coleridge seems to be finally stilled into awe. 'What was his mansion is consecrated to me a chapel'. We might even say that Coleridge's philosophy has finally triumphed. 'I felt and feel, though left alone/His being working in mine own' Tennyson would write; 'I feel how great a part he was of me', writes Lamb. It is as if a necessary part of his own being has been removed by Coleridge's death. For once, there does not even seem to be the slightest touch of wit in the writing. Or not unless one lingers over the statement 'He would talk from morn to dewy eve, nor cease till far midnight'.

This, after all, recalls one of the strangest passages in *Paradise Lost*. Unexpectedly, Milton seems to relent for a moment towards his ruined archangel as he describes how he appeared through Greek and Roman eyes:

> and in Ausonian land
> Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell
> From heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
> Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn
> To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
> A summer's day; and with the setting sun
> Dropped from the zenith like a fallen star
> On Lemnos the Aegean isle ... (46)

So great is the splendour and beauty of that descent that we almost forget for a moment that the figure is falling at all: we come near, too, to forgetting from what he has fallen; yet at the back of our minds we know all too well.

To Lamb, for whom Coleridge's presence had lost its dangers but not its magic, that passage must have provided the perfect emblem for a career which left it hard to say whether Coleridge had been the most influential figure of his time or the least effective. So that as one attends to the plangent undertones of that allusion one catches, even with the elegiac lyricism of that fine tribute, the ghostly hints of a celestial exchange; Coleridge, in the illumined state of one who has finally attained his Absolute Being, looking down at the figure of Lamb, active about his human devotions, and asking, with a touch of the old self-complacency, but also a touch of the old redemptive eagerness, 'And now, Charles, can you try to understand me?'

And Lamb, perhaps, rejoining, 'Coleridge, I never tried to do anything else!'

NOTES

Abbreviations

CT *Coleridge the Talker*, ed. R.W.A. Armour and R.F. Howes (Ithaca N.Y., 1940).

CL *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1956-71).

CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton, N.J., 1957-).

CPW *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.H. Coleridge, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1912).

LL (Lucas) *The Letters of Charles Lamb to which are added those of His Sister Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, 3 vols. (1935).

LL (Marrs) *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.W. Marrs, Jr (Ithaca, NY 1975-).

WPW *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E de Selincourt, 5 vols (Oxford, 1940-9).

1. Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography* (1850) ed Edmund Blunden (Oxford 1928) 432-5 Reptd *CT* 265-269.
2. See, e.g., George Whalley, 'Coleridge's debt to Charles Lamb' *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, n.s. *XI* (1958), 68-85; Basil Willey, 'Charles Lamb and S.T. Coleridge' *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* n.s.1 (1973) 1-8; John Beer, 'Coleridge and Lamb: the Central Themes' *ibid* 14 (1976) 109-13; Mary Wedd 'Charles Lamb - Friend and Critic' *ibid* 51 (1985) 61-76.
3. Letter to Coleridge, 1794, *CL* I, 112.
4. Letter of 27 May 1796, *LL* (Marrs), I, 4.
5. Letter of 28 July 1798, *ibid*, I, 130-1.
6. Letter of 9 April 1816, *ibid*, III, 211.
7. Letter of 26 April 1816, *ibid*, III, 215.
8. *Letters of John Keats*, 1814-1821, ed. H.H. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) II 88-9. Cf my essay in *Coleridge's Variety*, ed. Beer (1974) 219-42.
9. G.L. Prentiss, *The Bright Side of Life* (Ashbery Park, N.J., 1901)I, 253.
10. Account by William Harness. See A.G.L'Estrange, *The Literary Life of the Rev. William Harness* (1871) 143-44: *CT* 237-8.
11. Thomas Carlyle, *Life of John Sterling* (1851) ch viii.
12. Quoted by Julius Hare, preface to John Sterling, *Essays and Tales* (1848) I, xxv.
13. J.A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years* (1882) I, 238.
14. Letters to Jane Welsh Carlyle and to John A. Carlyle, 29 Aug and 13 Nov 1831, *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. C.R. Sanders and K. Fielding (Durham, N.C. 1976--) V,375; VI,51.
15. R.P. Graves, *Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton* (Dublin, 1882-89) II, 623: *CT* 235.
16. *Life and Correspondence of Charles Mathews the Elder, Comedian*, ed. E. Yates (1860) 244-6 (1st Pubd 1838-9; *CT* 300-1).
17. Sarah Flower Adams, 'An Evening with Charles Lamb and Coleridge', *Monthly Repository* n.s. IV (1835) 162-8: reptd in part, *CT* 101-3.
18. *CPW* I, 100, 107.

19. Letter of 27 Sept 1796, *LL* (Marrs) I, 44.
20. Letter of 24 Oct, *ibid* I, 53-4.
21. Letter of 28 Oct, *ibid* I, 56.
22. Letter of 14 Oct, 1797, *CL* I, 349-50.
23. 'It is a beauteous evening' *WPW* III, 17.
24. *1799 Prelude* ii 448-51, 455-8. *The Prelude, 1798-1799 ed. S. Parrish* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1977) 65.
25. Letter to his wife, 10 March 1799, *CL* I, 470.
26. Letter to Manning, 24 Sept 1802, *LL* (Marrs) II, 68-9.
27. See, e.g., Letter to Manning, 15 Feb 1802, *ibid* II, 54-8.
28. *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* ed. E.J. Morley (1938) I, 215-6: *CT 332.*
29. 28 Dec 1817: *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon* ed W.B. Pope (Cambridge Mass., 1960) IV, 173.
30. Quoted W. Jerrold, *Thomas Hood and Charles Lamb* (1930) 122-4: *CT* 264-5.
31. Letter to Barton, 23 Jan 1824, *LL* (Lucas) II, 416.
32. The first is reproduced in *CL* III, facing p.509, the second in *The Wordsworth Circle* III (1982) facing p.232, illustrating an account BY E.W.
33. *Biographia Literaria* ch. x., (*Collected Coleridge* I, 183).
34. Note of Jan 1805, *CN* VI, 886.
35. Letter of 24 Feb 1932, *CL* VI, 886.
36. T.L. Hunt in Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography* ed R. Ingram (1903) II,54.
37. Reproduced in *CL* VI, facing p.925.
38. G.L. Prentiss, *The Bright Side of Life, op.cit.* I, 263.
39. See *The Writings of Arthur Hallam* ed T.H.V. Motter (1943) 42-3.
40. *In Memoriam* 1, 2-4.
41. *Ibid.*, lxxxv, 42-4.
42. See *CPW* I, 178n.
43. 'Written after the Death of Charles Lamb', II.30-1 *WPW* IV 273.
44. John Forster, 'Charles Lamb' *New Monthly Magazine*. (1835, i) 198.
45. Written in the Album of Mr Keymer, a bookseller, 21 November 1834, *ibid.*, 198-9.
46. *Paradise Lost* I, 739-46.

COLERIDGE ON LUTHER

Paul Avis

1. *What Luther Meant to Coleridge*

'He is of all men', said Coleridge, laying his hand on an engraving of Luther, 'the one whom I especially love and admire'. Again and again Coleridge invokes the spirit of Luther - the heroic Luther, the philosophical

Luther, the delightfully mischievous and even impossibly wrong-headed Luther, the intriguing under-researched Luther. Coleridge's knowledge of the Reformer was not confined to Luther's *Table Talk* (he had picked up an edition of Luther's works in Germany) but it was in the pages of that volume, borrowed from his friend Charles Lamb, that Coleridge came closest to the real Luther. Here he not only discovered a figure of flesh and blood, the all-too-human Luther, but also a being of transcendent spiritual power: he found words of life for his hungry spirit. As F.J.A. Hort commented in his essay 'Coleridge' (1856): 'Martin Luther's *Table Talk*, translated by Captain Henry Bell with Laud's sanction and approval and, after an interruption by the civil wars, finally published under the auspices of Oliver Cromwell, seems to have lain nearer to Coleridge's heart than any book except the Bible... He found in Luther's strongest meat the very marrow of divinity: he believed that since St. Paul no man had been brought into such living contact with central truth'.(1)

It was not for merely literary or antiquarian reasons that Coleridge read Luther: it was for salvation. 'No where else', he says, 'the inspired volume of course excepted, have I found the doctrine of Christian faith so clearly and distinctly set forth, so vitally substantiated in scripture and in the very nature of a human soul'. And when Luther calls upon the reader to rest all upon Christ, Coleridge comments: 'Ay! this, this is indeed to the purpose. In this doctrine my soul can find rest: I hope to be saved by faith - not by my faith but by the faith of Christ in me'. (2)

In his marginalia to the *Table Talk* (1819-20), Coleridge seems to open his heart. His marginal jottings are among the most appealing of everything he wrote: but they are also true to the character of this *archangel a little damaged*, as Lamb described him. His comments not only endear him to us but exasperate us as well. As Gordon Rupp has remarked:

> To read Coleridge's marginal notes in his copy of that work is again and again to be halted by some earnest ejaculation, some prayer, some confession of a soul's struggle so intimate that the student almost desists, as though intruding into confessions too private and personal for academic survey. Then one remembers that this is simply the Coleridge manner, the least satisfactory trait of his romanticism, that in fact he was wont to treat the margins of all his books in this way, even books from circulating libraries, even books borrowed from his friends, not without half an eye to what they would make of it!(3)

In this case, however, the comments were not destined for Lamb to see: the book was never returned, in spite of his protests:

> Dear C., /he wrote/ Why will you make your visits which should give pleasure a matter of regret to your friends? You never come but you take away some folio that is part of my existence. With a great deal of difficulty I was made to comprehend the state of my loss. My maid Becky brought me a dirty bit of paper which contained her description of some book which Mr. Coleridge had taken away. It was 'Luster's Tables', which for some time I could not make out. What! has he carried away any of the *tables*, Becky? No, it wasn't any tables but it was a book he called 'Luster's Tables'. I was obliged to search personally among my shelves and a huge fissure suddenly disclosed to me the true nature of the damage I had sustained. That book, C., you should not have taken away from me, for it is not mine: it is the property of a friend who does not know its value.

The friend was Edward White, Lamb's colleague at East India House, and it was not Lamb's intention that the folio should find its way home again, for his friend 'does not know its value' - 'nor indeed', adds Lamb, 'have I been very sedulous in explaining to him the estimate of it: but was rather contented in giving a sort of corroboration to a hint that he let fall, as to its being suspected to be not genuine; not but I am sure it is Luther's as I am sure that Jack Bunyan wrote the "Pilgrim's Progress"; but it was not for me to pronounce upon the testimony that had been disputed by learneder clerks than I. So I quietly let it occupy the place it had usurped upon my shelves'. Lamb goes on to explain his attitude to offering house room to other people's books:

> for why should I be so bigoted as to allow rites of hospitality to none but my own books, children, etc. - a species of egotism I abhor from my heart. No; let 'em all snug together, Hebrews and Proselytes of the gate; no selfish partiality of mine shall make distinction between them; I charge no warehouse room for my friends' commodities; they are welcome to come and stay as long as they like...

Lamb presses Coleridge to return the book and 'eat some atoning mutton' with them, ending: 'my third shelf (northern compartment) from the top has two devilish gaps where you have knocked out its two eye-teeth', and signing himself, 'Your wronged friend'. (4)

2. *Luther's Moral and Philosophical Significance*

Coleridge revels in Luther and glories in Hooker but he certainly does not take a triumphalist view of the Reformation, regarding it as a *necessary evil.* (5) It was called for to combat a greater evil, the reign of antichrist, and only the conviction that the papacy was antichrist, Coleridge holds, could have justified the Reformation. What does he mean by this? Antichrist is defined by Coleridge as 'a power in the Christian church which in the name of Christ and at once pretending and usurping his authority, is systematically subversive of the essential and distinguishing characters and purposes of the Christian church'. In the case of Rome, this took the form of the 'erection of a temporal monarch under the pretence of a spiritual authority' - a transposition only possible in Christendom by 'the extinction or entrancement of the spirit of Christianity'. Nothing less than this supreme issue of principle could, in Coleridge's view, have justified the revolt of the sixteenth century. If the papacy is not antichrist, 'the guilt of schism in its most aggravated form lies on the authors of the Reformation. For nothing less than this could have justified so tremendous a rent in the catholic church, with all its foreseen most calamitous consequences... Only in the conviction that Christianity itself was at stake, that the cause was that of Christ in conflict with antichrist, could or did even the lion-hearted Luther with unquailed spirit, avow to himself: I bring not peace but a sword into the world'.(6)

For precisely this reason, Luther's mission had to be a violent one: the moderation of an Erasmus would not have met the case.

> Think you that a man could have gone through what he did, have stood alone before assembled diets, dared sovereigns, continued with his pen scourging a pope here and a monarch there and treating both of them as his inferiors...? Think you that such

> a man could have done this with the cool rational language of what is now called philosophy...? No - Luther's mistakes might have been superfluous but the spirit which made them inevitable was not superfluous.(7)

Luther needed to be an heroic figure and he more that matched his destiny.

When Coleridge is not addressing Luther as his 'dear Luther', it is as the 'heroic Luther', or sometimes both appelations together: 'this dear man of God, heroic Luther'. Above all, it is as an heroic figure that Coleridge sees the Reformer. Luther is 'this Christian Hercules, this heroic cleanser of the Augean Stable of apostacy'. He is 'the heroic Luther, a giant awakening in his strength... the German Son of Thunder'.(8)

As a student of the English moralists as well as an avowed Kantian, Coleridge saw every issue in moral terms and his own moral failings only served to sharpen his sense of the pervasive conflict of good and evil. Hort rightly refers to 'the universal supremacy which moral considerations held in his mind'. Coleridge's view of the Reformation was no exception: Luther's was a moral struggle and no considerations of expediency or moderation could outweigh this overriding claim. 'Luther felt and preached and wrote and acted as beseemed a Luther to feel and utter and act. The truths which had been outraged, he reproclaimed in the spirit of outraged truth at the behest of his conscience and in the service of the God of truth'.(9) And in 1818 Coleridge writes:

> O what a genuine son of Paul is he not! As in our Articles and Homilies the doctrine of our apostolic church appears in the meakness of wisdom, so in the writings of Luther does it *thunder* and *lighten* in it's [sic] sublimity - O how the painted mist of mock-rationality dissolves before him - the hollowness of self-procured gradual self-reformation by force of prudential reflections and enlightened self-interest...

The opium-eating Coleridge had tasted bitterly this kind of failure.(10)

The same ideas and images constantly recur: Luther as the worthy successor of St. Paul ('The only fit commentator on Paul was Luther - not by any means such a gentleman as the apostle, but almost as great a genius'; 'Paul and Luther - names which I can never separate'); the doctrine of the Reformers flashing like lightning across the 'papal darkness'; and the living power of Luther's words: he was 'as great a poet as ever lived in any age or country, but his poetic images were so vivid that they mastered the poet's own mind! He was *possessed* with them, as with substance distinct from himself: Luther did not *write*, he *acted* poems. The Bible was a spiritual indeed but not a *figurative* armoury in his belief'. Coleridge saw Luther as the embodiment of the principle - central to his own philosophy and the tradition that takes its rise from him - that 'words are not *things*, they are *living powers*, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined and humanised'.(11)

Like his disciple, F.D. Maurice, Coleridge regarded Luther as a thinker of profound philosophical significance - not in the sense that Luther possessed a fully articulated epistemology or metaphysic that could be borrowed uncritically by his admirers in the nineteenth century, but in as much as he consistently reduced theological questions to first principles and pointed to the transcendent reality of God as man's essential and ultimate concern. Even Luther's extravagant mistakes could not conceal the fact that he had the root of the matter in him. 'Luther - a hero, one fettered indeed with prejudices; but with those very fetters he would knock out the brains of a modern Fort Esprit [ie. rationalist]'.(12) And in the same vein Coleridge writes to Lamb:

> In how many little escapes and corner-holes does the sensibility, the fineness...the geniality of nature appear in this son of thunder! O for a Luther in the present age! Why, Charles! with the very handcuffs of his prejudices he would knock out the brains (nay, that is impossible, but), he would split the skulls of our Christo-galli, translate the word as you like - French Christians or coxcombs!

Even when Luther is wildly astray, there is some flash of insight in what he says that makes us treasure his words: 'Even in Luther's lowest imbecilities what gleams of vigorous good sense!' On some Martinian absurdity about the fathers, Coleridge glosses: 'O Swan! thy critical cygnets are but goslings'. And on Luther's warning of devils lying in wait in desolate places to molest people: 'Yes! heroic Swan, I love thee even when thou gabblest like a goose; for thy geese helped to save the Capitol'.(13)

Coleridge's comments sometimes fail to rise above vague adulation. He seldom discusses the specific tenets of Lutheran theology. But he did possess a rare insight into the issues at stake in the Reformation. He recognised the continuity of the Reformers with the great scholastic thinkers of the later middle ages; the Reformation was 'truly the egg of the schoolmen tho' they ostrich-like left it to be hatched by chance'.(14) He acknowledges the justice of Luther's claim that, while Wiclif and Huss had attacked the morals of the papacy, he alone had struck at the root of corruption by attacking false doctrine: as Coleridge paraphrases, 'I take the goose by the neck and set the knife to the throat'.(15) He also understands the obsession of the Reformers with trying to prove that they alone were the true church in continuity with the fathers and councils of the early church by their implacable opposition to heresy. What comes across to us as bigoted dogmatism in the Reformers is better explained as their bending over backwards to ward off the imputation of heterodoxy.(16)

3. *Coleridge's Luther Projects*

Coleridge's mind was always brimming with literary projects: when he had a good title and a number of ideas in his head he was likely to attempt to interest a publisher in the book that was 'nearing completion!'

Whether or not Coleridge ever contemplated preparing an edition of Luther himself, he certainly tried to interest others in such a scheme. An adequate life of Luther in English was the first requirement and Coleridge wrote to his nephew, William Hart Coleridge (1789-1849) in 1818 that he should 'even now look forward to some important work' and proceeded to outline what form that work might take: 'We have no life of Luther, no English work that could bear the title otherwise than ironically'. But William Hart did not know German. Samuel Taylor characteristically plays down the difficulties: 'In less than three months, could you spare but one hour a day, you might make yourself sufficient master of the German to read

Luther's German tracts with few dictionary interruptions - and these decreasing with every page you read...'(17)

Coleridge was fascinated by the under-researched Luther and remarks in *The Friend* that a life of Luther - an account both of the man and his thought - is a 'desideratum in English Literature, though perhaps there is no subject for which so many unused materials are extant, both printed and in manuscript'. Alongside the life might go an English edition of the letters: 'I can scarcely conceive a more delightful volume than might be made from Luther's letters... if they were translated in the simple, sinewy, idiomatic, hearty mother-tongue of the original'.(18) To achieve this Coleridge remarks in his *Table Talk*, the translator 'should be a man deeply imbued with his Bible, with the English writers from Henry VII to Edward VI, the Scotch divines of the sixteenth century and with the old racy German'.(19)

To attempt to collect Coleridge's references to Luther is to be impressed above all with his love for the man - a love that perhaps helped to fill a vacuum in Coleridge's affections after his estrangement from Wordsworth. Luther frankly delighted Coleridge. He is the 'dear honoured Luther', 'the dear man Luther', 'dearest Luther', 'thou rare black Swan!', whom Coleridge confessed to like and love all the better because he spoke as the mood took him. Luther is *the man of life, the man of power:-*

Luther: 'I have angered the pope... O! how the sow raiseth her bristles.. But God will triumph in the end and then he will call and say, Ho! Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, Justus Jonas, John Calvin, etc, arise, come up...'

Coleridge: 'How our fine preachers would turn up their Tom Tit beaks and flirt with their tails at it but that is the way in which the man of *Life*, the man of power set the dry bones in motion'.(20)

Coleridge loves to picture him - a romantic figure for a new romantic age - in the Wartburg with a price on his head, bringing all his scholarly and intuitive powers to bear on his study of the sacred text and proving that words were not things but living powers that could transform human lives and change the course of history. Luther's evangelical message was born out of arduous critical study of the text of scripture. As A.G. Dickens has pointedly remarked: 'Luther's interpretation of Christianity depended on how one translated certain Greek words'. This is precisely where Coleridge lays the emphasis himself and the point at which we may take our leave of Coleridge and Luther. 'Methinks I see him sitting, the heroic student, in his chamber in the Wartburg, with his midnight lamp before him... Below it lies the Hebrew Bible open, on which he gazes, his brow pressing on his palm, brooding over some obscure text'.(21)

NOTES

1. F.J.A. Hort, 'Coleridge' in *Cambridge Essays*, Cambridge, 1856,p.345.
2. E.L. Griggs, ed., *Letters of S.T. Coleridge*, Oxford, 1959,IV,p.845; Coleridge, *Notes: Theological, Political and Miscellaneous*, London, 1853,p.33.
3. E.G. Rupp, *The Righteousness of God - Luther Studies*, London,1953,p.49.
4. E.V. Lucas, ed. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb 1796-1820*, (Lamb, *Works*, V), pp.573ff.

5. H. Morley, ed., Coleridge, *Table Talk*, London, 1884,p.250.

6. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State*, London (Everyman edn.), 1972, pp.116f.

7. K. Coburn, ed., Coleridge, *Philosophical Lectures*, London,1949,p.309.

8. Coleridge, *Notes*,pp.9f; B.E. Rooke, ed., Coleridge, *The Friend (Collected Works*, IV), Princeton and London, 1969,I,pp.75n,132,140.

9. Hort, p.338; Coleridge, *The Friend*, I, p.64.

10. Coleridge, *Letters*, IV, p.845.

11. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, p.212; *Notes*, p.23; *The Friend*, I,pp.62,140f; *Aids to Reflection*, 5th edn., London, 1843, intro.aphorism 17.

12. Coleridge, *Anima Poetae*.London 1895, p.11.

13. Coleridge, *Notes*, pp.36, 51, 47, 50.

14. Coleridge, *Philosophical Lecturers*, p.284n.

15. Coleridge, *Notes*, p.41.

16. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, p.116.

17. Coleridge, *Letters*, IV, p.845.

18. Coleridge, *The Friend*, I, pp.134, 139.

19. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, p.156.

20. Coleridge, *Notes*, pp.9ff; p.43 mg of H. Crabb Robinson's copy of H. Bell's edn. of Luther's *Table Talk* in British Library.

21. A.G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther*, London, 1974,p.76; Coleridge, *The Friend*, I,p.140.

This is a condensed version of a paper read at the 1984 meeting of the National Conference on Literature and Religion at Hatfield College, Durham. I am grateful to Dr. John Beer for several suggestions arising out of the discussion that followed. I have pursued this theme on a broader front in *The Shaking of the Seven Hills - Anglicanism Encounters the Reformation* (a study of Liberal Anglicanism and the Oxford Movement).

Dr. Avis's other books include *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers (1982)*, *Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine (1985)* and *Foundations of Modern Historical Thought: From Machiavelli to Vico (1986)*.

PARODIC ALLUSION: COLERIDGE AND THE 'NEHEMIAH HIGGINBOTTOM' SONNETS, 1797.

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In his first six months at Alfoxden, Wordsworth affected not just Coleridge's response to Nature (and therefore the concerns of his writing), but also his attitude to language and poetic style. As early as July, Coleridge writes to Southey expressing the disgust he feels for his own earlier poetry; in particular, for the rhetoric of his *Monody on the Death of Chatterton:*

> to find such shadowy nobodies, as cherub-winged DEATH, Trees of HOPE, bare-bosom'd AFFECTION, & simpering PEACE--makes one's blood circulate like ipecacacuanha [*sic*].
>
> (Griggs i,333)

By the autumn, Coleridge had become much clearer about the failings of contemporary poetic diction, and had begun to put his own poetic 'vices' in a larger context. The 'Sonnets attempted in the manner of contemporary writers', which he published under the pseudonym 'Nehemiah Higginbottom' in the November issue of the *Monthly Magazine*, reflect some of the most recent changes in his attitude. They were composed, Coleridge writes in the same month, 'in ridicule of my own [sonnets], & Charles Lloyd's, & Lamb's, &c &c-- in ridicule of that affectation of unaffectedness, of jumping & misplaced accent on common-place epithets, flat lines forced into poetry by Italics (signifying how well & *mouthis[h]ly* the Author would read them) puny pathos, &c &c--'. 'The instances', he adds defensively, 'are almost all taken from mine & Lloyd's poems'; but his conclusion is the patronising comment, 'I think they may do good to our young Bards' (Griggs i, 357-8). We cannot be sure whom he had in mind, but it was Southey who reacted at once to the publication and whom Coleridge was at pains to soothe: 'I am sorry, Southey! very sorry that I wrote or published those Sonnets--but 'sorry' would be a tame word to express my feelings, if I had written them with the motives which you have attributed to me' (Griggs i, 358-9). Lamb certainly believed that Southey was a prime target. Any denial, he commented, was 'a lie too gross for the grossest ignorance to believe' (see Griggs i, 404).

A close look at the sonnets shows the first especially to be packed with allusions, and echoes, drawn from the minor poems of the 1790s, and used by Coleridge to point out the faults and idiosyncrasies of current poetic diction. According to *Biographia*, it 'had for its object to excite a good-natured laugh at the spirit of *doleful egotism*, and at the recurrence of favourite phrases, with the double defect of being at once trite and licentious'.(1) Any one of Coleridge's contemporaries might recognise in his poetry this 'spirit of *doleful egotism*', but a select few would feel more personally 'the recurrence of favourite phrases' actually lifted from their poems:

> Pensive at eve on the *hard* world I mus'd.
> And *my poor* heart was sad: so at the Moon
> I gaz'd--and sigh'd, and sigh'd!--for, ah! how soon
> Eve darkens into night. Mine eye perus'd
> With tearful vacancy the *dampy* grass
> Which wept and glitter'd in the *paly* ray;
> And *I did pause me* on my lonely way,
> And *mused me* on those *wretched ones* who pass
> O'er *the black heath* of Sorrow. But, alas!
> Most of *Myself* I thought: when it befell
> That the *sooth* Spirit of the breezy wood
> Breath'd in mine ear 'All this is very well;
> But much of *one* thing is for *no* thing good'.
> Ah! my *poor heart's* INEXPLICABLE SWELL!

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1. Coleridge introduces the 'Nehemiah Higginbottom' Sonnets into his discussion of 'the three sins of poetry' in Chapter One of *Biographia Literaria*. See Shawcross i, 17-19.

A brief survey of the *Poems* of Coleridge, Lamb and Lloyd (1797) shows that 'my poor heart' (1.2) appears both in a quotation from Bowles used by Lloyd as his epigraph (p.151), and in Coleridge's own Sonnet II ('THOU bleedest, my poor HEART!', 1.1); 'Eve darkens into night' (1.4) is a recollection of the line 'Eve saddens into NIGHT' in Coleridge's *Songs of the Pixies* (1.76); the word 'paly' (again from Bowles) occurs in Coleridge's *Effusion on an Autumnal Evening* ('paly radiance', 1.31) and Lloyd's *Melancholy Man* ('eve's meek star with paly eye', 1.21); (1) the construction 'I did pause me' is one used by Lamb in his third sonnet: 'And from the cottage turn'd me with a sigh' (p.219), and the image of 'those *wretched ones* who pass / O'er the black heath of Sorrow' (11.8-9) is based on the opening lines of Coleridge's *Monody on the Death of Chatterton:* 'WHEN faint and sad o'er Sorrow's desart wild / Slow journeys onward poor Misfortune's child', with just a touch, perhaps, of Wordsworth's *Evening Walk:* 'All blind she wilders o'er the lightless heath'. (285) (2) Southey too appears to be present in the last line of the sonnet, which echoes his Inscriptions VI, 'If that thine heart be human, Passenger! / Sure it will swell within thee' (11.9-10). Coleridge's capitalization of 'INEXPLICABLE SWELL' is doubly parodic--of the pompous use of language which is itself swelling, and of the fashion (demonstrated again and again in the 1797 volume) for printing emotive words in the higher case for emphasis. (3)

The second sonnet, which Coleridge later referred to in terms of 'low, creeping language and thoughts, under the pretence of *simplicity*' (Shawcross i,17) is less allusive than the first, and models itself on a certain kind of sensibility rather than borrowing its lines and images directly from other poems:

> O! I do love thee, meek *Simplicity*!
> For of thy lays the lulling simpleness
> Goes to my heart and soothes each small distress,
> Distress though small, yet haply great to me!
>
> (11.1-4)

The style Coleridge most obviously has in mind is Lamb's--which, in its frequent use of monosyllables, has a sort of bogus humility:

> In my poor mind it is most sweet to muse
> Upon the days gone by; to act, in thought,
> Past seasons o'er, and be again a child...
>
> (*Childhood*, 1-3)

---

1. The word 'paly' is made doubly funny by its juxtaposition with 'dampy'--unused in English poetry since Drayton. In its context here it is deliberately banal.

2. Heaths are of course frequent in early Wordsworth poetry, especially when toiled across. See, among other examples, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, 10-11, 'And dost thou hope across this Plain to trail / That frame o'ercome with years and malady?' and *Ruined Cottage*, 18, 'Across a bare wide common I had toiled'.

3. In a later manuscript note to Southey's *Joan of Arc*, Coleridge writes against one particularly capitalised passage 'These images imageless, these *Small-Capitals* constituting themselves Personifications, I despised even at that time; but was forced to introduce them, to preserve the connection with the machinery of the Poem, previously adopted by Southey' (*EHC* i, 145; *app.crit*). It seems odd that he should have wished to bring his other publication into line.

Lamb is an appropriate target because it was of course he who, during the months of his closest friendship with Coleridge, had again and again asserted the need for simplicity in poetry: 'Cultivate simplicity, Coleridge, or rather, I should say, banish elaborateness; for simplicity springs spontaneous from the heart, and carries into daylight its own modest buds and genuine, sweet, and clear flowers of expression' (Marrs i,60-1).

The third sonnet goes to the other extreme, being intended to ridicule 'the indiscriminate use of elaborate and swelling language and imagery' (Shawcross i,17). To cover his traces, Coleridge claims in *Biographia* that the phrases were 'entirely from his own poems', but it is Lamb who is again the main object of parody. The closing lines of his first sonnet in the 1797 volume contain the most absurd rhetorical questions--

And does the lonely glade
Still court the footsteps of the fair-hair'd maid?
Still in her locks the gales of summer sigh?
While I forlorn do wander, heedless where,
And 'mid my wanderings meet no Anna there!

(p.217)

--which Coleridge echoes, with a good deal of pleasure, in the central passage of Sonnet Three:

Did ye not see her gleaming thro' the glade?
Belike, 'twas she, the maiden all forlorn.
What though she milk no cow with crumpled horn,
Yet *aye* she haunts the dale where *erst* she stray'd;
And *aye* beside her stalks her amorous knight! (1)

(11.5-9)

'Aye' and 'erst' do seem like self-parody, but the use of 'swelling language'--later referred to as 'mental bombast', or 'thoughts and images too great for the subject'--can be observed just as frequently in Southey--'fair is the rising morn when o'er the sky / The orient sun expands his roseate ray' (Sonnet III, 1797)--and, on occasion, in Bowles: 'The orient beam illumes the parting oar' (*Sonnet X, At Ostend, Landing*, 1).

The Higginbottom Sonnets, read as a sequence rather than as three separate parodies, offer a critique of 'false diction' as used in the 1790s both by Coleridge himself, and by his friends. Lamb, it seems, is guilty on two counts: one, of *affecting* simplicity, when--according to his own criteria--it should 'spring spontaneous from the heart', and, two, of using 'elaborate and swelling language' when it is unwarranted by the subject-matter. Southey gets off more lightly, but Lloyd is present in all three poems. It is impossible to say whether the parody of his

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1. No comment is preserved from Lamb the 'amorous knight', but he would surely have been amused to find himself no longer forlorn.

'doleful egotism' is a case of Coleridge getting in a first attack, or whether he was responding to the satirical portrait of himself in *Edmund Oliver*. (1)

The use of phrases from his own poetry--early and more recent--shows in Coleridge a surprising degree of self-awareness; but it is in one particular allusion to Wordsworth that his criticism is at its sharpest. The title of the third sonnet, 'On a Ruined House in A Romantic Country', alludes unmistakeably to Wordsworth's recently composed, and more recently transcribed, *Ruined Cottage*. (2) Coleridge does not of course criticise the diction of this poem as a whole--according to his new views on the subject, Wordsworth's language is almost without fault. What he does instead, is pick out a single instance in the poetry where Wordsworth's diction becomes stilted:

> and so she sat
> Through the long winter, reckless and alone,
> Till this reft house by frost, and thaw, and rain
> Was sapped...
>
> (Griggs i.328)

'This reft house'--which belongs more to the world of *An Evening Walk* than to the great writing of 1797-8--reappears in Coleridge's first line:

> And this reft house is that the which he built,
> Lamented Jack!
>
> (11,1-2)

One could argue that if Wordsworth had felt Coleridge to be making a specific criticism he would, at a later stage, have changed his adjective; but it remains a fact that Coleridge has singled out one of the very few obvious poetic epithets in *The Ruined Cottage*. Interestingly, Wordsworth had in fact adapted the phrase from Coleridge's *Lines Written at Shurton Bars* of September 1795:

> And hark, my Love! The sea-breeze moans
> Through yon reft house!
>
> (11.31-2)

Coleridge must at once have recognized the words as originally his, and gone on to point out to Wordsworth their inadequacy. And yet one is bound to think that it was Wordsworth's influence that had increased his own sensitivity to the language of feeling. In this small interchange over the use of a stilted adjective one recognizes for the first time the layering of allusion that will become typical of the writers' most creative years.

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1. Charles Lloyd had completed *Edmund Oliver* by 11 November, but it was not published until spring of the following year (see Griggs i,404-5). Coleridge's reaction when the book came out might suggest that he did not know of it until then, but it seems likely that through Lamb (who kept in touch with Lloyd) Coleridge when he wrote the sonnet already had wind of its satirical references.

2. Dorothy had transcribed the first version of *The Ruined Cottage* for Coleridge to send to Estlin on 10 June 1797. Though the sonnet may be getting at Southey, there can of course be no reference to his *Ruined Cottage*, which belongs to autumn 1798 (see Mary Jacobus, *RES*, New Series xxii,85[1971]22-3).

Dr. Newlyn's book *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion* is published by Oxford University Press.

COLERIDGE AND THE SUBLIME: 'THIS LIME-TREE BOWER MY PRISON'

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The note which Coleridge appended to the copy of 'This Lime-tree Bower my prison' that he sent to Southey has led to fruitful discussion of the philosophical background to the poem. (1) However, Coleridge's own prompting has perhaps led us away from the most pervasive intellectual tradition operating in the text: the contrast of the beautiful and the sublime. In this short piece I propose to map on to the poem a number of what the eighteenth century would have seen as conventional properties of the two finer feelings and to show how the text works as an exposition of the relationship between the two.

While my aim is not specifically to trace the exact source of Coleridge's knowledge of this branch of aesthetic thought, some reference ought to be made to two celebrated works which provide a context for the reader. The most probable influence on Coleridge in this area was Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Coleridge certainly knew this and was arguably moved to use it elsewhere. (2) A more interesting possibility is that, by 1797, he had some acquaintance with Kant's *Beobachtungen über das Gefuhl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, if not in the original (and there is doubt as to his competence in German at this time) perhaps in the French translation of 1796. (3) Certainly, a reading of the first section of Kant's brief work holds out the enticing idea that Coleridge's contact with the German philosophy he later knew so well had borne fruit early in his career. I do not, however, intend to make a tenuous case for the direct influence of Kant on Coleridge in this context but rather to show how an authoritative statement from the heart of late eighteenth-century aesthetics may be brought to bear in the reading of one of the poet's most characteristic and celebrated works.

The methods adopted by Burke and Kant are different. Burke approaches his subject on the grand scale which means that the fine distinctions between the sublime and the beautiful become clearly apparent only over large sections of his argument. Kant, on the other hand, works within a much smaller compass and his method is primarily antithetical. Kant's procedure for the description of the 'distinct objects of the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime' may be seen at work in Coleridge's poem as his thoughts reach out from the beautiful prison of the lime-tree bower towards Charles Lamb and his companions, Friedrichian figures in a sublime landscape. The friends are imagined in a large, open terrain then winding their way down into:

> The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
> And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
> Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
> Flings arching like a bridge;
>
> (10 - 13) (4)

They emerge 'beneath the wide wide heaven'. The landscape of Coleridge's poem is a composition of the kind of features which are to be found in Kant's compact description of the sublime:

> Tall oaks and lonely shadows in a sacred grove are sublime.
>
> Deep loneliness is sublime, but in a way that inspires terror. Hence great far-reaching solitudes like the colossal Komul desert in Tartary, have always given us occasion for peopling them with fearsome spirits, goblins, and ghouls. The sublime must always be great... (5)

But the wide wide heaven of Nether Stowey is not the 'wide wide sea' of the 'Ancient Mariner' and Coleridge is seen to strive for the immense and terrifying sublime within the confines of an English landscape.

At the same time, Coleridge is able to present, with full force, the effect of the sublime on individuals. Lamb is moved and:

> Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
> Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
> On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
> Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
> As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
> Spirits perceive his presence.
>
> (38 - 43)

Coleridge's friend exhibits the behaviour of one who is drawn to the Kantian sublime:

> The mien of a man who is undergoing the full feeling of the sublime is earnest, sometimes rigid and astonished. (6)

Meanwhile, the poet is imprisoned in the bower, confined, as it were, to the realm of beauty and unable to participate fully in the sublimity of the evening. Kant pointed out that 'flower beds, low hedges and trees trimmed in figures are beautiful' and that while the sublime is great and simple, 'the beautiful can be adorned and ornamented'. (7) The contrast between Coleridge's immediate environment and that of his friends may thus be clearly read as a contrast of the sublime and the beautiful made explicitly in the terms of late eighteenth-century aesthetics.

In fact, the poet's enjoyment of his garden as night draws in keeps him 'Awake to Love and Beauty'. As he remembers the dappling of the sunshine on the foliage and the shadows 'of the leaf and stem' we see that it is precisely these small perceptions of the beautiful that have enabled him to enter into the imaginative apprehension of the sublime sensations enjoyed by his friends as they perceive the more massive dappling of great trees above the 'roaring dell'. Thus, while Coleridge's response to his garden is that of a man in the realm of the beautiful - he is 'charmed' rather than 'moved' and the words 'mark'd' and 'sooth'd' contrast here with 'Gaze' and 'struck' - the gladness which he feels lets him reach out into the landscape and participate in the gladness of his friends which has been stimulated by the sublime. (8)

It may be seen then that a reader may take the details of the second section of the poem (lines 43 - 76) and, by superimposing them on the first section (lines 1 - 43), construct a very clear set of the kind of antitheses used by Kant in his essay. This method of work has more than superficial significance for by it Coleridge is able to show the poetic soul transcending the immediate limitation of environment and achieving contact with 'Nature'. It should be noted that Coleridge's realisation at lines 43 - 45:

> A delight
> Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
> As I myself were there!

marks the poem's transition from the sublime to the beautiful, Coleridge now rehearses his memories of the beautiful sensations of the bower and this leads him to an understanding of how it is that he has been able to visualise the sublime landscape. It might be said, punningly, that in the first section of the poem the sublime has been quite literally sublimated as the poet merely muses, stimulated by sense impressions which are not yet described, then, in the second section the sublime is released through his conscious re-playing of those impressions which have been experienced during a period of unconscious thought. Thus, the time-scale of the text (i.e. the impressions as they are described) precisely reverses the time-scale of the world which the text predicates (i.e. the notional events of the walk and Coleridge's 'imprisonment'). The poem's opening ironically denies the possibility of such a reversal:

> I have lost
> Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
> Most sweet to my remembrance....
>
> (2 - 4)

But it is precisely beauty which Coleridge has not lost as he sits in his garden and, eventually, it is the memory of beauty which enables him to reclaim the rich feeling appropriate to the sublime. The conventional contrast of the sublime and the beautiful may thus be said to facilitate Coleridge's development of 'This Lime-tree Bower' from a decorative occasional verse to a major statement of poetic faith.

Whatever else the poem may be, it is a poem of friendship, and this too may be seen as a function of the contrast between the finer feelings. The shift which occurs at the end of the poem as Coleridge stretches out to Lamb (lines 68 - 76) may be traced in that passage of Kant which aptly describes the feeling which the poet attributes to himself:

> Temperaments which possess a feeling for the sublime are drawn gradually, by the quiet stillness of a summer evening as the shimmering light of the stars breaks through the brown shadows of night and the lonely moon rises into view, into high feelings of friendship, of disdain for the world, of eternity. (9)

The poem is an antithetical account of the finer feelings superimposed on the ironic situation of Coleridge's imprisonment while the urban Lamb roams free. Now it may also be seen as a ratification of the poet's cherished tendency to the sublime, as the summer evening plucks him from the realm of beauty and, through that comtemplation of 'Life' so evocatively expressed by Kant, leads him into the transcendent realm of sublimity.

NOTES

1. Coleridge glossed the word 'view' (line 39 in the ms. sent to Southey) with the remark, 'You remember I am a *Berkleyan*'. The fullest discussion of this note may be found in J. Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (London, 1969) pp.197-199.
2. edited by J.T. Boulton (London, 1958). Suggestions as to Coleridge's knowledge of Burke and the possibility of Burke's influence on the verses in praise of Joseph Cottle may be found in Boulton's introduction, pp. cii - ciii.
3. translated by J.T. Goldthwait as *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (Berkeley, 1960). R. Ashton, *The German Idea* (Cambridge, 1980) assesses Coleridge's knowledge of Kant and suggests (pp.42 - 43) that it is unlikely that he read the philosopher 'at first hand' till 1801. A. Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime* (Cambridge, 1984) gives an intelligent account of the sublime in the eighteenth century on pp.1 - 24.
4. All quotations from 'This Lime-tree Bower' taken from S.T. Coleridge, *Poetical Works* edited by E.H. Coleridge (Oxford 1967)
5. Kant, op.cit. pp. 47-48.
6. ibid. p.47.
7. ibid. pp. 47-48.
8. see Kant, op.cit. p.47.
9. Kant, op.cit. p. 47. It is also worth noting that Burke (op.cit pp.84-85) points to the cries of animals as productive of the sublime and this may be related to the creeking of the rook's wings at the end of Coleridge's poem. It is interesting to record too that at several points in his treatise Burke posits a relationship between pain and the sublime. Perhaps this should be kept in mind when considering the occasion of the poem's composition - Coleridge's scalded foot!

NOTES

THE LIFE OF SIR CHARLES LAMB

Lamb, with his love of Red Letter Days, would have approved of the Economic Life Assurance Society. On 26 May 1825 its directors decided: 'That the following Holidays be kept at this office, New Year's Day, King Charles Martyr, Ash Wednesday, Lady-day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, St George's Day, Holy Thursday, Whit Monday, Restoration, Midsummer Day, Coronation, Michaelmas Day, Gunpowder Plot, Lord Mayor's Day, Christmas Day, Day after Christmas Day'. Unfortunately in later years this generous allowance was reduced to eight holidays.

Elia would have chortled among his friends had he known that in the same year the society agreed to issue a life assurance policy for £5,000 on Sir Charles Lamb, and a few months later lent him £20,000. We can be confident this Sir Charles Montolieu Lamb (Bart) was no relation, for his father had been James Bland Burges and changed his name on inheriting the estate of a friend, John Lamb.

But on 28 January 1831 the directors of the Economic Life Assurance Society agreed to issue a policy for £200 on the life of plain Charles Lamb. It is intriguing to see that the week before a similar policy for £600 was granted to Henry Leigh Hunt. Theodore Hook was not so lucky - his application six months later for £3,000 assurance was rejected. But then he had attacked the company in *John Bull*, the newspaper he edited. On 19 June 1835, six months after Lamb's death, the directors noted in their minutes: 'A letter from R. Obbard respecting policy No 1793 on the life of Mr. C. Lamb having been read it was ordered that a new policy be granted, on the same terms as the former, in the name of Mr Obbard!

The following year a new policy was issued to Mr Obbard 'in lieu of that No 1793' and there is no further mention of C. Lamb. It would be ironic if the real Charles Lamb did insure himself with the Economic, for the chairman who presided at the meeting of the directors who granted the policy was Sir James Mackintosh, the man Lamb lampooned more than 30 years before as 'an apostate black'.

But it seems more likely the transaction concerned Charles Edward Lamb, listed in Robson's 1834 *London Directory* as a jeweller living at 43 Ludgate Hill. Subsequent entries read 'Edward Lamb, Jeweller, Silversmith' etc but there is no indication whether this meant a change of resident or a clipping of the name to get the word silversmith in without incurring the cost of an extra line. The premises in Ludgate Hill would have been within a few minutes walk of the assurance company's office in what is now New Bridge Street. The same directory lists Robert Obbard as living in Newington Causeway, south of the River Thames.

It is possible the arrangement between the two men related to pawnbroking business. Ludgate Hill seems to have been popular with this fraternity, for Peter Patmore father of Elia's fellow-writer, Peter George Patmore, had his shop there at No. 33. It was with pistols belonging to the elder Patmore that his son set out in 1821 as second in the duel that ended the life of John Scott, editor of *The London Magazine*.

For the opportunity to extract information from the Directors' Minute Books of the Economic Life Assurance Society I am indebted to Sun Alliance Insurance Group who absorbed the former company and to the Guildhall Library, where the archives are now lodged.

Patrick O'Leary

FROM MR. D.E. WICKHAM

FOR THE RECORD

As a footnote to my continuing interest in exactly what, or how, Charles Lamb ordered on the occasion that he asked in French for a boiled egg and obtained brandy, I record a letter from Mr Alastair Ross of Ealing, published in 'The Times' on 29 June 1984, in which he refers to a 'Punch' cartoon of 1914 or 1915.

It shows a Scottish soldier, home on leave from France, being asked how he has got on in the French shops

> 'Och, it's easy', he replies. 'If ye want two eggs, ye jist say "Twa oof". Then they bring you three eggs and ye give them back one'.

* * *

'A man the other day, who had rather disobliged me than not, asked me to do him a favour. I said I would, as a true Christian, "heap coals of fire on his head", utterly regardless of the present price - rather like Elia. By-the-by, Charles Lamb's adopted daughter, Isola, Mrs. Moxon, is in great poverty. Would you be inclined to subscribe a tenner? Thomas Baring, just before he died, sent me £50 for her 'in memory of the pleasure he had had from Charles Lamb". Is not that nice?'

> From a letter from Lord Houghton to Henry Bright, dated from Fryston, 21 December 1873, and printed in T. Wemyss Reid's 'The Life, Letters, and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes, First Lord Houghton',1890, ii.284. A surprise?

* * *

'...the faithful Elia who trailed after Vittorio Alfieri, the poet, over the plateau of ancient Castile'.

> From Carlo Levi's 'Christ Stopped at Eboli', page 162, first published in Britain in 1948. A stunner? - before the penny drops.

* * *

I once enquired after the meaning of 'Epping' as found in the Elian canon, i.e. as an adjective with the noun understood but not by me. The usual sources were useless and the most likely explanation seemed to be that a fine country butter might be intended. However, on 22nd April 1982 the 'Daily Telegraph' referred to the celebration of St George's Day in the St George's Taverns ,'whose 103 pubs will be offering Spiced Beef, English Rarebit (?) and Epping sausages, which are illegal under Common Market rules'.

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