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CONTENTS

		Page
Lamb and Coleridge as One-Goddites	Jonathan Wordsworth	
Procter, Lamb and Eliot: Mermaids Calling Each to Each	Joseph E. Riehl	47
'Snatch'd Out of the Fire': Lamb, Coleridge and George Dyer's Cancelled Preface	Harriet Jump	54
Notes from Members and Society Notes		67

LAMB AND COLERIDGE AS ONE-GODDITES

The fourteenth annual Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture, given to the Society by Jonathan Wordsworth *on 1 November 1986.*

It is an honour to be invited to give the Crowsley Memorial Lecture, but I have to confess that I look forward especially to the discussion-period at the end, when I shall be able to put to my distinguished audience some of the questions that have been raised rather than answered by rereading Lamb these past few days and weeks. What, for instance, is the role of Aunt Sarah: as well as being the Witch of Endor, is she truly (as Marrs i,14 suggests) the source of Lamb's Unitarianism? Despite Lamb's remarks on 9 January 1797 about the loneliness of his religious life, are there others among his friends who strengthen his Unitarian thinking -- Dyer, Burnett, Frend? (1) Where do the Lambs worship? On 19 October 1810 there is the uncharitable allusion to 'Unitarian Belsham' of the Essex Street Chapel, and in *Unitarian Protests* (1825) Lamb has 'read in the Essex Street Liturgy a form of celebration of marriage', but there must be other references. While we are about it, are there further allusions to Unitarianism tucked away in *Elia* and *Last Essays*?

And, last but not least, does Lamb ever cease to be a Unitarian? Coleridge, we all know, made strenuous efforts to do so (not, I think, as successfully as some have imagined), (2) and in general the pattern of Dissent seems to have shifted rapidly away from Unitarianism in the period following Priestley's emigration to America in 1794; (3) but Lamb's religion was a personal dedication that did not have to move with the times, and he had neither Coleridge's speculative delight, nor the need to conform that he (Coleridge) inherited from his Anglican father and elder brother. As Edwina Burness has reminded us (*Bulletin*, Jan. 1986), Lamb was at different times attracted by the Quakers (as was Coleridge, for other reasons), but his comment of 13 February 1797 -- 'I detest the vanity of a

man thinking he speaks by the Spirit' -- together with comparable remarks in *The Quaker Meeting* and *Imperfect Sympathies* (both 1821) make it hard to believe he would ever have joined them. I don't myself see any reason to doubt that he was a Unitarian all his life. It is true that there are moments when he seems to distance himself -- his reference on 21 August 1800, for instance, to 'Gentlemen of Mr. Friend's [*sic*] clear Unitarian Capacity', or to the glibness of Belsham in 1810 (Marrs iii, 58) -- and *Unitarian Protests* (signed, of course, Elia, not Lamb) gives little hint of fellow-feeling; but comments on how others behave do not constitute evidence of a change in personal faith. (4) Priestleyan necessitarianism, with its emphasis on the good that must finally come from suffering, had sustained him -- and enabled him to sustain Mary -- through the events that surrounded their mother's death; what cause was there to chop and change? When it comes to the point, I don't think he *did* have any need of Dyer's 'penny tract' on 24 October 1831. 'Did G.D.', he asks Moxon in the letter that gives me my title, 'send his penny tract to convert me to Unitarianism? Dear blundering soul! Why I am as old a one-Goddite as himself'.

Strictly speaking, it may not have been true. The 'dear blundering soul' was 20 years older than Lamb, and apparently learned his Unitarianism from, or with, Robert Robinson in the early 1780s; at which time Lamb, if *Susan Yates* may be regarded as autobiographical, was listening to distant Anglican bells bidding him '*come to church*'. Be that as it may. When we encounter Lamb at first hand he is 21, and has come a long way from the presumably not very rigorous Unitarianism that Aunt Sarah might have been able to offer. In his second extant letter (31 May 1796) it becomes clear that he is a well-informed follower of Joseph Priestley. He is in a position to crow a little over Coleridge, and, still more surprisingly, he is in a position to give him advice about what books to read:

> Coleridge, in reading your R. Musings I felt a transient superiority over you, I have seen priestly. I love to see his name repeated in your writings. I love & honor him almost profanely. You would be charmed with his sermons, if you never read em, -- You have doubtless read his books, illustrative of the doctrine of Necessity. Prefixed to a late work of his, in answer to Paine there is a preface given [*sic*] an account of the Man & his services to Men, written by Lindsey, his dearest friend, -- well worth your reading --

On 2 January 1797 Lamb is 're-re-reading' Priestley's fairly obscure work on 'the Scotch Drs', Reid, Beattie and Oswald; on the 9th comes the reference to 'Priestly, whom I sin in almost adoring', and it seems that he has moved on to *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*:

> Yet I rejoice, & feel my privilege with gratitude, when I have been reading some wise book, such as I have just been reading, Priestly on Philosophical necessity, in the thought that I enjoy a kind of Communion, a kind of friendship even, with the great & good.

In the same letter he asks Coleridge earnestly: 'Are you yet a Berkleyan?' 'Make me one', he continues:

> I rejoyce in being, speculatively, a necessarian. -- Would to God, I were habitually a practical one. Confirm me in the faith of that great & glorious doctrine, & keep me steady in the contemplation of it.

It is time to stand back and ask what it is all about. As well as being one of Europe's top scientists (writing a book on electricity at the suggestion of Franklin, and isolating oxygen in advance of Lavoisier), Joseph Priestley was the extreme one-Goddite. There are perhaps three major points to be made about his views:

(i) As one might expect, there is no Trinity, no Holy Spirit, no Son of God. Christ is man, the son of Joseph and Mary. 'Though honoured and distinguished by God above all other men', he had no pre-existence (as was claimed by Priestley's associate, Richard Price), and he was capable of sin. To worship him is idolatry.

(ii) We ourselves, complex as the structure of our minds and our principles of action are, are links in a great connected chain, parts of an immense whole, a very little of which only we are as yet permitted to see, but from which we collect evidence enough, that the whole system (in which we are, at the same time, both *instruments* and *objects*) is under an unerring direction, and that the final result will be most glorious and happy. Whatever men may intend, or execute, all their designs, and all their actions, are subject to the secret influence and guidance of one who is necessarily the best judge of what will most promote his own excellent purposes. To him, and in all his works, all seeming *discord* is real *harmony*, and all apparent *evil*, ultimate *good*. (5)

(iii) There is no soul distinct from the body, and there is thus no after-life in the conventional sense of the term. In rising *corporeally* from the dead, however, Christ set an example of the perfection to which his fellow human-beings may attain. At the Millennium -- assumed by Christians of many persuasions to be due after the 6,000 years of Creation (6) -- those who have deserved to do so will rise, and live with Christ for a 1,000 years before the earth is finally consumed.

That Lamb accepted these doctrines is implied not only in his expressed admiration for Priestley, but in his response to Coleridge's great necessitarian poem, *Religious Musings*, completed in 1796. 'In his own, and in his Father's might / The SAVIOUR comes!' Coleridge proclaimed, in lines that are Unitarian both in their theology, and in their wish for scientific explanation:

> While as to solemn strains
> The THOUSAND YEARS lead up their mystic dance,
> Old OCEAN claps his hands! the DESERT shouts!
> And soft gales wafted from the haunts of Spring
> Melt the primaeval North! The mighty Dead
> Rise to new life, whoe'er from earliest time
> With conscious zeal had urg'd Life's wond'rous plan
> Coadjutors of God. (1796 *Religious Musings*, 379-87)

To which in 1797 he added the footnote:

> The Millennium:-- in which I suppose, that Man will continue to enjoy the highest glory, of which his human nature is capable.-- That all who in past ages have endeavoured to ameliorate the state of man, will rise and enjoy the fruits and flowers, the imperceptible seeds of which they had sown in their former Life: and that the wicked will during the same period, be suffering the remedies adapted to their several bad habits. I suppose that this period will be followed by the passing away of this Earth, and by our entering the state of pure intellect; when all Creation shall rest from its labours. (*Poems* 1797, p.144)

By chance Lamb's first extant letter (27 May 1796) contains a brief allusion to *Religious Musings*. At this stage he has read only the extract published in *The Watchman* on 9 March, under the improbable heading of *The Present State of Society*. Though he has just spent six weeks 'very agreeably in a madhouse at Hoxton', he observes very sanely: 'There were noble lines in what you inserted ... from *Religious Musings*, but I thought them elaborate'. Two days later he 'retract[s] whatever invidious there was in [his] censure', but continues to take some exception to 'the Gigantic hyperbole by which [Coleridge] describe[s] the Evils of existing Society'. 'Snakes, Lions, hyenas and behemoths', he adds, 'is carrying your resentment beyond bounds'. Obviously the problem with such poetry is how to take it seriously, but Lamb does so most of the time -- indeed his valuation of *Religious Musings* goes up and up -- and if we are to understand what it is that he and Coleridge believe at this period, we have to make an act of historical imagination. A good recipe -- of which you can hardly avail yourselves at this moment -- is to spend half an hour each with *Paradise Lost* and the *Book of Revelation* before one begins:

THE PRESENT STATE OF SOCIETY

> AH! far remov'd from all that glads the sense,
> From all that softens or enobles man,
> The wretched Many! Bent beneath their loads
> They gape at PAGEANT POWER, nor recognize
> Their Cot's transmuted plunder! From the tree
> Of Knowledge, ere the vernal sap had risen,
> Rudely disbranch'd. O *blest* Society!
> Fitliest depictur'd by some sun-scorch'd waste
> Where oft majestic thro' the tainted noon
> The SIMOOM sails, before whose purple pomp
> Who falls not prostrate dies: and where, at night,
> Fast by each precious fountain on green herbs
> The LION couches; or HYAENA dips
> Deep in the lucid stream his bloody jaws;
> Or SERPENT plants his vast moon-glittering bulk
> Caught in whose monstrous twine BEHEMOTH yells
> His bones loud-crashing.

It is, as Lamb says 'Gigantic hyperbole', but there is a compelling earnestness beneath the exaggeration:

> O ye numberless,
> Whom foul OPPRESSION'S ruffian gluttony
> Drives from Life's plenteous feast! O thou poor Wretch,
> Who nurs'd in darkness and made wild by want
> Roamest for prey, yea thy unnatural Hand
> Dar'st lift to deeds of blood!...

(A borrowing from Wordsworth's unpublished *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, with its murderer-hero who is a victim of society.)

O wretched Widow who in dreams dost view
Thy Husband's mangled corse -- and from short doze
Start'st with a shriek! or in thy half-thatch'd cot
Wak'd by the wintry night-storm, wet and cold,
Cowr'st oe'r thy screaming baby! Rest awhile
Children of Wretchedness! More groans must rise,
More blood must steam, or ere your wrongs be full.
Yet is the day of Retribution nigh:
The Lamb of God hath open'd the fifth seal,
And upwards spring on swiftest plume of fire
The innumerable multitude of wrongs
By man on man inflicted! Rest awhile,
Children of Wretchedness! the hour is nigh:
And lo! the Great, the Rich, the Mighty men,
The Kings and the Chief Captains of the World,
With all, that fix'd on high, like stars of Heaven,
Shot baleful influence, shall be cast to earth
Vile and down-trodden, as the untimely fruit
Shook from the fig-tree by a sudden storm.
Ev'n now the storm begins!...

(The French Revolution -- seen as prophetic of the Last Judgment.)

O return!
Pure FAITH! meek PIETY! The abhorred Form,
Whose robe was stiff with earthly pomp;
Who drank iniquity in cups of gold;
Whose names were many and all blasphemous;
Hath met the horrible judgment!...
Return! pure FAITH! return, meek PIETY!
The kingdoms of the world are your's: each heart
Self-govern'd, the vast Family of Love,
Rais'd from the common earth by common toil,
Enjoy the equal produce ....

The vision is surely a moving one? Coleridge brings his extract to a close with lines which, interestingly, were later singled out by Wordsworth:

Such delights
As float to earth! permitted visitants!
When on some solemn Jubilee of Saints
The sapphire-blazing gates of Paradise
Are thrown wide open, and thence voyage forth
Detachments wild of seraph-warbled airs,
And odors snatch'd from beds of amaranth,
And they, that from the chrystal river of life
Spring up on freshen'd wing, ambrosial gales!
The favour'd good Man, in his lonely walk,
Perceives them, and his silent spirit drinks
Strange bliss, which he shall recognize in Heaven.
And such delights, such strange beatitude,
Have seiz'd my young anticipating heart,
When that blest Future rushes on my view!

Coleridge in his extract stops immediately before the Millennium, which I quoted earlier, but includes the apocalyptic events leading up to the Judgment. (7) In doing so, he follows Priestley's farewell sermon, preached at the Gravel Pit Meeting in Hackney on 28 February 1794, *The Present State of Europe compared with the Antient Prophecies:*

> If we can learn anything concerning what is before us, from the language of prophecy, great calamities, such as the world has never yet experienced, will precede that happy state of things, in which 'the kingdoms of this world' will become the 'kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ' ... Let us look back to the antient prophecies, and compare them with the present state of things around us, and let us then look to ourselves, to our own sentiments and conduct, that we may feel and act as our peculiar circumstances require.(8)

Priestley is clear that the Second Coming will be attended by violence -- 'Ev'n now the storm begins!'-- but takes rather less pleasure than Coleridge in the punishment of the 'Chief Captains of the World'. 'All those who appear on the theatre of public affairs', he writes at the conclusion of his Sermon,

> in the field, or the cabinet, both those whom we praise, and those whom we blame, are equally instruments in [God's] hands, and execute all his pleasure .... What, then, should hinder our contemplating the great scene, that seems now to be opening upon us, awful as it is, with tranquillity, and even with satisfaction, from our firm persuasion, that its termination will be glorious and happy? (9)

The American and French Revolutions are part of God's purpose, but necessitarians are not revolutionaries: 'Rest awhile,/Children of Wretchedness! ... Rest awhile,/Children of Wretchedness!' For the masses there is pure faith, meek piety; for 'The favour'd good Man', an anticipation of the future state, which it is not his job to hurry along. Everyone fulfils a part of God's purpose; in the fulness of time his plan will be revealed.

Which brings me back to Lamb's earnest question in January 1797, 'Are you yet a Berkleyan?' Coleridge's side of the correspondence has almost all been lost, so we can't know what he had said about his reading. (10) And though it is hardly surprising that three months after his mother's death Lamb should wish to be strengthened in his Priestleyan faith that 'all seeming *discord* is real *harmony* ... all apparent *evil*, ultimate *good'*, one does not necessarily link necessitarianism with Bishop Berkeley:

> Are you yet a Berkleyan? Make me one. I rejoyce in being, speculatively, a necessarian. -- Would to God I were habitually a practical one. Confirm me in the faith of that great & glorious doctrine, & keep me steady in the contemplation of it.

One is surprised not least by the use of the word 'speculatively': it is not in Lamb's nature to 'speculate' in the sense in which Coleridge, for instance, speculates that the universe may consist of 'organic Harps

diversly fram'd', or of 'one mighty [Berkeleyan] alphabet/For infant minds' (1797 *Eolian Harp*, 36-7; *Joan of Arc* ii, 20-1). Alone of Coleridge's readers, he sides with Sara at the end of *The Eolian Harp*, as she bids her husband 'walk humbly with [his] God'. (1.44) The distinction he draws is between principle and practice. In principle he is a necessarian, in practice it cannot have been easy to see murder, suffering, insanity, within one's own family as divine instruments for good. His letter shows him to have been rereading *Religious Musings*, and also Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749), which is the foundation of Priestley's optimism; and yet it is Berkeley whom he associates with the 'great & glorious doctrine' of necessity. It is a fair bet that Coleridge has drawn his attention to *Siris* (1744), last and oddest of Berkeley's philosophical works, which is laughed at -- and depended upon -- in Chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria*, (11) and which makes a wholly unexpected bond with Hartley's materialism.

'Since God', Hartley argues, in a passage that Coleridge regarded as 'demonstrating' the central *faith* of *Religious Musings*,

> is the source of all good, and consequently must at last appear to be so, i.e. be associated with all our pleasures, it seems to follow, even from this proposition, that the idea of God, and of the ways by which his goodness and happiness are made manifest, must, at last, take place of, and absorb all other ideas, and HE himself become, according to the language of the scriptures, all in all. (12)

'By experiments of sense we become acquainted with the lower faculties of the soul', Berkeley writes towards the end of Siris, and from them, whether by a gradual evolution, or ascent, we arrive at the highest. Sense supplies images to memory.

> These become subjects for fancy to work upon. Reason considers and judges of the imaginations. And these acts of reason become new objects to the understanding. In this scale, each lower faculty is a step that leads to the one above it. And the uppermost naturally leads to the deity. (13)

Coleridge, whose entire life was a struggle 'to idealize and to unify', had found in the idealist Berkeley a necessitarian optimism that corresponded exactly to Hartley's (and Priestley's) materialism. In the same paragraph of *Siris* occur the words:

> There runs a chain throughout the whole system of beings. In this chain one link drags another. The meanest things are connected with the highest. (14)

Which was exactly what Coleridge wished to believe. The chain, or ladder (seen in the first of my quotations from Priestley), was the support of his Unitarian thinking in the mid 1790s, just as it was to be the support of his definitions of imagination twenty years later in *Biographia* (1817). (15) The extent to which such thinking could have been a support for Lamb, however, is another question.

In attempting to define what Lamb and Coleridge believed as one-Goddites

I have tended to assume that they believed the same things, and -- as you cannot have failed to notice -- I have put a great deal of emphasis on *Religious Musings*. The poem can, I think, also be used to show differences between the two writers. Lamb does not, as one might expect, become increasingly critical; in fact his highest praise of Coleridge's poem comes on 5 February 1797, after almost a year of frequent rereadings:

> I was reading your Religious Musings the other day, & sincerely I think it the noblest poem in the language, next after the Paradise lost, & even that was not made the vehicle of such grand truths. 'There is one Mind' &c down to 'Almighty's Throne' are without a rival in the whole compass of my poetical reading.

There is no doubt that Lamb at this period wished to please Coleridge, and it could be said too that he is fairly free with his Milton comparisons, but this is a considered judgment. It is the 'grand truths' that matter to him. The passage that he singles out is a statement of the faith which he and Coleridge certainly have in common:

> There is one Mind, one omnipresent Mind
> Omnific. His most holy name is LOVE... (1796, ll.119-20)

Over the page, however, comes an assertion of a different kind:

> 'Tis the sublime of man,
> Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves
> Parts and proportions of one wound'rous whole:
> This fraternizes man, this constitutes
> Our charities and bearings.

To which Coleridge adds, in what might seem almost a parody of Miltonic convolution:

> But 'tis God
> Diffus'd thro' all, that doth make all one whole;
> This the worst superstition, him except,
> Aught to desire, SUPREME REALITY! (1796, ll, 140-8)

Lamb would have agreed in worshipping a single, omnipresent God, 'Diffus'd thro' all', and in thinking plural gods (whether the Trinity, or pagan alternatives) to be idolatry. He would have taken the contemporary reference in 'fraternize', and agreed that God (whose 'most holy name is LOVE'), rather than political '*fraternité*', forms the basis of the social bond. But he might well have felt a certain arrogance in the 'noontide Majesty' of man.

Much as he admires *Religious Musings*, Lamb is never in fact uncritical. Alongside his most fulsome comments, belonging to 9 June 1796 --

> I dare not *criticize* the Relig Musings, I like not to *select* any part where all is excellent. I can only admire; and I thank you for it in the name of a Christian, as well as a Lover of good Poetry.

-- he makes a distinction about Coleridge's concluding lines that is of great importance:

'Believe, thou, O My Soul, Life is a vision shadowy of truth, & vice & anguish & the wormy grave Shapes of a dream!' I thank you for these lines, in the name of a *Necessarian*, & for what follows in the next paragraph in the name of a child of *fancy*.

It is necessary -- that is to say, destined, fated, ordained by God -- that I should for one last time quote *Religious Musings*. First, a vision of the Millennium, accepted by Lamb as truth, and showing (incidentally) a second way in which Berkeley could be used to support a necessitarian position:

Believe thou, O my soul,
Life is a vision shadowy of Truth,
And vice, and anguish, and the wormy grave,
Shapes of a dream! The veiling clouds retire,
And lo! the Throne of the redeeming God
Forth flashing unimaginable day
Wraps in one blaze earth, heaven, and deepest hell.

Next, lines to be praised only for their imaginative quality:

Contemplant Spirits! ye that hover o'er
With untir'd gaze th'immeasurable fount
Ebullient with creative Deity!
And ye of plastic power, that interfus'd
Roll thro' the grosser and material mass
In organizing surge! Holies of God!
(And what if Monads of the infinite mind?)
I haply journeying my immortal course
Shall sometime join your mystic choir! Till then
I discipline my young noviciate thought
In ministeries of heart-stirring song,
And aye on Meditation's heaven-ward wing
Soaring aloft I breathe th'empyreal air
Of LOVE, omnific, omnipresent LOVE,
Whose day-spring rises glorious in my soul
As the great Sun, when he his influence
Sheds on the frost-bound waters -- The glad stream
Flows to the ray and warbles as it flows. (1796, ll. 421-46)

Lamb elsewhere praises the 'young noviciate thought' -- I'm not clear why -- but cannot take the speculation. On 28 October 1796 he speaks of 'these latter days, tinctured (some of us pretty deeply) with mystical notions and the pride of metaphysics'. And the same point is made, in a different tone of voice, in his marvellous comments of 14 August 1800 about *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* (newly published in *The Annual Anthology*):

You Dog! --you[r] 141st Page shall not save you. I own I was just ready to acknowledge that there is something not unlike good poetry in that Page, if you had not run into the unintelligible abstraction-fit about the manner of the Deity's making Spirits perceive his presence.

The conclusion to *Religious Musings* will of course lead straight through into

Tintern Abbey, and Wordsworth's 'sense sublime/Of something far more deeply *interfused*', which is both a motion and a spirit, and 'rolls through all things' precisely 'in organizing surge' (ll. 96-103). But this thread of Romanticism that will pass through Coleridge to Wordsworth, and through both of them to Shelley (and the Byron of *Childe Harold* Canto III), is not for Lamb. He can appreciate the lines, but as 'fancy', not the 'grand truths' that supersede *Paradise Lost*. On 24 October 1796, a month after his mother's death, he had written (to Coleridge):

> Do continue to write to me. I read your letters with my sister, and they give us both abundance of delight. Especially they please us two, when you talk in a religious strain, --not but 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.

In his recent letter, Coleridge has suggested that through suffering God has given man 'a portion as it were of his Omnipresence'; Lamb's rebuke is couched in very interesting terms:

> Now, high as the human intellect comparatively will soar, and wide as its influence ... can extend, is there not, Coleridge, a distance between the Divine Mind and it, which makes such language blasphemy? Again, in your 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 idolators?

Poor Coleridge has done his best to provide comfort in an appalling situation -- for once he wrote what he was asked for, and sent it by return of post! -- and is met with a reprimand straight out of *Measure for Measure:* 'man, in the pride of speculation, forgetting his nature, and hailing in himself the future God, must make the angels laugh'. (16) 'In my poor mind', Lamb concludes,

> 'tis best for us to ... consider [God] as our *heavenly* Father, and our *best Friend*, without indulging too bold conceptions of His nature. Let us learn to think humbly of ourselves, and rejoice in the appellation of 'dear children', 'brethren', and 'co-heirs with Christ of the promises', seeking to know no further.

Those final words say it all. Lamb is a knowledgeable one-Goddite, who reads and rereads Priestley, and hails *Religious Musings* for the great Unitarian poem that it is, but his belief is wholly unspeculative, vested (as are all his most cherished emotions) within the family. It is a deep and lonely personal faith, needed to give him the optimism that keeps him going, and to create the compassionate, jesting, Elia whom we love. I doubt very much if it ever changed.

NOTES

1. Dyer seems perhaps the most likely. Lamb's letters about him are affectionate, indulgent, and never seem to take him seriously; but Coleridge, on 10 March 1795, sends him one of his most important Unitarian letters, and Nicholas Roe has recently drawn attention to his political effectiveness during the early period ('Radical George: Dyer in the 1790s', *Bulletin*, Jan. 1985).

2. See Jonathan Wordsworth, 'The Infinite I AM', *Coleridge's Imagination*, ed Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe (Cambridge, 1985), 42-50.

3. See, for instance, Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978) 488-90.

4. Belsham was probably too charismatic for Lamb; *Unitarian Protests* is directed against occasional conformity, and the failure to live up to one's principles, which Lamb would always have disapproved.

5. Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity* (1777), vii-ix.

6. See, for instance, Cowper, *Task*, vi, 729-36, Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 14, and Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), 342-6.

7. Ian Wylie, whose forthcoming Oxford Monograph on *Religious Musings* will answer a great many of our questions, argues that the lines printed in *The Watchman* are recent work, and that Coleridge simply breaks off at the point that he has reached.

8. *The Present State* 2-3.

9. *ibid*, 31-2.

10. Lamb twice lent batches of Coleridge's letters, and failed to get them back -- first to an unnamed friend (Marrs i, 78), and next to Manning (Marrs i, 261). One day perhaps the second lot will turn up at a junk-shop in Canton.

11. See *Coleridge's Imagination*, 29-30.

12. David Hartley, *Observations of Man* (reissued 3 vols., 1791) i, 114. The passage is cited by Coleridge in his 1797 footnote to *Religious Musings*, 44 -- effectively to 42-6:

    GOD only to behold, and know, and feel,
    Till by exclusive consciousness of God
    All self-annihilated it [the soul] shall make
    GOD its identity: God all in all!
    We and our Father ONE!

13. George Berkeley, *Works* (2 vols., Dublin, 1784) ii, 600-1.

14. *Ibid*, 601.

15. See *Coleridge's Imagination*, 28-9, 38-9.

16.
    man, proud man,
    Drest in a little briefe authoritie...
    Plaies such phantastique tricks before high heaven,
    As makes the Angels weepe... (II. ii. 118-22)

PROCTER, LAMB AND ELIOT: MERMAIDS CALLING EACH TO EACH

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T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' ends with an imaginative version of the sea, which, incarnated in the beauty of mermaids, is both alluring and frightening. As in the other situations of the poem, the

speaker imagines the consequences of commitment to action, sees himself crowned with glory, attended with pleasures, but suddenly catches sight of his own frailty and rejects the vision.

> Shall I part may hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
> I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
>
> I do not think that they will sing to me.
>
> I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
> Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
> When the wind blows the water white and black.
>
> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
> Till human voices wake us and we drown.

The passage is a coda to the themes and images established earlier in the poem, a passage which Piers Gray has called 'an astonishing achievement's astonishing achievement' (83). It restates the speaker's psychological difficulty with relating to women and to the imaginative life they symbolize ('I do not think that they will sing to me'), and his self-consciousness about his past youth and present age. The mermaids recapitulate the women who 'come and go talking of Michelangelo'. The wild sea counters the dull seaport of the opening of the poem with its 'yellow fog' and its 'sawdust restaurants with oyster shells'. The sea is an open, imaginative and 'romantic' counterpart to the enclosed, citified consciousness of the speaker. It is free and exotic; it represents the world of imagination which the speaker has lost with his youth.

Noting the vaguely threatening nature of Eliot's mermaids, some critics have seen this passage as an allusion to *The Odyssey*, specifically to the song of the sirens which lures men to their doom. Phillip Headings, summing up the critics, connects the mermaids with 'Dante's singing maidens in the Earthly paradise', and Ulysses's sirens, and with the Salome figures of Laforgue and Wilde (31). Piers Gray finds a connection with Gerard de Nerval's *El Desdichado*, 'I dreamed in the cave where the siren swims', and adds the possible connection with Donne's singing mermaids in 'Song: Goe, and catch a falling star', and with Nerval, Baudelaire and Laforgue (pp. 76, 79, 82).

Another source of the last line of Eliot's poem may be in Milton's 'Methought I saw my late espoused saint'. Milton's sonnet ends 'I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night'. In this case, awakening from the dream causes a sort of inversion of the world, with the real world a place of utter despair. In Eliot's poem, '. . . human voices wake us and we drown'. The spell of the singing mermaids, like the dream of Milton's wife, is broken by mundane reality, and the world is inverted; we wake to drown; our eyes open to darkness.

The proliferation of possible sources for Eliot's mermaids points us toward a more or less inescapable conclusion, that the late nineteenth century seems to have been fascinated with mermaids and their underwater grottoes

both as symbols of repressed sexuality and of repressed imagination. Douglas Bush has catalogued some of the early-nineteenth-century mermaids and has traced them back primarily to Ovid, to the *Faerie Queene*, and to Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (180-196). It is also likely that some of the nineteenth-century works concerning mermaids are really based on themes which Bush calls the 'common property' of poets, illustrated by Thomas Hood's version of *Hero and Leander*. In this version, Leander encounters a sea nymph 'who carries him down to her home, not knowing that gratification of her love is death to him' (191). This story expresses in essence, the paradoxical duality of the mermaids, a duality which Piers Gray contends is central to 'Prufrock'. Gray contends that 'Prufrock' reveals two parallel levels of existence, one above (the enclosed rooms, the conscious mind) and one below (the sea, the unconscious); life in one is death in the other (81). As in Milton, the female figure represents the 'other level'. The mermaid, in Hood's version, both as a sexual symbol and a symbol of the imagination is more threatingly powerful than in Prufrock. And Prufrock seems to fear Leander's fate. There can be little doubt that these mermaids of Hood and other nineteenth-century poets are the poetic ancestors of Prufrock's attractive but vaguely threatening sea-creatures.

It is clear therefore that Eliot did not take his mermaids from any single source. But one possible source of Eliot's reference to mermaids remains unexplored, and it is far closer to Prufrock than any of these previously mentioned. Eliot's mermaids may be an allusion to Charles Lamb's 'Witches and Other Night Fears', an essay which might be described as Lamb's answer to the 'Immortality Ode', because it similarly explores the problem of imagination and its loss. There can be little doubt that Eliot knew this essay. He was, of course familiar with Lamb's *Specimens of Elizabethan Drama*, and though he blames Lamb's influence for a pervasive misreading of the plays of the English renaissance, nevertheless he acknowledges Lamb's critical powers more than once. (*Elizabethan Essays* 8, 129).(1) It is difficult to imagine that a writer as formidably well-read as Eliot would not have continued his reading of Lamb until it included the essays of Elia.

The thesis of 'Witches and other Night Fears' is, as with most of the essays of Elia, subtly embedded in a web of allusion and circumstance. It was written as part of a controversy which arose over the origin of nightmares in children, specifically 'Little T.H.', Thornton Hunt, son of Leigh Hunt. 'Little T.H.' had been carefully shielded from fairy tales and stories of monsters, yet had suffered nightmares 'to which the reveries of the cell-damned murderer are tranquility' (I, 556). Elia concludes that nightmares are the consequence of the very psychological makeup of each child, that we all carry with us, to use Lamb's term, the 'archetypes' of horror, which appear as monsters in our dreams. In an allusion to Wordsworth's supposed theory of the pre-existence of souls, in the 'Immortality Ode', Elia proposes his own proof of pre-existence: nightmares.

> Is it that we naturally conceive terror from such objects, considered in their capacity of being able to inflict upon us bodily injury? O, least of all! These terrors are of older standing. They date beyond the body--or, without the body they would have been the same. . . That the kind of fear here treated of is purely

> spiritual--that it is strong in proportion that it is objectless upon earth--that it predominates in the period of sinless infancy--are difficulties, the solution of which might afford some probable insight into our ante-mundane existence, and a peep at least into the shadow-land of pre-existence (I, 556-7).

While Wordsworth saw evidence for immortality in the glory of childhood, Lamb wryly found it in nightmares. He had suffered terrifying night fears as a child, as he reveals in this essay, and, paradoxically, he associates the loss of his childhood imagination with the departure of his nightmares, which seem to him more imaginative than anything he is able to conjure up as an adult. The essay ends with Elia's lament that his own imaginative powers are feeble when compared with those of Coleridge and of the less well-known Barry Cornwall.

> There is Coleridge, at his will can conjure up icy domes, and pleasure-houses for Kubla Khan, and Abyssinian maids, and songs of Abara, and caverns, **Where Alph, the sacred river, runs,**
>
> to solace his night solitudes -- when I cannot muster a fiddle. Barry Cornwall has his tritons and his nereids gamboling before him in nocturnal visions, and proclaiming sons born to Neptune--when my stretch of imaginative activity can hardly, in the night season, raise up the ghost of a fishwife. To set my failures in somewhat a mortifying light--it was after reading the noble *Dream* of this poet, that my fancy ran strong upon these marine spectra; and the poor plastic power, such as it is, within me set to work, to humour my folly in a sort of dream that very night. Methought I was upon the ocean billows at some sea nuptials, riding and mounted high, with the customary train sounding their conchs before me, (I myself, you may be sure, the *leading god* and jollily we went careering over the main, till just where Ino Leucothea should have greeted me (I think it was Ino) with a white embrace, the billows gradually subsiding, fell from a sea-roughness to a sea-calm, and thence to a river-motion, and that river (as happens in the familiarization of dreams) was no other than the gentle Thames, which landed me, in the wafture of a placid wave or two, alone, safe and inglorious, somewhere at the foot of Lambeth palace (I, 557-8).

The dream convinces Elia to concentrate on 'inland prose', rather than the poetry of the sea.

The passage is similar to the end of 'Prufrock' in several ways. First, though Elia does not mention mermaids specifically, he does refer to 'nereids', which are the more strictly classical equivalents of mermaids; they are 'riding' on the waves as on horses, an image echoed by Eliot's 'riding seaward on the waves'. And there is a somewhat conventional reference to the 'whiteness' of the sea creatures in both passages: in Lamb, the image is introduced by the Greek term Ino Leucothea, Ino the White Goddess, and that in turn suggests a 'white embrace'; in 'Prufrock' the image of whiteness is beautifully condensed; the mermaids are 'combing the white hair of the wave', coalescing both the image of riding the waves and combing their own hair. Finally, the mermaids in Lamb are not singing as they are in 'Prufrock', but they are 'sounding their conchs'.

More important than the superficial use of images is the similar structural significance of both passages to their larger contexts. In both Elia and Eliot, the mermaid passages come at the end of the work, expanding material which had only before been lightly touched on or suggested, and pointing outward to new subjects. Elia ends a theoretical essay on dreams and a lament for his lost imagination with the mermaid episode, and Eliot ends a lament for lost youth and imagination in like manner, so that both passages function as a coda to the earlier themes.

In both works, the subject is transmuted by an ambling stream-of-consciousness style. Eliot's phrase, 'Let us go then you and I ...' might well function as an introduction to any essay of Elia, and Eliot's 'tedious argument of insidious intent leading to an overwhelming question', if it weren't so frightening, might also describe the typical Elian ramble, in its apparent aimlessness leading nevertheless to a sometimes overwhelming conclusion.

Also, in both works the passage is presented as a remembrance of a dream from which the speaker, like Milton in his sonnet, is awakened to mundane reality. Both passages serve naturally to counterpoint the sad reality of the earlier parts of the works, both are dreams from which one does not consciously wish to awake, and both recapitulate and transform earlier themes. Both dreams, too, involve what appears to be a rejection of the speaker by the mermaids, though in fact the contrary is true; both speakers unconsciously reject the mermaids. In Eliot, the timidity of Prufrock is obvious, ('I do not think that they will sing to me',) and he rejects the mermaids because he is too old or too unimaginative or too fearful to as much as attempt to hear them singing Elia, on the other hand, is less conscious in his rejection. Just as he is about to enter the embrace of the goddess he awakens, losing his status as the chief god, and finding himself, still in his dream, at the foot of Lambeth palace. Elia's rejection of the 'imaginative life' is cleverly disguised, but his return to mundane reality occurs *within* the dream, over which, one assumes, Elia has unconscious control. For Lamb, who has been forced more than once to give up his pretensions to poetry by circumstances, and for whom circumstances also forced the choice (Fanny Kelly notwithstanding) of bachelorhood, this awakening not in the arms of the goddess but at the foot of the palace of the archbishop, sums up his clerkly life. In Eliot's words, he is 'not prince Hamlet nor was meant to be'. Even in the midst of his marine bacchanal his Elian conscience reaches into the dream and, with a touch, returns him to the humdrum.

A final similarity between the two works lies in the personae of the two speakers; Prufrock is admittedly more self-tormented, more dispirited, more alienated than Elia, yet they share a number of qualitites. Both are old, selfconsciously so, perhaps because their creators are *not* old themselves. Both are apparently bachelors, both somewhat fastidious. There are even some superficial resemblances to Lamb himself in Prufrock: his tentative approach to Fanny Kelly, expecting rejection, reminds us of the Prufrockian refusal even to ask 'the overwhelming question'; his love of walking with his friends reminds us that Prufrock too takes us on an evening walk; and his allusiveness, his love of renaissance drama, his delight in ellipsis, all remind us of Eliot himself.

If Eliot had Lamb's 'Witches and other Night Fears' in mind as a source for Prufrock, that is fitting, since Lamb himself alluded to another dream-poem in his essay. He compares his imaginative efforts to a poem written four years before by his friend Bryan Waller Procter, under the pseudonym Barry Cornwall. 'A Dream' was published in 1819 in the collection, *Dramatic Scenes and Other Poems*, with the note, 'This is merely the recollection of an actual dream', (2) It recommends itself to Lamb's purposes because it so labels itself as a literal account of a dream. But its images do not seem entirely to be the source of Elia's dream. In Cornwall's poem, the speaker dreams that he is able to call up famous figures from the past. He sees Zeus and Juno, Cleopatra and Mark Antony, and hears a celebration on the waves; he is told that it is in honour of the birth of a child to Neptune. Then he awakes.

> And then I heard the sullen waters roar,
> And saw them cast their surf upon the strand,
> And then, rebounding toward some farseen land,
> They washed and washed its melancholy shore,
> And the terrific spirits, bred
> In the sea-caverns, moved by those fierce jars,
> Rose up like giants and shook their silver hair against the stars.
> Then, bursts like thunder--joyous outcries wild--
> Sounds as from trumpets, and from drums,
> And music, like the lulling noise that comes
> From nurses when they hush their charge to sleep,
> Came in confusion from the deep.
> Methought one told me that a child
> Was that night unto the great Neptune born;
> And then old Triton blew his curled horn,
> And the Leviathan lashed the foaming seas,
> And the wanton Nereides
> Came up like phantoms from their coral halls,
> And laughed and sung like tipsy Bacchanals,
> Till all the fury of the ocean broke
> Upon my ear. ---------I trembled and awoke *(Dramatic Scenes* 131-2).

The poem contains little of the imagery or mood of Lamb's essay. There is a celebration, but of a birth, not of nuptials. There is only a hasty reference to 'wanton mermaids'; the speaker is not involved in the spectacle but merely an onlooker, and, while the speaker awakes in the end, as the speakers do in Elia and Eliot, he seems neither resigned nor disappointed.

But Procter wrote several other poems on the mythological inhabitants of the sea. One published only a year before Lamb's 'Witches and other Night Fears', bears close resemblance to the end of Lamb's essay. In 'Midsummer Madness', published in *The Poetical Works of Barry Cornwall*, the speaker wishes for the freedom to roam the sea and air at will, then reconciles himself to his limitations as a denizen of earth. It begins 'Now would that I might cast me in the sea/ And perish not'. The speaker desires to explore Neptune's kingdom,

> ay, and view
> The bedded wonders of the lonely deep
> And see on coralbanks the sea-maids sleep,

> Children of ancient Nereus . . .
> Would I go floating on my dolphin-steed
> Over the billows, and, triumphing there,
> Call the white Siren from her cave to share
> My joy, and kiss her willing forehead fair (*Poetical Works* 186-7).

Here are a number of the elements that Lamb used. First, the passage somewhat more sexual or voyeuristic in tone (though still, of course, chastely pre-Victorian), with the speaker participating in the action, wishing to look on the sleeping sea-maids and kiss the 'willing forehead' of the 'White Siren', as Elia anticipates the 'white embrace' of Leucothea. And, in the Elia essay, there are verbal echoes of Cornwall's use of 'white' and 'billows'. The speaker rides the waves, as in the Elia essay. And whereas Elia reconciles himself to 'inland prose' Procter reconciles himself to the less inspiring poetry of earth:

> --It may not be. No wings have I to scale
> The heights which the great poets pass alone;
> On earth must I still chaunt an earthly song (188).

This poem likely suggested to Lamb the transformation of the festivities of the dream from a celebration of birth to nuptials, and that he move himself centre-stage, so that the end of the dream is really a rejection of the possibility of both sexual and imaginative union. From this poem too Lamb took the structure of the dream from which the speaker awakes, and the more overtly sexual attraction of the mermaids, the riding of the waves, the image of white hair (Neptune's hair is 'silvery' in 'A Dream'.), and the resignation of the speaker to his less inspired, earthly state at the end. Elia turns to 'inland prose'; Procter 'chaunts . . . an earthlysong'. So though Elia implies to his reader that he has been inspired only by Cornwall's 'A Dream', he is in fact taking elements from more than one poem and conflating them. In doing so he found an apt 'objective correlative' for Elia's unconscious rejection of hopes of salvation or transcendence by means of either the imagination or sexual union. Later, Eliot, perhaps by coincidence, found the same 'objective correlative' for the same sort of rejection in 'Prufrock'.

NOTES

1. Eliot writes: 'The accepted attitude toward Elizabethan drama was established on the publication of Charles Lamb's *Specimens*. By publishing these selections, Lamb set in motion the enthusiasm for poetic drama which still persists, and at the same time encouraged the formation of a distinction which is, I believe, the ruin of modern drama--the distinction between drama and literature. For the *Specimens* made it possible to read the plays as poetry while neglecting their function on the stage. It is for this reason that all modern opinion of the Elizabethans seems to spring from Lamb, for all modern opinion rests upon the admission that poetry and drama are two separate things, which can only be combined by a writer of exceptional genius'. (Elizabethan essays, 8).

2. For a discussion of this poem in relation to Lamb's essay see Geoffrey Tillotson.

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'SNATCH'D OUT OF THE FIRE': LAMB, COLERIDGE, AND GEORGE DYER'S CANCELLED PREFACE

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A Lecture given to the Society on 1 March 1986

In an interesting talk given to the Charles Lamb Society in April 1984,(1) Nick Roe set out a convincing plea for George Dyer -- the GD of Lamb's 'Oxford in the Vacation' and 'Amicus Redivivus' (2) -- to be taken more seriously. Roe argued that Dyer should be given credit for his political activities during the 1790s, not least because he appears to have been instrumental in introducing Coleridge and Southey into the London radical and dissenting circles of which he himself was already a member. He concluded his lecture by saying that most of the numerous anecdotes about Dyer's bumbling absentmindedness dated from the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. Although I would not disagree with the general terms of this conclusion, I think it is possible to fix on a somewhat earlier date for the change in attitude towards Dyer which one

can discern in Coleridge and Southey, and for the beginning of Lamb's affectionate jokes about his eccentricities.

Born in Wapping, the son of a watchman, in 1755, Dyer was twenty years older than Lamb, seventeen years older than Coleridge. In other words, he belonged to an earlier generation -- a fact which becomes obvious when one starts to examine the style of his poetry and the tenor of his literary criticism, both of which are firmly rooted in the eighteenth century. He was educated at Christ's Hospital and Emmanuel College Cambridge. After his graduation in 1778, he worked as an usher at Dedham and later Northampton Grammar Schools, and also for a period as tutor to the family of the reforming baptist minister Robert Robinson. He settled in London in 1792, and remained there for a number of years, actively involved in the early-mid 1790s with political societies and writing a number of political pamphlets, while supporting himself mainly by tutoring and hack-journalism. His chief obsession, however, was the pursuit of knowledge; an obsession which was to be a doubtful blessing when it came to pursuing his literary and critical activities, as we shall see. He met Coleridge in 1794, and, probably through Coleridge, Lamb and Southey sometime during the next year or two.

As far as Lamb's surviving correspondence is concerned, the episode which forms the subject of this paper makes its first appearance in a letter which Lamb wrote to Thomas Manning on August 9 1800. (3) The letter, which is rather jocularly risqué, is dominated by the themes of pregnancy and birth. Lamb starts with a paragraph of semi-serious benediction on the newly-born infant of Charles and Sophia Lloyd, and moves on to the news that 'Coleridge is settled with his Wife (with a child in her Guts)... at Keswick' (Marrs I, 221). Literal births now suggest the idea of metaphorical ones: Wordsworth and Coleridge are said to have 'contriv'd to spawn a new volume of Lyrical Balads [sic] which is to see the Light in about a month...'; and finally, Lamb goes on,

> George Dyer too -- that good natur'd Heathen -- is more than 9 months gone with his Twin volumes of Ode, pastoral, sonnet, Elegy, Spenserian, Horatian, akensidish, and Masonic verse -- Clio prosper the birth -- it will be twelve shillings out of somebody's pocket ... (Marrs I, 222).

Dyer was indeed a good deal 'more than 9 months gone' with his poetical project. As early as October 1796 -- almost four years before Lamb's letter -- he had announced in the *Monthly Magazine* that he was 'preparing a course of publications -- satire, odes and elegies' to display his 'poetical talents'. The first two of these, he confidently asserted, 'will shortly make their appearance under the title of *Poet's Fate* and *Poetic Sympathies*'. (4) Although the *Poet's Fate* did in fact appear alone in 1797, there was no further sign of the rest of this ambitious project until, slightly more than two years later, the *Monthly* carried an apology:

> Mr. Dyer, in consequence of unforeseen engagements, and the advice of his friends, has been obliged to alter the plan of his Poetical Publications... the first volume will appear next month (*MM* (Nov. 1798) 373).

This announcement appeared in November 1798; and later in the same month Lamb wrote to Southey that he was being 'lectured' by Dyer on the

distinguishing qualities of the Ode, the Epigram, and the Epic' and that Dyer was correcting the proof sheets of his lyrics (Marrs I, 151). However, another seven months went by before another long apology was printed in the *Monthly* stating that the publication was now to be 'delayed to the winter season' (*MM*(June 1799) 349). Even if Lamb was calculating the length of Dyer's gestation period from the appearance of this announcement, made in June 1799, his 'more than 9 months' was something of an understatement, since fourteen months had elapsed by the time of his August letter to Manning.

In August 1800, however, it really did seem possible that Dyer's works were about to see the light of day. On the 14th, Lamb wrote to Coleridge in Keswick:

> I must announce to you, who doubtless in your remote part of the Island have not heard Tidings of so great a Blessing, that George Dyer hath prepared two ponderous volumes, full of Poetry & Criticism -- they impend over the town, and are threaten'd to fall in the Winter ... (Marrs I, 226)

Lamb was obviously pleased with the way in which he had described the derivative nature of the poems to Manning ('Spenserian, Horatian, akensidish and Masonic'), since he repeated the same phrases almost verbatim to Coleridge. He also added a description of the contents of the second volume, which is, he says,

> all Criticism, wherein [Dyer] demonstrates to the entire satisfaction of the literary world, in a way which must silence all reply for ever, that the Pastoral was introduced by Theocritus & polished by Virgil & Pope -- that Gray & Mason (who always hunt in couples in George's brain) have a good deal of poetical fire and true lyric genius; that Cowley was ruined by excess of wit ... that Charles Lloyd, Charles Lamb and Wm Wordsworth in later days have struck the true chords of Poesy ... (Marrs I, 226).

Again, Lamb seems to have been pleased with this periphrastically ironic way of saying that Dyer's volume of criticism contains nothing new or interesting whatsoever, since he echoed it virtually word for word in a letter to Manning on the 21st. To this letter, however, he added further details, evidently gleaned from a visit of Dyer's the night before. Dyer has, it seems,

> *touch'd* most *deeply* upon the Drama -- comparing the English with the modern German stage, their merits and defects ... (Marrs I, 229).

Feeling certain that Dyer was somewhat unqualified to discuss these matters, Lamb goes on,

> I modestly enquir'd what plays he had read. I found by George's reply that he *had* read Shakespeare, but that was a great while since ... (Beaumont & Fletcher, Massinger, Ben Jonson, Shirley, Marlowe, Ford, & the worthies of Dodsley's Collection he confess'd he had read none of them, but profest an *intention* of looking thro' them all, so as to be able to *touch* upon them in his book ... (Marrs I, 229).

This rather worrying insight into Dyer's research and composition habits makes it clear that, despite the fast-approaching publication date, his volume of criticism was still far from complete (5); and Dyer was evidently only too prone to distractions from the serious business of writing it. Indeed, the purpose of this letter from Lamb to Manning is to request for Dyer a copy of Manning's *Introduction to Arithmetic and Algebra* (2 vols.; 1796-1798), since, says Lamb, Dyer is 'just now diverted from the pursuit of the Bell letters by a mathematical paradox which has 'seized violently on /his/ Pericranic ... it is necessary for his health that he should speedily come to a resolution of his doubts'. (Marrs i, 228).

More problems were to follow. On August 26th, Dyer's mathematical ponderings were temporarily displaced by a sudden pressing need to obtain a copy of an obscure 1400 line epic, 'the Epigoniad, by one Wilkie' (6) (Marrs I, 231); while the September issue of the *Monthly*, in addition to a by now predictable announcement that

> The poems of Mr. Dyer are printed, but ... they will not be published, for obvious reasons, until the winter (*MM* (Sept. 1800) 157),

contains evidence of further distractions in the form of a letter from Dyer to the Magazine describing in some detail 'a singular kind of verse in the Greek Anthology' (*MM* (Sept. 1800) 134); and another letter on the same subject appears in the October issue (*MM* (Oct. 1800) 212).

On September 22nd, Lamb described a dinner which he and Dyer had been given by an eccentric Dr. Anderson. During the course of the evening the doctor had managed to let fall another 'spark' into the 'inflammable matter' of Dyer's brain, this time in the form of a chance remark about mediaeval Scottish writers, which immediately became

> the dominant sounds in George's pia mater, and their buzzings exclude Politics, Criticism, and Algebra, the Late Lords of that Illustrious Lumber room -- (Marrs I, 238).

Despite all these forays into the more abstruse fields of human knowledge, however, Dyer finally succeeded in getting his volume of criticism (by now referred to as a Preface) actually printed, probably by early December. All, however, was not yet well, as Lamb's letter to Manning of December 27 makes clear:

> At length George Dyer's Phrenesis has come to a crisis, he is raging and furiously mad. -- I waited upon the Heathen Thursday was a sevn'ight... the first symptom which struck my eye, and gave me incontrovertible proof of the fatal truth was a pair of Nankeen Pantaloons, four times too big for him, which the said Heathen did pertinaciously affirm to be *new*. -- They were absolutely ingrained with the accumulated dirt of ages. But he affirmed them to be clean. He was going to visit a Lady that was nice about those things, and that's the reason he wore nankeen that day --. And then he danced and capered, and fidgeted, and pulled up his pantaloons, and hugged his intolerable flannel vestment closer about his poetic Loins ... then he caught at a proof sheet, and catched up a Laundresse's bill instead, made a dart at Bloomfield 's poems, and threw them in agony aside --. I could not

> bring him to one direct reply, he could not maintain his jumping mind in a right line for the tithe of a moment by Clifford's Inn Clock -- he must go to the Printer's immediately -- the most unlucky accident -- he had struck off five hundred impressions of his Poems, which were ready for delivery to subscribers -- and the Preface must all be expunged -- there were 80 Pages of Preface, and not till that morning he had discovered that in the very first page of said preface he had set out with a principle of criticism fundamentally wrong, which vitiated all his following reasoning -- the preface must be expunged, altho' it cost him £30 -- -- the lowest calculation taking in paper and printing --. In vain have his real friends remonstrated against this .. Midsummer madness --. George is as obstinate as a primitive Xtian -- and wards and parrys off all our thrusts with one unanswerable fence -- "Sir, its of great consequence that the *world* is not *mislead*"--. --- (Marrs I, 262-3).

When the long-expected happy event finally took place, then, in February 1801, only one of the projected twin volumes was actually published, and its opening page carried a typically rambling, apologetic 'Advertisement', explaining at great length that the Preface 'for many reasons, has been cancelled'. (7) Eight apparently peaceful months now went by until the next episode in this continuing saga. Then, in late October or early November, Lamb wrote to Rickman:

> A letter from G. Dyer will probably accompany this. I wish I could convey to you any notion of the whimsical scenes I have been witness to in this past fortnight. Twas on Tuesday week the poor heathen scrambled up to my door about breakfast time. He came thro' a violent rain with no neckcloth on & a *beard* that made him a spectacle to men and angels and tap'd at the door. Mary open'd it & he stood stark still and held a paper in his hand importing that he had been ill with a fever. He either wouldn't or couldn't speak except by signs. When you went to comfort him he put his hand upon his heart & told us his complaint lay where no medicines could reach it. I was dispatch'd for Dr. Dale, Mr. Phillips of St. Paul's Church yard & Mr. Frend who is to be his executor. George solemnly delivered into Mr. Frend's hands & mine an old burnt preface that had been in the fire with injunctions which we solemnly vow'd to obey that it should be printed after his death with his last corrections & that some account should be given to the world why he had not fulfill'd his engagement with subscribers. Having done this & borrow'd two guineas of his bookseller ... he laid himself down on my bed in a mood of complacent resignation. (Marrs II, 29).

Dyer was evidently not so near to death as he had feared, however; indeed, he appeared to be suffering more than anything else from a lack of food and drink. Lamb reported that he complained of 'sensations of gnawing which he felt about his *heart* which he mistook his stomach to be, & sure enough these gnawings were dissipated after a meal or two', and undertook to avoid a recurrence of this state of affairs in future, by proposing that Dyer should 'dine with me ... whenever he does not go out & pay me. I will take his money beforehand' (Marrs II, 30). These life-saving dinners did take place, as repeated references in Lamb's letters during the rest of this winter make clear. (8). It seems possible, as I hope to show below, that during the course of them, Lamb -- who had already

'assisted [Dyer] in arranging the remainder of what he calls Poems' (Marrs II, 30) for his projected new edition -- may also have helped with the considerable revisions which Dyer now made to the 'old burnt preface'. Certainly these revisions appear to have reached their final form during the course of the next four to six weeks, since on November 24th Lamb wrote to Rickman that 'one volume [of Dyer's new edition] is printing' (Marrs II, 38), and, two weeks or so later, that 'his 1st vol. is nearly printed' (Marrs II, 39). Predictably, however, the second volume, which contained some new critical remarks, seems to have caused problems, since the final revised two volumes did not appear until May or June of the following year (see *MM* (July 1802) 598).

So much, then, for Lamb's contemporary reporting of the events. We are fortunate, however, in having further materials to examine, which add a fascinating and somewhat puzzling dimension to the whole affair. On August 4th 1882 the British Library purchased from a bookseller in Charing Cross -- for the sum of £2.10d.-- Lamb's copy of Dyer's *Poems* of 1801, to which is attached a copy of the cancelled Preface; presumably, indeed, that very same copy which Dyer had consigned to Lamb's care with what he thought to be his dying breath in October 1801. As we saw above, the apologetic 'Advertisment' in Volume II explains that the Preface 'for many reasons, has been cancelled'. In the British Library copy, the last word of this sentence has been underlined in ink; and in the margin, in Lamb's hand, is written

> one copy of this cancelled Preface, snatch'd out of the fire, is prefixed to this volume.

Elsewhere in this copy are several other relatively minor marginalia by Lamb, mostly correcting printing or proofreading errors. It also contains marginalia which are much longer (and much ruder); these are the work of that inveterate scribbler on other people's books, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. (9)

The study of Coleridge's annotations has become a not inconsiderable part of the Coleridge industry. The first two volumes of his *Marginalia* which have been published in the Bollingen *Collected Coleridge* series (10) are together over two thousand pages long and cover less than a third of the alphabet. Their editor, George Whalley, suggests that Coleridge wrote very little marginalia before he settled at Greta Hall in 1800, and goes on to argue that the notes on Dyer's poems are possibly the first example of the 'rather more sustained' note writing which characterised his later habits. Their importance in this respect leads Whalley to go on to speculate as to the probable date of their writing; and he concludes that this was either 'in November 1801-February 1802, when [Coleridge] saw much of Lamb in London, or in March 1803, when he stayed with Lamb to console him on the recurrence of Mary's insanity' (Whalley I, lxxx). Taking into account the complicated history of events which we have just been examining, I think that one can fix with a fair degree of certainty on the earlier of these two periods, the winter of 1801-2. As we saw earlier, Lamb had been presented with the 'old burnt preface' in October 1801, and was still full of the news a month or so later when Coleridge arrived in London from Keswick, after which he undoubtedly spent a good deal of time with Lamb; visits are definitely recorded on November 19th

and February 21st, but there were almost certainly other unrecorded ones before Coleridge returned to the north in late February. The later date -- the beginning of 1803 -- seems much less likely, since the original version of the preface was by then very old news, having been revised and published in its altered version more than six months before.

Whalley also suggests that 'a variety of discernable purposes' lay behind Coleridge's note-writing, among them that of providing 'critical advice for an author ...' (Whalley I lxii). It would be convenient if one could argue that the notes on Dyer's *Poems* had been written in order to assist Dyer in the course of his revisions. Unfortunately, however, this does not seem to have been the case, as we shall see.

As far as the volume of poetry is concerned, Coleridge's marginal notes are restricted to the longer poems (described by Dyer as 'satires') which end the volume. Dyer's habit of footnoting his own work becomes particularly marked in the case of these long poems; and it is to these footnotes that Coleridge takes exception. The first of his marginalia is a relatively minor one, correcting a wrong attribution by Dyer of a translation into Greek verse. (11) Next on page 299, Dyer footnotes a rather obscure line in *Poetic Sympathies* which refers to the classical Greek poet Sappho as follows:

> Sappho, loved by Anacreon. Her celebrated ode, beginning **Φαινεται μοι κηνος ισος θεοισιν,** is produced by Longinus as one of the noblest and completest examples of the sublime.

Coleridge disagrees profoundly with this statement. In the text the word 'sublime' is heavily underlined, and down the side and along the bottom of the page, he has written

> No such thing. Longinus was no very profound critic; but he was no Blunderer. Of the energetic, of the language of high excitement, elevated from passion, in short υψοτητος παθητικης,. of this indeed it was, & probably ever will be, the most perfect specimen. But as to Sublime you might as well call it Blue, or Snub-nosed.

Longinus certainly does cite the poem of Sappho's which Dyer quotes as an example of a quality which in Greek is called **Το υψος** . Coleridge's objection rests on the interpretation of this Greek phrase. Dyer has followed many eighteenth-century translators in taking it to mean 'the sublime', a practice which is still followed in some twentieth century editions of Longinus. Coleridge, however, is suggesting that a more accurate translation of the phrase would be 'the elevated style of writing'; an interpretation which is followed by the editor of the *Loeb Classical Texts* edition of Longinus. (12) In other words, Coleridge sees Dyer as perpetrating a typically eighteenth-century anachronistic interpretation of Longinus (see Whalley II, 355).

The other note which Coleridge made on this volume is a comment on one of Dyer's footnotes to the final poem, *The Redress: To a Young Poet.* Here, Dyer asserts

> That the principle and immediate aim of poetry is, to please, has been opposed by Julius Scaliger, and some other critics ... Yet will I still abide by Aristotle's and Plutarch's opinion, that the immediate object of poetry is, to please, and that even in solemn subjects poetry is used to render them more engaging and agreeable. (*1801* 325-6).

This statement attracts an irritable response from Coleridge:

> Damned nonsense! But *why* does it please? Because it pleases! O mystery! -- If not, some cause out of itself must be found. Mere utility it certainly is not -- not mere goodness -- therefore there must be some third power - & that is Beauty, i.e. that which *ought* to please. My benevolent friend seems not to have made an obvious distinction, between end and means -- The Poet *must* always aim at Pleasure as *his* specific *means;* but surely Milton did & all ought to aim at something nobler as their end -- viz -- to cultivate and predispose the heart of the Reader &c.--

Coleridge's objection here is illuminated by reference to another, rather more significant, piece of contemporary critical prose, Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, which had first appeared in October 1800. In it Wordsworth emphatically states that poetry has a definite purpose, towards which the giving of pleasure is the means rather than the end. He asserts that truly valuable poems -- that is, those which are written by 'a man who being possessed of more than organic sensibility, [has] also thought long and deeply' will naturally elevate and culture the mind and feelings of the reader; in Wordsworth's words,

> the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves... must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated. (13)

Indeed, the discussion of the higher forms of pleasure which poetry is able to give, their ultimate purpose, and their connection with beauty, is much enlarged on in the revised and extended version of Wordsworth's Preface which was published in April 1802. Since it is probable that the revisions were planned during the previous winter, the subject may well have been under discussion by Wordsworth and Coleridge just before Coleridge's visit to London in November. In this case, Coleridge would have been particularly alert to the lack of clear reasoning on the same subject which was demonstrated by Dyer's footnote.

Even if one puts the earliest possible date on these marginalia -- that is, about the middle of November 1801, just after Coleridge's arrival in London -- it is hard to see that they could have been influential as far as the selection of poems for Dyer's 1802 edition was concerned. Certainly the poems on which the comments appear were left out of the 1802 edition; but so were a great many others. Indeed, while the 1801 edition contained 53 poems, the 1802 version only contained 23, of which 13 were not in the earlier edition. In other words, only ten poems from *1801* found their way into *1802*; and it seems far more likely that these were selected under the guidance of Lamb, who in any case was writing 'I have assisted him in arranging the remainder of what he calls Poems'

approximately two weeks before Coleridge's arrival in London.

One more of Coleridge's notes remains to be considered. This is the one which he wrote at the point in the cancelled Preface where Dyer is extrapolating on the subject of panegyric:

> Panegyric, in the hands of a mere rhymster, is almost sure to sink into insipidity; in the hands of a poet, it may swell into flattery. Here, probably, Pindar and Horace grew extravagant. (*1800* xxvi-xxvii).

In the margin beside this statement, Coleridge has written:

> PINDAR -- and -- who? -- *Horace*!!! and pray, good George Dyer! in what ode or fragment of the Theban Republican do you find Flattery? I can remember no one word, that justifies the charge. As to Horace, praise be to him as an amiable gentleman, & man of fine courtly sense -- thanks & thanks for his Satires & Epistles, and whatever is "sermoni proprius" -- & his little translations or originals of light & social growth, thanks for them too!-- But as a Poet, a Lyric Poet, a companion of *Pindar*, or the Author of the Atys -- (be he Catullus or some unknown Greek--) -- it won't do! No!--

The source of Coleridge's indignation here is that Dyer's note seems to him to diminish Pindar in two ways: first by linking him so casually with Horace, and second by accusing him of extravagant flattery. Horace himself would appear to have agreed with this judgment, since he not only described Pindar's poetry as being 'like a torrent rushing down rain swollen from the mountains, boiling and roaring', but also said that he felt it was too dangerous to try and rival Pindar. (14)

If Coleridge's comments had been written with the intention of providing critical advice to Dyer on how to revise his Preface, one would expect to find that this paragraph had been considerably altered in the later version, if not removed entirely. However, this proves not to have been the case. The paragraph remains substantially the same in *1802*, and one source of Coleridge's irritation -- the linking of Pindar and Horace -- still remains. As for the other source, the accusation of panegyric in their hands 'swelling into flattery', this has been slightly modified; Dyer has replaced 'here, probably, Pindar and Horace grew extravagant' with the more modestly phrased 'as, probably, it did in the hands of Pindar and Horace' (*1802* xxxvi-xxxvii). This kind of modification of statements which in the early version tend to be clumsily phrased and verging on the extreme in their judgments is characteristic of the revisions which Dyer made throughout the Preface, however, so that it would be difficult to prove that Coleridge's comments had any influence in this particular instance. In any case, his notes sound much more like explosions of personal outrage (possibly somewhat exaggerated for the amusement of Lamb) than reasoned critical advice, and his 'addresses' to Dyer almost certainly rhetorical rather than literal.

Nevertheless, that Dyer did have some quite substantial and valuable help with his revisions of the Preface seems a strong probability. Indeed, he says as much in one of the introductory paragraphs which he prefixed to

the 1802 Preface. Apologising for the difference 'both in form and contents, from what were originally intended', Dyer explains that 'the present plan has been adopted' following

> the counsel of persons ... very competent to give advice, because not likely to be mistaken in their judgment; persons, who had not interest of their own to serve, but were well acquainted with the taste of the public... (*1802* ii)

Who, one must ask, were these 'very competent' and disinterested 'persons'? If, as I have suggested, Coleridge must be discounted, then Lamb seems to be the most likely candidate for the main protagonist. He undoubtedly had the opportunity; during the crucial period between late October and the last week of November 1801 when the revisions were probably made, Dyer was dining with him almost daily. Certainly a survey of the revisions themselves suggests that they were carried out under the supervision of someone with a clearer sense of structural logic and a better ear for prose style than Dyer appears to have possessed, at least when it came to writing literary criticism.

A comparison between the two versions of the Preface is interesting. Very little has been removed in the later version; indeed, further examples are frequently added in order to clarify some of its main points. Dyer's overall purpose in writing the Preface seems to be an attempt to justify his decision to present the public with a collection of his lyric poems, since, as his opening paragraph puts it,

> An author never, perhaps, more naturally falls into anxiety, than on presenting the public with poetic compositions. (*1800* iii)

Characteristically, he hastens to assure his readers that he is well aware of the 'peculiar delicacy and appropriate difficulties' of lyric poetry (*1800* iv); and he goes on to demonstrate this by means of an historical survey of all the poets -- both classical and British or European -- who have attempted this form in the past. Interspersed throughout this survey are a number of disclaimers to the effect that 'the reader must not conclude from this that I think highly of the following performances: far very far, am I from great pretensions ...' (*1800* xxvii), and also a number of attempts to anticipate any possible objections which might be made to the poetry. One such attempt produces one of the most appealing passages in the Preface in which Dyer answers the putative objection that 'some of the poems are rural and descriptive but the author lives in the Great City' with several paragraphs of explanatory autobiography:

> But, will it necessarily follow, that the person, who lives in London at a particular time, must have resided there always? Suffice it to say, that of the years of my life since I left college, the greater part have been spent entirely in the country; and, that since I have lived in town, I have usually past some part of the year in a course of constant rambling, or at the rural seat of some friend. The environs of London, too, will bear witness, how regular have been my solitary devotions in her modest retreats; so that, I hope, the critics will not treat my Muse too ungallantly, at least, on this account, as if she were a mere London trollop, always sauntering, or gadding about the streets of London, sallow with city smoke, and listening to the sound of Bow-bells... (*1800* xxxi).

This passage, which was left almost unchanged in the later version, makes one wish that the autobiography which Dyer apparently wrote had not been lost after his death (15), as does the passage towards the end of the Preface in which Dyer confronts another possible objection:

> With regard to the ladies, whose names are mentioned ... let it be publicly understood, as it has always been privately, that my language has been the expression of a simple, though sincere, respect ... when the heart is most subdued, it sometimes loves to worship in silence. These feelings may, perhaps, since have broken out into verse ... (*1800* lxiii-lxiv).

This passage also remains, though with some alterations in language and structure, in *1802*, and indeed is even expanded upon in the later version, so that it concludes rather touchingly

> But if nothing short of declaring, that I have been in love with every woman who has set my muse to work, will do, I will submit; and here declare, that, though I may not have paid court to any of them, that I have, however, been in love with them all: a confession, it is to be feared, which will not be reckoned prudent. (*1802* lxxxiv).

Elsewhere, in the more objective critical passages of the Preface, more noticeable changes have been made. For one thing, there have been a number of major structural alterations; whole paragraphs have been uprooted from their original positions and replaced in order to make for greater logical sense in the flow of the argument. An attempt has also been made to flesh out Dyer's frequently rather sketchy generalisations about a particular period of poetry or group of poets by adding further examples. Also, as in the case of the passage which was annotated by Coleridge, extreme statements have been modified; and a general stylistic smoothness and polish has been given to Dyer's often harsh and syntactically irrational prose style. Finally, one very interesting three page addition has been made:

> There is a species of lyric poetry that may be thought somewhat different from those already mentioned, and to have obtained but little sanction from such as we consider the models of this sort of composition, the Greek and Roman poets: I mean that which studiously searches for subjects in what are deemed the most ordinary concerns of life, and where language is characterised by the greatest simplicity ... ... to do justice to a subject in this way requires something of the Shakespearean genius, to hold the mirror up to life, and to make nature speak to the heart. In such hands the loftiness of an idea gives dignity to the language; and, in the simplicity of style, we contemplate the true sublime. (*1802* xxxix, xli).

Clearly it had been pointed out to Dyer that his original Preface had one important omission: he had failed to take account of the recently published *Lyrical Ballads*. The terms in which the deficiency is made up sound to me stylistically quite uncharacteristic of Dyer. One cannot help suspecting that someone -- and, again, the strongest candidate would seem to be Lamb -- stood over him and told him exactly what to say.

Before we leave the subject of Dyer's revisions, it remains to be said that there is one rather mysterious problem in their complicated history. As we have seen, Lamb's account of Dyer's 'phrenesis', in December 1800, gave as Dyer's reason for his declaration that 'the Preface must all be expunged' the fact that

> that very morning he had discovered that in the very first page of said preface he had set out with a principle of criticism fundamentally wrong, which vitiated all his following reasoning ... (Marrs I, 263).

The problem here is that although a number of minor stylistic alterations have been made to the 'very first page' of the Preface in the 1802 version, nothing has been substantially changed or removed which fits Dyer's description. Both versions do, in fact, 'set out with a principle of criticism'; this is how the 1800 version begins:

> That poetry will allow no mediocrity, is a formidable principle of criticism; a principle, however, which, as laid down by an accurate critic and elegant poet, may be plausibly quoted and even malignantly applied ... (*1800* ii).

The 'accurate critic and elegant poet' referred to here is Horace, and Dyer's reference is to his *Ars Poetica* I. 372-3. In Latin, the lines read:

> Medeocribus esse poetis
> Non homines, non Di, non concessare columnae.

The *Loeb Classical Edition*'s editor translates this as 'But that poets should be of middling rank, neither men, nor gods, nor booksellers ever brooked'.(16) While it is true that Horace's dictum against mediocrity appears to refer to poets rather than to poetry, it is difficult to see why Dyer should have felt his version of it to be so fundamentally wrong as to warrant the destruction of his entire Preface. Furthermore, if one turns to *1802*, one finds that the passage remains substantially the same, although a 'therefore' has replaced a 'however' in the second phrase.

E.V. Lucas, whose chapter on Dyer in his *Life* of Lamb includes a discussion of some of the events which have been discussed in this paper, notes the curious fact that the first page of the Preface remains more or less the same in *1802*, and points out that the first *omitted* passage, which occurs on the second page of *1800*, is one which reads:

> A sufficient degree of generosity is found in the world to encourage a useful pursuit, and even an attempt to please: the violence of party cannot controul it; nor will it be overrated by the manoeuverings of pride, or the feebleness of ignorance. (*1800* iv)

'Can this be the benevolent opinion', asks Lucas, 'which poor George Dyer found to be a fatal error?' (17)

To me, this seems rather unlikely. It is, after all, as Lucas says, an opinion rather than a 'principle of criticism' which Dyer is offering here. However, as we saw above, Dyer's revisions consist almost entirely of

additions rather than excisions; and even after a painstaking search I am forced to agree with Lucas that there does not appear to be anywhere in the Preface 'any discrepancy amounting to a false principle' (*Life* 187). One could, of course, simply conclude that Lamb had invented this part of the story; but the fact that the Preface does indeed 'set out with a principle of criticism' does much to support his account. Given Dyer's highly unstable state of mind during the months preceding his decision to destroy the Preface, almost anything seems possible, including, perhaps, his simply misjudging the magnitude of his misquotation from Horace.

When one realises how much time Lamb spent with Dyer throughout this period, and what a prolonged exposure to his habits of composition and their fruits he endured as a result, it seems hardly surprising that his affection for Dyer became considerably tempered with a certain amount of gentle mockery. As for Coleridge and Southey, who had been so much influenced by 'radical George' in the early 1790s, it is clear that for them, too, the episode of the Preface marked the start of a very noticeable change of attitude.

In Coleridge's case, this manifested itself not only in the tone of his marginalia, but also in the fact that Dyer became a standing joke in the Grasmere and Keswick circle at this time: as Coleridge wrote to Southey (who was staying in Bristol) on August 1 1801, the chance remark of a 'little quaker Girl' to the effect that ' "Yan belks when yan's fu', & when yan's empty" -- that is "One belches when one's full & when one's empty"' had become 'a favourite piece of slang at Grasmere & Greta Hall -- whenever we talk of ... George Dyer, & other Perseverents in the noble Trade of Scriblerism'. (18) Earlier in the same year, too, we find Southey -- who as little as nine months before had been writing to Dyer in terms of the greatest admiration and respect -- describing him in a letter to Danvers as 'Cancellarius Magnus', the great canceller. (19)

All this being said, however, it is clear that Dyer was still regarded with genuine affection. As a poet and a literary critic, he had proved himself to be something of a failure; but it says much for his qualities of warmth and gentleness that even in the midst of his frenzied last throes of composition in August 1800 Lamb could write of him:

> The oftener I see him, the more deeply I admire him.
> He is goodness itself. (Marrs I, 235)

NOTES

1. Published in *Charles Lamb Bulletin* N.S. No. 49 (January 1985) 17-26.
2. *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas (7 vols., 1903-4) ii 8-13, 237-42. Hereafter cited as *Works*.
3. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. E.J. Marrs (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975 --) i 221-2. Hereafter cited as Marrs.
4. *Monthly Magazine* (October 1796) 735. Hereafter cited as *MM*.
5. The disquisitions on the drama which Lamb describes were not, in fact, included in either the first or second versions of Dyer's Preface.
6. William Wilkie (1721-72), known as 'the Scottish Homer', had published this nine book epic in 1757 (2nd. edn. 1759).

7. George Dyer: *Poems* (1801) lxiii. Hereafter cited as *1801*. The 'cancelled' Preface will be cited as *1800*; and the first volume of the second edition (which contains the revised Preface) as *1802*.

8. See for example Marrs ii 37-8, 39, 51, 53.

9. For Lamb's comments on Coleridge as an annotator, see 'The Two Races of Men', *Works* ii, 31.

10. *Collected Coleridge* Bollingen Series lxxv (Princeton, N.J.), xii. *Marginalia* i and ii, ed. George Whalley (1980, 1985). Hereafter cited as Whalley.

11. Dyer assigns the translation to Josiah Barnes (1654-1712), which Coleridge points out is incorrect. He does not, however, say who did translate the verse in question (see Whalley ii 354).

12. The passage is from Longinus: Περὶ ὕψους 10. 1-3. The *Loeb Classical Library* translation is by W. Hamilton Fyfe (1927). For a twentieth century translation which follows Dyer's practice, see for example Longinus: *On Sublimity*, trans. D.A. Russell (Oxford, 1965) 14-15.

13. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974) i 126.

14. Horace: *Carminedes* 4. 2. For a discussion of the relation of Pindar and Horace, and of the influence of both poets on eighteenth century poetry, see Gilbert Highet: *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford, 1949) 224-5.

15. This autobiography is referred to in Dyer's Obituary, which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* N.S. 15 (May 1841) 545.

16. Horace: *Ars Poetica*, 372-3; trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (*Leob Classical Library*, 1970) 480-1.

17. E.V. Lucas: *The Life of Charles Lamb* (2 vols., London, 1907) 187. Hereafter referred to as *Life*.

18. E.L. Griggs (ed): *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71) ii 407.

19. Southey to C. Danvers, Jan. 20 1801. K. Curry (ed): *New Letters of Robert Southey* (2 vols., New York and London, 1965) i 237. The earlier letter from Southey to Dyer is dated Mar. 27 1800, and can be found in *Notes & Queries* N.S. VIII (Jan. 1961) 14-15.

NOTES FROM MEMBERS

DETACHED THOUGHTS ON READING IN BED

Found by our Hon. Secretary, Mrs. M. Huxstep, *among the papers of her father, the late* Mr. A.F. Bishop, *Formerly Chairman of the Charles Lamb Society.*

A diverting brochure might be written on 'Reading in bed through the centuries'. A beginning could be made with Chaucer's Clerk of Oxenford, who

> was levere have at his beddes heed
> Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophie,
> Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie

and an ending with an Oxford scholar of later time, Mark Patinson, who during his last illness gazed upon his favourites saying, 'I am to leave my books; they have been more to me than my friends'.

What qualities does one require of the ideal bedside author? There are many answers, dependent upon a wide variety of taste and circumstances. Have you a tendency towards the sombre and the morbid? Then Young's 'Night Thoughts' or Harvey's 'Meditations among the Tombs' will be your nocturnal cup of tea; or do you favour the mellifluously soporific? - then poetry furnishes you with

> The moan of doves in immemorial elms
> And murmuring of innumerable bees

and

> Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
> Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.

Or perchance the excitements of the detective novel attract? Then mental exhaustion may accompany the pursuit of the elusive criminal.

Devotees of Charles Lamb have surely a wiser choice than any of these: for he satisfies the conditions required by the discriminating reader-in-bed. First with regard to formation. Your chosen author must be available in a volume amenable to manipulation by one hand outside the coverlet. (Chronic addicts have recourse to a single mitten in the winter solstice.) No one is better served than Lamb in this regard. His writings are available in a plenitude of editions meeting the requirements of good print, good paper and lightness of weight, and ranging from the modest to the deluxe 'where a neat rivulet of text shall meander thro' a meadow of margin'.

Even the most devoted enthusiast would not advocate an indiscriminate perusal of the 'Works' at bedtime. The *Dramatic Specimens* make too great a mental demand at half after ten, and noble pronouncements like the judgment on Marlowe's Edward, 'The reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty', furnished with hints which Shakespeare scarce improved in *Richard II* are not to be lightly absorbed by the tiring brain. But the essays, the letters, the *Tales from Shakespear*, each of these constitute an entity admirable in completeness and satisfying quality.

Psychologists, we are told, advocate pleasant thoughts at bedtime in order to encourage untroubled slumber. The content of the essays and letters reveals their author's embracing and pervasive humanity. He gently chides Wordsworth for his attachment to 'dead nature' and sings the praises of 'London itself a pantomime and a masquerade'.

It is the more humane and gracious aspects of life on which his genius loves to dwell. (A revealing commentary is afforded by the circumstance that, although the Napoleonic wars were being waged throughout the two middle decades of his life, practically no echo of these epic events obtruded itself into his writings.)

How admirably, moreover, the style is wedded to the matter. It is on

record that, on the occasion of the young clerk at the India House being asked to write a report on the year's cotton production, he was reproved by a Director on the ground that 'it may have had literary merits, but the style the Board preferred was the humdrum'. Fortunately for posterity our author continued his reading in the Elizabethansand Sir Thomas Browne, with the result that his style (outside office hours) developed that quaint archaism which was not a mere foible or mannerism but the result of loving study which became part of the stuff and texture of his thinking.

And for those of us who would have our day close with a smile, the gentle humour with which the essays are suffused is an unfailing delight. You will recall how in 'New Year's Eve' Lamb, being prompted by the occasion to thoughts of human mortality, 'relucts at the inevitable course of destiny' and asks, does 'irony itself ... go out with life? Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides ...?' and then follows the confession, not of a drunkard, but of a reader-in-bed, when he apostrophises his books, his midnight darlings, and their intense delight.

Something of this delight we may recapture in his pieces, and not the least appropriate for this diversion is to read them in bed. Here, to adapt Dryden's comment on Shakespeare, is God's plenty, for the pillowed head.

FROM DR. D.G. WILSON

From *Shaw's Music*, Bodley Head 1981, vol, 3, p. 307

(article from Pall Mall Budget August 1894)

(But) I have a constitutional inaptitude for solemn occasions. It is not, believe me, that I am deficient in depth of feeling or seriousness of character. Rather, on that very account, the spectacle of people deliberately appointing a day and hour for a solemn mood, and making elaborate and costly mechanical preparations without the least misgiving as to their being able to live up to them when the hour strikes, is one which brings out the Mephistophelean [would have been a nice pun to have written Mephistophel*i*an!] side of me at once. In my youth .... funerals were pretty frequent (and) I soon disqualified myself from attending them by the unseasonable mirth which they always excited in me. And yet I could have written Gray's Elegy when there was no hearse in sight.

From Lamb 'The Wedding'

I do not know what business I have to be present in solemn places. I cannot divest me of an unseasonable disposition to levity upon the most awful occasions. I was never cut out to be a public functionary. Ceremony and I have long shaken hands ....

From a letter to Southey

I am going to stand godfather; I don't like the business; I cannot muster up decorum for these occasions; I shall certainly disgrace the font;

I was at Hazlitt's marriage and was like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony. Anything awful makes me laugh. I misbehaved once at a funeral.

and from a letter to P.G. Patmore

I have been to a funeral, where I made a pun, to the consternation of the rest of the mourners.

FROM MRS. WINIFRED COURTNEY

In response to Mr. D.E. Wickham's note, p. 264, *CLB*, Oct. 1986;
With the help of Denis Courtney (who is a dab at French), I have ascertained that brandy in French is often *eau-de-vie* and boiled egg always *oeuf a la coque* (confirmed in dictionary).

'To boil' in French, as I myself know, is *bouillir*. Might not Lamb, as amateur of the language, have said '*oeuf bouilli*' and been misunderstood as asking for *eau-de-vie*?

This brings to mind a fascinating vignette I once observed abroad, when an Englishman (not D.C.) acquired a Russian boiled egg among what to him were the extraordinary breakfast offerings in a Moscow Hotel, 1976, collected on a teeny plate (no toast). As well as he could, without the British egg cup, he tapped the top of it, which resisted-- and found the interior *hardboiled* and *cold*. The sight of his face, dropping miserably, has remained in my memory. Lamb could have done worse!

Winifred Courtney

SOCIETY NOTES

COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA SPECIAL SESSION ON LAMB

At just about the time when this *Bulletin* is due out, early in April, the College English Association of America has its annual meeting, this year in Charleston, South Carolina. Thanks to the initiative of Professor Joseph E. Riehl, this is the third year that they have been willing to host a special session on Lamb. Professor John I. Ades is to be in the Chair and papers are to be given by James B. Misenheimer, Jr., Mrs. Winifred F. Courtney and John R. Nabholtz, with Joseph E. Riehl as Respondent. We hope to carry a report of this session, which is entitled 'Three Faces of Charles Lamb: Essayist, Friend, Critic', in a future *Bulletin*. In the meantime, we do congratulate all concerned on arranging the inclusion of Lamb in the proceedings.

THE CROWSLEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

Our lecturer this year, Jonathan Wordsworth of St. Catherine's College, Oxford, Chairman of the Dove Cottage Trust, generously spared time in his busy life to give us a most interesting afternoon on November 1st, 1986. His lecture, which we are delighted to be able to publish in this *Bulletin*, was followed by a lively discussion from a full and appreciative audience.

SAD NEWS FROM HERTFORDSHIRE

Members and friends who have enjoyed visits to Lamb's beloved Hertfordshire will grieve at two examples of the march of progress ....

HERTFORD

Following the transfer of the girls from Christ's Hospital, Hertford to Horsham, the Hertford school site will eventually offer 'at the most elegant address in Hertford' (according to Wimpey's advertisement)

> One and two Bedroomed flats (on the school & science blocks, the reference library and the playground area)
>
> Mews cottages (at £140,000 upwards) in the historic buildings facing the main road
>
> Office accommodation in the eight Houses (or Wards)

(Tescos were appealing on a proposal to build a super-store and car park on the playing field and surrounding buildings(including the Chapel).

> 'The work of ruin had proceeded with a swift hand indeed ...'
>
> ('Blakesmoor in H.....shire')

WIDFORD - 'THE BELL'

Late in 1986 we learned that (on appeal) planning permission had been given for the 'Bell'to be closed as a Public House, and converted to residential use, with more housing on the site.

The Society had not been informed of the original planning application nor of the appeal, or we should certainly have joined our voice to the objections of the villagers.

'OFFICIAL BIRTHDAY' CELEBRATION LUNCHEON

Saturday, 9th May 1987   12.15 for 1 p.m.

Guest of Honour - Michael Foot, M.P.

at the Vitello d'Oro Restaurant, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1.
(Westminster or St. James's Park Tube Stations; on-street parking in the vicinity)

Members are reminded (see January Bulletin) that applications for tickets @ £13.00 each (enclosing remittance - cheques payable to 'The Charles Lamb Society' - and S.A.E.) should be sent to

Dr. D.G. Wilson, OBE,
9 Banham's Close,
Cambridge, CB4 1HX   (Tel: 0223 322241)

and *not* to Madeline Huxstep.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 1987 were due on 1st January.

Personal:	U.K.	(single)	£6.00
		(double)	£9.00
	Overseas		U.S. $12.00
Corporate :	U.K.		£9.00
	Overseas		U.S. $18.00