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CHARLES AND MARY LAMB: THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

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In 1975, this society, the Charles Lamb Society, marked the bicentenary of Lamb's birth with an address by George L. Barnett on 'The History of Charles Lamb's Reputation'. (1) Barnett's essay concentrated mainly on the critical reception of Lamb's writings when they first appeared, and dealt but briefly with the subsequent ramifications in Lamb's literary prestige. There are contradictions and anomalies in the history of Lamb's reputation which have not yet been fully explored, and which can cast an interesting light not only upon Lamb himself but also upon the processes and trends of literary criticism generally, during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The aim of this present paper is to expand upon Barnett's account, and to continue it into the 1980s. The history of Mary Lamb's reputation, unrecorded by Barnett, also deserves attention, both for its own intrinsic interest and for the further light it casts on the reception of her brother's life and writings.

A striking characteristic of our critical heritage on the Lambs is the consistency of its violent internal contradictions. From the first, Lamb evoked extreme reactions: his critics either hated his work or loved it, and wrote more as if they were personal friends or enemies of their subject than his impartial judges. During his lifetime, the period covered most intensively by Barnett's account, criticism of Lamb's writings became energized to an unusual extent by strong emotive responses to his impact as a person. The connection of Lamb's work with his personal life, a connection later to become an ubiquitous characteristic of Lamb studies, first became publicly evident, perhaps, in Robert Southey's defence of his

friend against William Jerdan's particularly vituperative review of Lamb's *Album Verses*, published in 1830. (2) In ostensibly defending the work from Jerdan's attack, Southey, in fact, praises and upholds the man. His poem 'To Charles Lamb: On the Review of His Album Verse in the Literary Gazette', published in the *Times* in August 1830, speaks of Lamb with affectionate protectiveness, as if he were the beloved child of his friends rather than their adult contemporary. Southey asserts that:

To us, who have admired and loved thee long,
It is a proud as well as pleasant thing
To hear thy good report.

As well as being a reaction to Jerdan's assault, his friend's protectiveness was also, no doubt, the consequence of earlier personalised attacks upon Lamb's reputation. William Gifford, editor of the *Anti-Jacobin* when Lamb was first notoriously lampooned in its columns for his supposedly radical political affiliations, (3) went on to become editor of the *Quarterly Review* in 1809. In 1811 the *Quarterly* described Lamb as insane, and in 1822, it reported him to be an incurable alcoholic, (4) accusations which were both later to be seconded by Thomas Carlyle's condemnation of Lamb's 'diluted insanity' in his journals and *Reminiscences*. (5) The majority of those commentators who made Lamb's acquaintance came away with very different impressions of the man, however. When Walter Savage Landor encountered Lamb in 1832, for example, a year after Carlyle's last meeting with him, he was charmed and captivated to the highest degree by the whole household. In subsequent correspondence and verses he celebrated his brief meeting with Elia in most affectionate terms:

Once and once only have I seen thy face,
Elia, once only has thy tripping tongue
Run o'er my heart, yet never has been left
Impression on it stronger or more sweet. (6)

In life as well as in his works Lamb appears to have had the knack of getting under the skin of his acquaintance so that he became to them either a blessed idea to be cherished and protected, or a thing of darkness, arousing hatred and contempt more than pity. Amongst his critics, a defamatory report calls forth a protesting defence, and vice versa.

The immediate result of Lamb's death in December 1834 was a proliferation of personal testimonies to the worth of his character: Wordsworth's elegy, for example, affirmed unequivocally 'O, he was good, if e'er a good Man lived!.' Consequently, Lamb's writings came to be appreciated more and more for the light they threw upon an exemplary individual, whose personality was now rapidly being established as one of mythic proportions. The *Essays of Elia* provided rich feeding-ground for assumptions of autobiographical content. H.N. Coleridge, writing in the *Quarterly Review* in 1835, for example, insists that the '*Elia*s were not merely written by Lamb, - they *were* and *are* Lamb, - just the gentle fantastic subtle creature himself printed off.' (7) As soon as Lamb's letters began to be published they, in their turn, provided further matter for admirers of his character, and seem quickly to have achieved more popularity than the actual works. The Cornell University Press edition now in the process of publication is the fifteenth on the list of new editions of the letters, while the works

have been edited ten times. The immediacy and freshness of Lamb's affectionate tone of voice in the correspondence won for him a substantial following of friends and admirers. The numerous biographies and memoirs of Lamb published throughout the century which followed his death are also evidence of public eagerness to acquire every detail of his life.

One other eminent Victorian apart from Carlyle, however, found cause to quarrel with Lamb. Thomas Macaulay, when ostensibly reviewing Leigh Hunt's edition of *The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar* for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1841, wrote sternly against the 'sophistical' and immoral argument of the Elia essay 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century.' (8) In the essay, Lamb presented the Restoration comedies as a 'world of themselves', an 'Utopia of gallantry', which a nineteenth-century audience destroyed by applying to its characters conventional moral tests and judgements. Macaulay protested that the morality of *The Country Wife* and its like is not that of 'an unreal world, but of a world which is a great deal too real'; 'the immorality is of a sort which can never be out of date, and which all the force of religion, law, and public opinion can but imperfectly restrain'. The levity and irresponsibility of Lamb's argument appears to Macaulay to indicate a serious flaw in a nature otherwise admirable. In 1848, a *British Quarterly* review, attributed to George Lewes, defended Elia from Macaulay's reprimand. For Lewes, 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century' illustrates the capacity of Elia's 'guileless' mind to draw out the sting of evil and immorality from indecent material. No attempt is made in this review to take Lamb's argument seriously; his redeeming personal innocence alone is presented as sufficient vindication of his point of view. And, as if in order to give further force to his description of Lamb's virtue, Lewes goes on to provide the first published account of the domestic tragedy which shattered the Lamb household in 1796, when Mary Lamb in a fit of insanity killed her mother. Charles took upon himself all responsibility for the remaining members of the family, and committed himself particularly to care for his sister while she lived, thus procuring her release from permanent incarceration. Lewes sees in this 'suffering, unselfish' embrace of 'the stern austerity of duty' a dearly won self-discipline which gives to Lamb's mind the profundity to strengthen and enlarge those of his readers. (9) Later in 1848, Thomas Noon Talfourd revealed in full the details of Lamb's self-sacrifice in his *Final Memorials of Charles Lamb*. In the face of this unequivocal proof of goodness, the anti-Lamb school of thought was effectively silenced for the rest of the Victoria era, while Lamb's admirers continued to provide a market for a series of biographies encouraging the processes of a popular enthusiasm which now amounted to a secular canonization of 'Saint Charles'.

But not all Victorian commentary on Lamb lacked critical interest in his writings. Walter Pater's essay 'Charles Lamb', first published in the *Fortnightly Review* (October 1878) and reprinted in his *Appreciations* remains one of the best assessments of Lamb's writings, and introduces for the first time many ideas which were later to form the basis of twentieth-century interpretations. Pater is not afraid to indicate the apparent contradictions in Lamb's work, while at the same time stressing that he was 'one who lived more consistently than most writers among subtle literary theories.' (10) One contradiction lies in the 'modern subjectivity' of Elia and his egotistic 'self-portraiture' as opposed to Lamb's particularly

selfless 'loyal, self-forgetful work for others' as a critic. Further, Pater found that in the making of prose Lamb realized 'the principle of art for its own sake, as completely as Keats in the making of verse', and yet he points out that the essays 'reached an enduring moral effect also, in a sort of boundless sympathy'. But, for all his intricate and subtle appreciation of Lamb's writings, Pater remained one with his age in his stress on the importance of never forgetting the life. Following what he considers to be one of Lamb's chief characteristics, his 'habitual apprehension of men's life as a whole - its organic wholeness', Pater insists that Lamb's readers must always keep his domestic tragedy in mind:

In estimating the humour of Elia, we must no more forget the strong undercurrent of this great misfortune and pity, than one could forget it in his actual story. (11)

Few Victorian readers of Lamb could have been capable of forgetting the details of his personal history; the importance of the life was impressed upon them from all sides. Augustine Birrell, for example, in the first series of his *Obiter Dicta*, refused to accept as an admirer of Lamb any reader not thoroughly acquainted with the life:

I run no great risk in asserting that, of all English authors, Charles Lamb is the one loved most warmly and emotionally by his admirers, amongst whom I reckon only those who are as familiar with the four volumes of his 'life and letters' as with 'Elia'. (12)

Birrell goes on to compare Lamb with Dr. Johnson, but he does so on the grounds of their mutual humanity and 'obedience to duty' in matters which relate to their lives alone rather than their works. The importance of the life was also stressed by Lamb's most vociferous and enthusiastic Victorian idolator, Swinburne; superlatives flow from Swinburne's pen whenever he concerns himself with Lamb. He attempts very little straightforward criticism of his 'best beloved', however, presenting instead a justification for not doing so which would invalidate further critical studies of Lamb altogether:

No good criticism of Lamb strictly speaking, can be written; because nobody can do justice to his work who does not love it too well to feel himself capable of giving judgement on it'. (13)

Loving Lamb becomes a moral touchstone for Swinburne: he asserts that 'All men worthy to know him would seem always to have loved him in proportion to their worthiness'.

Given the highly emotional, and, from the objective critic's point of view, provocative nature of such praise, it is surprising that a critical backlash against Lamb did not commence sooner; perhaps one reason why nothing of the kind occurred was due to the fact that the Victorians were still reading Lamb's own writings intensively, as well as reading eulogiums on him. Agnes Repplier, for example, in her *Points of View*, argues against what she sees as a characteristic trend of her age, the introduction of moral lessons into the writing or the appreciation of art, and accuses Swinburne of being one of its worst practitioners. But she refers to Lamb for support for her own argument: he had recognized that 'the natural point of

view, as apart from the purely ethical point of view, supplies the proper basis for all imaginative writing'. (14) She quotes effectively from some of Lamb's more obscure works to prove her point. Another ardent Lamb lover, Arthur Symonds, found in his favourite author similar enfranchizing qualities. In his *Figures of Several Centuries*, he praises Lamb as a 'mental gipsy' who saw 'in every orderly section of social life magic possibilities of vagrancy'. At the same time he too assures his readers of the amelioration to be gained from a study of Lamb: 'To read Lamb makes a man more human' and 'incites to every natural piety'. (15) Altogether, then, it may be said that during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, the myth of Lamb appears to have functioned to such potent effect because it incorporated in the one figure two apparently disparate ideals of human life, both of which the age found particularly compelling: firstly, the highly honourable allegiance to duty and domestic responsibility of the upright Victorian paterfamilias; secondly, the blithe, childlike freedom of a Never-Never Land or Wonderland, with its mischievous dodging of the values of a conventional grown-up world.

At any rate, during the first three decades of this century, Lamb's status as 'best beloved' writer went unquestioned in England. His chosen literary form, the essay, achieved particular popularity in these years, too: not only were many volumes of essays produced, but the history and techniques of the form were recorded and analyzed. In these records, Lamb figures as the greatest practitioner of the 'ideal' essay, that is, the familiar essay. His own work is rarely analyzed, however; according to his Edwardian admirers, he 'belongs to a small group of authors for whom we cherish a kindly feeling that precludes any cool critical estimate'. (16) In his *History of English Criticism*, George Saintsbury, it is true, does hint at some limitations of Lamb's as a critic, but he does so in the mildest and most affectionate of terms, and takes care to establish his own moral worthiness by the preliminary assurance that 'if any be an "Agnist", I more'. (17) But Lamb was defended as a critic, too. E.M.W. Tillyard, in introducing his 1923 edition of Lamb's criticism, presents him as 'among the very greatest critics' for any reader who looks to criticism for 'a more intimate understanding of the original than would have been possible without its help'. (18) In 1931, Edmund Blunden goes further and asserts that if the proposition he puts forward, that criticism 'is at its finest a secondary poetry' be accepted, then Lamb is 'the chief of critics'. (19) Blunden's contributions dominated the first years of the thirties in Lamb studies: his critical biography *Charles Lamb and his Contemporaries* (1933) was followed in 1934, the year of the centenary of Lamb's death, by the volume *Charles Lamb: His Life Recorded by his Contemporaries*, which Blunden compiled. The centenary year also saw the publication of two further studies on Lamb, both semi-critical and semi-biographical, J. Lewis May's *Charles Lamb: A Study* and A.C. Ward's *The Frolic and the Gentle*. These four works provided material for the unashamedly fictional biographies which followed them, books such as E. Thornton Cooke's *Justly Dear: Charles and Mary Lamb* and Neil Bell's *So Perish the Roses*. Altogether admiration for Lamb reached its height in the thirties, after a century of affectionate tribute to his merits and appeal.

But in the centenary year itself nemesis descended upon the 'Agnists', and Lamb's reputation received a blow from which, in Britain if not in the States, it can hardly yet be said fully to have recovered. The enthusiasm

of his admirers brought Lamb to the attention of F.R. Leavis's critical journal *Scrutiny* and, in the furtherance of its self-imposed duties as the watchdog of literary values, *Scrutiny* damned him. Denys Thompson, one of Leavis's followers, in an article entitled 'Our Debt to Lamb', found the 'extravagant eulogy' accorded to Lamb 'preposterous and so unrelated to fact, that one can hardly take it seriously or find a point to engage in controversy'. Instead, he stated his own reactions to Lamb categorically: Lamb's was a 'regressive mind, shrinking from full consciousness'; 'Elia has been a Bad Influence'. According to Thompson, Lamb's work does not require its reader to 're-orientate' himself, and provides no salutary 'shock to self-satisfaction'; consequently, it represents a falling away from the more rigorous eighteenth-century essay which attempted to improve the reader's 'spiritual manners' by disturbing his complacency. That the essay of his own day was a 'profitable channel for vulgarity, "low-brow" propaganda and a studied irresponsibility' Thompson attributed to his contemporaries' debt to Lamb. (20)

This *Scrutiny* article was collected in the volume *Determinations*, edited by Leavis and published in 1934; in the same year the first edition of Thompson's *Reading and Discrimination* appeared. The manner in which Lamb is referred to in this practical criticism guide for schools did him in all probability more effective harm than the *Scrutiny* essay itself. The professed intention of *Reading and Discrimination* is to train its students to discriminate for themselves between good and bad literature, but, in fact, its commentary on the extracts it supplies, the choice of extracts, and the guidance implicit in the order in which they are placed, make up altogether a didactic and domineering over-view of the texts which it would take an unusually independent-minded student to resist. In the section 'The Essayist - Then and Now' an extract from the Elia essay 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers' is placed between an extract from an Addison *Spectator* essay and a verbose twentieth-century advertisement. The commentary informs the student or teacher that in the eighteenth century the essay was a medium for serious writers but 'Lamb reduced it to a vehicle for charming whimsies'. The Elia extract is described as 'remarkable for its offensive affectedness, a pseudo-literary style unvitalized by living speech'. Its 'pretentiousness' and 'Bad Influence' have resulted in the 'undesirable' style of the advertisement which follows it, according to Thompson, and he goes on to deplore that Lamb's work should be distributed as 'literature' in schools at all. (21) A revised edition of *Reading and Discrimination* appeared in 1954 in which the section on Lamb remained substantially the same as in the 1934 edition, but when a 'New edition, completely rewritten' was published in 1979 it contained no mention of Lamb whatsoever. Thompson's diatribes have had their effect: Lamb is no longer generally taught in schools, and it is exceptional to find his name on university syllabuses.

The Leavisite school of criticism thus succeeded in severely damaging Lamb's reputation within the framework of academic studies of English literature. But the reasons for the attack, and for its success, need to be understood in the light of the general purposes of Leavis and his followers with regard to the development of 'English' as a new discipline in higher education during the first half of this century. In order to further its aim of establishing English as a strenuous branch of academic study, the

equivalent, for example, of scientific subjects, *Scrutiny* set itself against what it saw as the hitherto 'gentlemanly' mode of English teaching, which encouraged, as they saw it, an effeminate or dilettante sense of the subject. The concept of studying 'English' was to be reformed as an arduous activity, more capable than any other discipline of strengthening the manly moral and intellectual fibre of its practitioners. (22) A new canon of the 'Great Tradition' of English writers was established, in which a writer such as Lamb, whose appeal was considered to apply generally to the emotions, and who had no underlying didactic moral mission to pursue, could have little place.

The main thrust of the Leavisite attack upon Lamb, however, as Geoffrey Tillotson stressed in his 1966 article on 'The Historical Importance of Certain *Essays of Elia*', (23) was directed not so much against the author himself as against the type of English scholar, or man of letters, who celebrated his writings and character in the early thirties. Much of 'Our Debt to Lamb' is, indeed, devoted to disparagements of the works of Thompson's immediate contemporaries rather than of Elia. A.C. Benson is quoted, for example, as self-damningly confessing that 'the point of the essay is not the subject, for any subject will suffice, but the charm of personality. It must concern itself with something "jolly".' (24) But if there was one Edwardian essayist who caused Lamb to be represented in the worst possible light from the point of view of the Leavisite critic bent upon rigour, it was not Benson but Lamb's editor and biographer, E.V. Lucas. The titles alone of Lucas's essay collections are sufficient to reveal him as belonging to the essayists of slippers and ease who so repelled Thompson: his works include *Domesticities* (1900), *Loiterer's Harvest* (1913), *Urbanities* (1921), and *Pleasure Trove* (1935). From their appearance in 1903-5, his edition of the works and his biography have remained the standard texts on Lamb. Although invaluable in the factual information they provide, his writings on Lamb do tend to present their subject as precisely the type of gentlemanly and jolly man of letters to whom the Leavisite school most strongly objected. In his essay 'The Evolution of Whimsicality', for example, collected in the volume *At the Shrine of Saint Charles* published for Lamb's centenary year, Lamb is celebrated as the 'chief populizer' of whimsicality, which Lucas defines as 'unreluctant egoism', 'the author's side-long amused canonization of himself'. According to Lucas, Lamb 'came naturally to his task and fondled and displayed his ego with all the ecstasy of a collector exhibiting bric-a-brac or first editions'. (25) It is not difficult to imagine the horrified disgust with which Thompson would have responded to such intended praise. It is primarily the image accorded to Elia by his thirties' admirers that he loathes, and would shatter.

In 1957 Thompson's attacks were repeated and further disseminated in another influential critical vehicle largely constructed by disciples of Leavis, the *Pelican Guide to English Literature*. G.D. Klingopoulos in his account of 'The Spirit of the Age in Prose' for the Romantic volume of the series introduces Lamb only to disparage him, and is apparently motivated by the need to make sure that the flames of Lamb's past fame are thoroughly extinguished. He dismissed the work as artificial and lifeless, and the man as 'self-consciously ingratiating' and lacking in integrity. (26) But here again it is the image of Lamb presented by his earlier admirers, rather than Lamb himself, which appears to arouse Klingopoulos' disgust most strongly.

Apart from a few honourable exceptions, such as John Cowper Powys's celebration of Lamb in his collection *Visions and Revisions* (1955), favourable British criticism of Lamb throughout the mid-twentieth century tended to adopt a defensive tone. Some reluctance was shown to tackle his work and reputation as a whole, in a refutation of the Leavisite attack. The equivocal reputation of Elia was still, it would appear, too embarrassingly alive in the minds of many British academics to allow even his admirers to affirm whole-heartedly the need for a complete reincorporation of the *Essays* into the canon of reputable literature. The few critical texts which appeared up to the close of the seventies, such as Wayne McKenna's *Charles Lamb and the Theatre*, Joan Coldwell's edition of *Charles Lamb on Shakespeare*, and Roy Park's volume on *Lamb as Critic* for the Routledge Critics Series, all concentrate on emphasizing Lamb's contribution to literary criticism alone and do not venture onto the dangerous territory to be negotiated in a full reappraisal of the effects and literary influence of his Elia persona. The new series of the *Lamb Bulletin* has, however, continued to maintain and further Lamb studies effectively, but, although a British publication, it appears to be more frequently available in academic institutions in the States.

That this should be the case is due, no doubt, to the fact that Lamb's reputation in America has never undergone the same vacillations from praise to detraction as it has in Britain. He was cordially received there from the first, particularly after Talfourd's *Final Memorials* revealed 'the painfully-exciting cause' of his occasional over-indulgence in drink, and he has since been established as a minor, but honourable, member of the Romantic school. Ernest Bernbaum's *Guide through the Romantic Movement* of 1949, for example, presented Lamb as a whole-hearted Romantic who through 'his persuasive warning against narrow formalizations of one's conception of life and character' gave effective expression to one of the movement's most characteristic principles. (27) A volume which appeared in 1957, *The English Romantic Poets and Essayists: A Review of Research and Criticism*, contained a chapter on Lamb which did much to direct subsequent developments in Lamb studies in the States. In concluding his survey of the criticism, Stuart M. Tave suggested that future work should endeavour to ascertain the 'position of Lamb in his own age, as influencer and influenced'; he also found criticism of Lamb deficient in 'close analyses of the compositional elements in his essays'. (28) A number of American scholars have subsequently endeavoured to realize both his suggestions.

In *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia* (1964) George Barnett provided a detailed account of the influences - primarily early eighteenth-century according to Barnett - which went to form Lamb's style, and analysed the manner in which many of the Elia essays evolved from Lamb's personal letters. (29) A year earlier, in 1963, the American critical periodicals had started to publish the first in a sequence of studies analysing in detail the form and themes of the *Essays of Elia* as examples of the workings of a characteristically Romantic imagination. (30) This series of articles led in recent years to three full-scale studies of the Elia essays, Fred V. Randel's *The World of Elia: Charles Lamb's Essayistic Romanticism* (1975), Robert D. Frank's *Don't Call Me Gentle Charles!* (1976) and Gerald Monsman's *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb's Art of Autobiography* (1984). Like the articles which preceded them, these books achieve their effects primarily through detailed studies of individual Elia essays. Randel emphasizes the manner in which Lamb, at one and the same

time, transformed the traditions of the essay form through Romanticizing it, and yet tempered the extremities of Romanticism through merging it with the techniques and attitudes of the familiar essay tradition. (31) *Don't Call Me Gentle Charles!*, a more useful study than its title would suggest, takes seven Elia essays and demonstrates the way in which they are shaped and informed by characteristically Romantic themes and devices. (32) Gerald Monsman similarly emphasizes the ties between Lamb and the major Romantics, seeing in his writings a preoccupation with the losses inherent in the human condition, and with art as a redemptive agent, which serves as a prosaic equivalent of the poetic concerns of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. (33)

But Monsman goes on to make new claims for Lamb's work. He sees Lamb's symbol-creation as prefiguring 'the problems inherent in the modern literary imagination' and compares Elia in his introductory chapter to major twentieth-century writers as well as to his contemporaries. Like Yeats, for example, Lamb had realized that the external symbols of art can never transcend earthly life because they owe their existence to the mutable sensations and perceptions of day-to-day experience. (34) Monsman explores in detail the manner in which Lamb's use of irony and wordplay serves to highlight the ambivalence of the artist's endeavours. A section on Lamb in Mary Jacobus's recent article 'The Art of Managing Books: Romantic Prose and the Writing of the Past' also concentrates on the subtle effects of Lamb's characteristic ironic style, presenting Elia as the 'chameleon' writer who through his manifold disguises and personae liberates and authorises a self-exploration free of egotism. (35) Such approaches, in their focus upon the suggestive use of ambivalence and paradox in Lamb's style, are applying to his work recent theoretical interpretations of language, and in particular of literary language, as endlessly productive of multiple ways of meaning. According to contemporary French theoreticians, the literary text is, for its readers, essentially paradoxical; it avoids definitive closure, and is inherently plural, a weave of varied meanings rather than a single message. (36) Full-scale investigation of Lamb's works in the light of such currently popular approaches may well be the mode by which subsequent assessments of his writings will restore them to academic respectability, finally laying the ghost of *Scrutiny's* condemnation.

As well as developments in the critical analysis of his writings, a reawakening of interest in Lamb has also, of late, been demonstrated by the publication of new biographical studies. Winifred F. Courtney's *Young Charles Lamb: 1775-1802* (1982) was followed a year later by David Cecil's *A Portrait of Charles Lamb*. The latter volume, it is true, provides little new information on its subject, being essentially an elegant and beautifully illustrated reworking of the earlier Edwardian biographies. But *Young Charles Lamb* is the first volume in a thoroughly researched study of its subject, and one which has brought much useful new material to light, including some of Lamb's hitherto uncollected early contributions to periodicals. (37) Courtney concentrates in particular upon Lamb's social affiliations during the politically turbulent period of his youth, and aims to correct the previously accepted notion of his apolitical stance with regard to the events of his time. Her concern with the question of 'Political Lamb', as she entitles one chapter, tends, however, to draw attention away from the one major and indubitably formative event of Lamb's

first twenty-seven years, Mary's madness and matricide, and his pledge to care for her. *Young Charles Lamb* does not dwell on this tragedy: in it Lamb tells of the disaster in his own words, in long quotations from the letters he wrote to Coleridge at the time, and Courtney adds very little by way of comment.

In evincing some wariness of engaging herself on a profound level with the private and domestic realities of Lamb's life, and of his relationship with his sister, Courtney but follows a trend common to much twentieth-century biographical material on Lamb. Lamb's first biographers, who had the advantage of knowing both brother and sister personally, showed little unease in describing their close association, and were unanimous in their praise of Mary, and in appreciation of her contribution to her brother's life. Wordsworth, for example, in his elegy to Charles, celebrates their sibling relationship and describes Mary as 'the meek, / The self-restraining and the ever-kind'. P.G. Patmore, in his account of the Lambs in *My Friends and Acquaintance* (1854), testifies to her 'universal loving-kindness and toleration', (38) and Barry Cornwall's biography of Charles similarly recalls Mary's habitual reconciliatory kindness. (39) Talfourd in his *Final Memorials* records in some detail the 'remarkable sweetness of her disposition': this 'most quiet, sensible and kind of women' was 'to a friend in any difficulty ... the most comfortable of advisers, the wisest of consolers'. He adds to his own account Hazlitt's testimony to her good sense; Mary, alone of all her sex, becomes the exception that proves the misogynist's rule:

Hazlitt used to say, that he never met with a woman who could reason, and had met with one only thoroughly reasonable - the sole exception being Mary Lamb. (40)

But apart from a few isolated sympathetic presentations of her life, such as Anne Gilchrist's *Mary Lamb* (1883), Helen Ashton and Katharine Davies's chapter on the Lambs in their volume *I Had a Sister* (1937), and Ernest C. Ross's more extensive study *The Ordeal of Bridget Elia*, published in 1940, Mary Lamb has on the whole featured but little to positive effect in later nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of the influences upon her brother's life and work.

Indeed, since his fall from British critical grace in the thirties, there has been a tendency amongst some of Lamb's defenders to blame Mary for her brother's apparent limitations: his relatively slender literary output, for example, is attributed to the burden of maintaining his sister; and the extremes of his whimsicality are held to be the consequence of his close and debilitating involvement with her madness. The critics' difficulty in coming to terms with Mary is projected on to her brother himself:

V.F. Morley, for example, in his *Lamb Before Elia* maintains it inhuman of Lamb were he not to hate and fear his sister, (41) and R.A. Foakes in a recent seventies' article similarly assumes that Charles must have hated 'one who through her madness' was 'such a clog to him'. (42) The situation was, perhaps, exacerbated by Katharine Anthony's strongly partisan defence of Mary in her *The Lambs: A Study of Pre-Victorian England*, published in 1948, in which she appears to assume that in order to present Mary in the best possible light her brother must be discredited. Her extraordinary, and entirely unfounded claim that Charles neglected his sister in the last

years of his life because of his unrequited passion for their adopted daughter, Emma Isola, detracted substantially from a study of the pair which in many other regards did provide a healing corrective of Mary's earlier critical neglect.

It would appear that too many of those critics who have concerned themselves with the Lambs' relationship have acted on the principle that one member of their union can only be properly acclaimed at the expense of the other, thus positing a tension between the two entirely contrary to the testimonies concerning their strong mutual dependence and regard manifested consistently throughout their own writings and correspondence, and to which the records of their contemporaries also bear witness. Yet current developments in the field of literary theory have had an ameliorative effect on this aspect of Lamb studies, also. The rise of feminist criticism in the seventies and eighties, and the new interest in women's contribution to literary history, have led to further detailed investigations of Mary Lamb, and of the nature of Charles's bond with her. A hitherto unpublished American Ph.D. dissertation on Mary, by Leslie Joan Friedman, which provides much new information on the difficult progress of Mary's career, leaves its readers with an increased appreciation of the creative achievements, under great duress, of both sister and brother. (43) And Gillian Beer's recent article on 'Lamb's Women' in *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* presents Charles's unique alliance with Mary as the source of his unusual ability to enter with imaginative sympathy in his writings into the full range of human experience, both male and female, both childlike and parental. (44)

With the increasing maturity of 'English' as a scholastic discipline in the second half of this century has come a broadening of critical horizons, and a greater openness to the influence of previously ignored or discredited literary voices. Rigorous and dominant authorial tones, and the adoption of didactic roles with regard to the reader, now appear suspect and lacking in subtlety, while emphatic suggestivity, irony and a playful ambivalence are recognized as qualities to be celebrated in writing. In this context, Lamb's critical reputation stands fair to regain all its lost lustre, and to gleam ever more brightly into the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. George L. Barnett, 'The History of Charles Lamb's Reputation', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, ii (1975), 22-33.
2. [William Jerdan], *London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, 10 July 1830.
3. See 'The New Morality', *Anti-Jacobin: or Weekly Examiner*, 9 July, 1798, p. 286.
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A DISTANT 'BOUM' AMONG THE HILLS: SOME NOTES ON COLERIDGE'S
'FEARS IN SOLITUDE' (1798)

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'John Thelwall had something very good about him. We were once sitting in a beautiful recess in the Quantocks when I said to him, "Citizen John, this is a fine place to talk treason in!"-"Nay! Citizen Samuel", replied he, "it is rather a place to make a man forget that there is any necessity for treason!".' (1)

The anecdote sounds a little too cosy to be true. But, even if it only happened in Coleridge's mind, there is a rightness about it. The scene is a cameo from a Forster novel: two men are in a dell - one, an honest atheist and man of action, is simply relaxing and enjoying the scene for its own sake; the other, a self-torturing contemplative and literary type, is unable to forget the pressures of a world of telegrams and anger, in which he can

never do more than perform ineffectively himself. The link with Forster is not entirely arbitrary, as I shall attempt to suggest. But first perhaps seeing things that way may help us to enjoy the whimsical irony of the Coleridge story. He is a man who could seldom rest in a green shade untroubled.

One European tradition which both Coleridge and Forster honoured was the Pastoral. From its earliest times, the form had juxtaposed contending energies in human life. On the one hand, it celebrated the desire to escape from reality; on the other hand, it expressed our desire to redefine and rediscover reality, using the pastoral mode itself as a means of analysis. Arcadia was a country where men and women struggled with disparate values and where the poet himself both recognised the charms of the countryside and its desperate vulnerability. Of course, neither Coleridge nor Forster wrote simply in the classic Pastoral mould. But in assessing their work it may be helpful to remember the classical roots from which their different Romanticisms stemmed.

For a moment I want to return to those two figures in the pastoral dell and listen to their Eclogue. Coleridge is speaking: 'I can *at times* feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves, and for themselves - but more frequently, *all things* appear little - all the knowledge, that can be acquired, child's play - the universe itself - what but an immense heap of *little things*? - I can contemplate nothing but parts, and parts are all *little* -! - My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something *great* - something *one* and *indivisible* - and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! - But in this faith *all things* counterfeit infinity! - "Struck with the deepest calm of Joy" I stand ...'

Let us move tactfully away; the man is beginning to quote poetry!(2)

In his famous words to that 'atheist reprobate' Thelwall, Coleridge was, of course, expressing life-long attitudes to Nature. His poetic quotation was drawn from the first assured success of his poetic career, *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* (June 1797). In that poem he had helped to form what M.H. Abrams has aptly called 'the Greater Romantic Lyric' from the eighteenth-century 'Local Poem', which in turn had grown from Classical and Arcadian prototypes. Each of the great Romantic poems that were to follow would deal with tensions between an idealised Nature and a human awareness of imperfection and death. The conflict was usually resolved only by a statement within the poem of a transcendental faith. Each poem, in effect, was a struggle to affirm in Nature the basis of enlightened moral consciousness. And yet always there was the fear, which Coleridge's 1797 words to Thelwall catch so acutely: what if the universe itself is no more than 'an immense heap of *little things*?' It was a question with which Forster was still wrestling more than a century later.

I

Such thoughts may serve as an introduction to *Fears in Solitude*, a work which has proved elusive to many modern critics and yet which seems central to the most creative period of Coleridge's poetic career. The poem first appeared in a quarto pamphlet published by Joseph Johnson 'in Saint Paul's Churchyard, 1798'. It appeared with *France: an Ode* ('that dull ode', as

S.T.C. later called it) and an undisputed masterpiece, *Frost at Midnight*. The fact that Johnson published Coleridge at all was a mark of some distinction, since he was a lively-minded publisher, who had made £10,000 by publishing Cowper's *Task* and had been shrewd enough to withdraw Blake's *French Revolution* before publication. In the event, Johnson only sold some two hundred copies of the pamphlet, and, despite later attempts, Coleridge never managed to win *Fears in Solitude* much esteem. His own doubts and reservations are suggested by an undated manuscript note on a copy of the poem reproduced in E.H. Coleridge's edition:

'N.B. The above is perhaps not Poetry, - but rather a sort of middle thing between Poetry and Oratory - sermoni propria. - Some parts are, I am conscious, too tame even for animated prose'. (3)

This self-defensive note suggests a link with those other poems which Coleridge and his 'Giant Wordsworth' published with the Bristol publisher Cottle in the same year, and which became so surprisingly celebrated. (At the time, who would have expected the provincially-printed volume to be more widely-noticed than Johnson's pamphlet? And it was not until after the expanded 1800 and 1802 editions that *The Lyrical Ballads* came to be well-known.) The 1798 'Advertisement' reads:

'The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers ... will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title.' (4)

Just how doctrinaire and systematic such linguistic experiments really were has, of course, been the subject of continued critical debate almost ever since. It seems enough here to suggest that Coleridge's language experiments at that time were not restricted to the poems in the Bristol volume.

II

A green and silent spot, amid the hills,
A small and silent dell

The simple, almost child-like words, playing mental catch with the key word 'silent', open *Fears in Solitude* in the commonplace language of everyday, and this simplicity of diction continues for the first twelve lines. Any reading with an exact ear for nuances of language is difficult after two centuries, but the prevailing tone seems recognisably low-key, the conversational diction of middle class society, commenting on ordinary natural phenomena: hills, heath, yellow furze, a sky-lark singing. At line seven the language lifts a little; two similes are used and they lead, through an open, easy-flowing line, to an exclamation of Romantic faith:

The level sunshine glimmers with green light.
Oh! 'tis a quiet spirit-healing nook!

If this is linguistic experiment, it is based upon a language to which every polite late eighteenth-century poetaster's bosom returned an echo. But there

are at least two points to notice. First, although the simple hillside scene is bare and heathy (typical Quantock soil, bearing furze-blooms in April, bracken later, and little else), the dell itself is bathed by the mist of two similes which paint an *imagined* harvest: the riches of this countryside exist largely in the poet's mind. Second, and linked with the first point, Coleridge's final word 'nook' raises his poem into poetic/Platonic realms through its literary echoes. The word suggests Milton's *Il Penseroso*, (a poem quoted in that other work of April, 1798, *The Nightingale*). There the writer imagined following

The spirit of Plato, to unfold
 What worlds or what vast regions hold
 The immortal mind that hath forsook
 Her mansion in this fleshy nook. (5)

Yet Coleridge's nook reverses the effect of Milton's. Hidden away, within the physical confines of an everyday landscape, lies something spiritually restoring and regenerative. Behind the Milton reference lies Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where the King's ship bewitched by Ariel was held in a 'deep nook'. (6) Such allusive patterns playing across a mind seem to fit the linguistic mood the poet now creates, for all that happens in the remainder of the first verse paragraph is *conditional*, existing only in that imagined dimension where the 'humble man' ('Lyrical Ballads Man', may we call him?):

' Might lie on fern or withered heath'

and 'with meditative joy' dream of -

'Religious meanings in the forms of Nature'.

We are back in the dell with Thelwall, listening once more to Coleridge quoting *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison*:

So my friend
 Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
 Silent with swimming sense. (7)

But notice, again, the mood is conditional. The friend 'may' stand and have the transcendental experience. The poet does not absolutely know, because he himself is confined by a domestic accident in his Lime-Tree Bower prison, just as, in the later poem, he is confined by the spirit-healing nook. In both Milton's poem and Shakespeare's play the nook is associated with troubles: in *Il Penseroso* they are the troubles of Melancholy; in *The Tempest* they are the troubles of Man's fallen and political nature.

Coleridge's second verse paragraph turns to face the double threat of melancholy and political unrest. A similar conflict underlies the earlier poem usually known as *Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement* (1796): how can the poet resolve the tension between a meditative joy in his country retreat and a social concern for his troubled times? The treatment in *Fears*, however, seems more dramatic and successful. Instead of imagining the poet moving away from the country to the political world, he now feels the political world moving into the country retreat. The menace is rendered in vivid terms of sound:

What uproar and what strife may now be stirring
 This way or that way o'er these silent hills -
 Invasion, and the thunder and the shout,
 And all the crash of onset ...

Again, the conditional 'may' reminds us that we share a language of the poet's mind. It is there that the trouble lies. To respond to the impulsive rhythms of his diction here is to realise imaginatively his mental strain. At times he keeps an admirable control, abstract nouns and sense-impression words working through skilful proximity - as in 'crash of onset' or 'Carnage and groans'. But the passage is constantly breaking into apostrophe, that dread device which every reader of his letters knows was always threatening to turn him into an early model of Queen Victoria. Here, it seems, we are at last in the middle ground, somewhere between Poetry and Oratory. It is difficult, dead ground for a modern reader to traverse.

Dead ground suggests that we need to find our bearings, and we might do worse than look back at the Latin tag used in Coleridge's note. 'Sermoni propria' was a conscious variant upon the word used in Horace's *Satires*:

Neque, si qui scribat uti nos
Sermoni propiora putes hunc esse poetam.

(Nor, if someone wrote, as I do, lines nearer to prose, would you think him a poet.) (8)

The variant form 'sermoni propiora' can hardly have been created by mistake and presumably appealed to Coleridge's deep love of the pun, which he shared with his friend Lamb. Coleridge once told his nephew H.N. Coleridge that Lamb had 'translated my motto *Sermoni propiora* by 'properer for a sermon!' Charles Lamb was probably the shrewdest of Coleridge's early critics and here he surely saw exactly what was happening. His friend was attempting to write a verse equivalent of those *Lecturers on Politics and Religion* which he had given in public places and in print since at least 1795. Of course it was a risk. But perhaps a modern reader assumes too readily that it sank the poem. Contemporary taste thought otherwise. Both *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review* selected lines 41 to 129 to quote verbatim and C.L. Moody, in the orthodox Whig *Monthly Review*, proclaimed: 'there is so much truth, with so much serious, pointed, and suitable exhortation, in these lines, that we feel it a duty, more for the sake of the public than of the author, to solicit their perusal'. (9)

The Romantic poets' role as would-be political spokesmen has perhaps received enough critical attention in our times. They may be patronised (Poor misguided undergraduates! Couldn't they see? The 'unacknowledged legislators' of this world are not the Poets but the Secret Police!) or they may be adopted as prospective Marxists (Poor Bourgeois intellectuals! They were choked and corrupted by a self-protecting Capitalist Establishment!), but Coleridge's voice in *Fears in Solitude* cannot easily be dismissed that way. It speaks independent of party and is worth hearing. It is a perennial voice, that of the detached, humane critic of English Expansionism, who attacks the Wars in America and France as he might have attacked the 1982 war in the Falklands, because he holds fast to underlying principles:

Even so, my countrymen! have we gone forth
 And borne to distant tribes slavery and pangs,
 And, deadlier far, our vices, whose deep taint
 With slow perdition murders the whole man.

He condemns the ease with which a civilian population can be lulled into accepting militarism abroad, and his words have an ominous ring in an Age of Mass Media:

Boys and girls,
And women, that would groan to see a child
Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war,
The best amusement for our morning meal!

Crucially, he sees such moral deadening as the result of a deadened response to language itself. Acts of violence are translated into mere technical jargon by a militaristic press and become:

empty sounds to which
We join no feeling and attach no form.

Such deadening of language may lead to a Day of Judgment when Providence will:

make us know
The meaning of our words.

Whatever their power as poetry, these passages have continued human relevance as oratory. They remind us that, at the time of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge and Wordsworth still held radical aims for uniting reform of poetic diction and subject-matter with reform of society.

We might look at two moments in this section where Coleridge once more lifts his language by the use of simile and metaphor. First, a simile for the contaminating effects of British colonialism:

Like a cloud that travels on,
Steamed up from Cairo's swamps of pestilence,
Even so, my countrymen! have we gone forth ...

The image is of exotic and Oriental horror. For Coleridge's generation, the Orient still primarily meant the Middle East and this image of Egyptian Plague has the force of a passage from the Old Testament of the Bible. Coleridge's imaginative grasp of Egypt, perhaps, differs little from Shakespeare's. But there is one interesting point. The effect of the horror is turned *against* the West. The image may be a conventional one for expressing European fear of the other world, but it is used to express fear of what Europe itself may do to that other world. Today, unfortunately, the equivalent image might be one of Nuclear Contamination. (A similar image used in *The Destiny of Nations* suggests the modern parallel even more strongly - see *Destiny of Nations*, lines 422-426)

My second example, however, initially looks more forced and dated. At the culmination of a passage in which, Lear-like, he has denounced a corrupt, irreligious society through its legal system, Coleridge tells how:

the owlett Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun of Heaven,
Cries out, 'Where is it?'

Here the exact collocation of images may seem dauntingly personal or clumsily literary, and indeed that might be part of their point. Various elements can be isolated and identified. The Owl, here a mere owlet, serves to recall traditional symbols for Satan, and its flight might even suggest the flight of Milton's Satan encircling Earth before penetrating Eden. Dropping 'blue-fringed lids' takes us back to *The Tempest* and looks like a conflation of Sycorax the 'blue-eyed hag' with Prospero's command to Miranda:

'The fringed curtains of thine eyeadvance...' (10)

The lids are held close: there is no possibility of a 'Brave New World' appearing while that is so. Instead, the owlet Atheism hoots at 'the glorious sun' and cries bathetically and clumsily, 'Where is it?' No reader of Coleridge needs 'the glorious sun' glossed. God-given sunlight, the creative light of natural revelation plays an important part in the mental landscape of the Quantocks, as it does in that other haunted world of *The Ancient Mariner*.

But my main point here would be that such reflective, secondary meanings come only when we mull over the passage rather than when we read it first. Here, it seems to me, Coleridge works in the manner of the late eighteenth-century satirical Cartoon, that prolific art which had been breeding at a rate of about 50,000 cartoons a year from the mid-century. Coleridge himself refers enthusiastically to the genre in a letter of 1799 to Tom Poole:

'The Victory at Novi! - If I were a good Caricaturist, I would sketch off Suwarrow' (the Russian General, Suvaroff)' in a Car of Conquest drawn by huge Crabs!!!' (11)

The imaginative use of cartoon techniques in his writings is worth more study. It can be seen widely, in the *Letter from Liberty to Famine* in *Conciones ad Populum* or in such poetic squibs as *Fire, Famine and Slaughter* (printed in the *Morning Post* in January 1798). More subtly, it can be linked with some important moments in the great poems, most obviously the appearance of Death and Life-in-Death in *The Ancient Mariner*.

A comparison of effects in the central sections of *Fears in Solitude* with the English Political Cartoon, which held among its exponents such notable artists as Gillray, Rowlandson, and Cruickshank, may be more helpful if we rid ourselves of some misconceptions. The prints themselves were broad and often crude in humour (exhibiting a vigorous vulgarity that has made them popular with recent compilers of English history books). But, essentially, they were drawn for a cultivated and élitist taste. Priced at sixpence plain or two shillings coloured, they were more expensive than the newspapers in which they seldom as yet appeared. They portrayed leading figures of the day, Pitt, Fox, 'Boney', 'Prinney', and so on, with a witty allusiveness to literature, the Bible, and Classical Mythology, which presupposed an intelligent and educated audience. To interpret their messages may, like reading Coleridge, have been a double process, easy enough in broad outline but offering also a subtler pleasure in skilful understanding of allusions. Such middle-class pastimes might be compared with the later English delight in cross-words and detective stories. The audience these Cartoonists served would have been a fit audience for *Fears in Solitude*. They were certainly the audience Coleridge was aiming for in *The Watchman* and, later, *The Friend*. (12)

What is striking when we read this poem with the Political Cartoon model in mind is that Coleridge seems intent on muffling the broader effects. His approach seems clear when, for example, at line 89 he uses the shock word 'war-whoop' (for the first time, according to Murray's Oxford Dictionary, in English poetry!). The idea behind the word was, indeed, shocking enough, recalling the barbarous policy of the British in the American Wars of employing Red Indian tribes against their opponents and paying them for scalps. But in its verbal context here the word-shock is carefully controlled. It arises from a Cowperesque euphony of poetic language best seen two lines earlier in:

'Peace long preserved by fleets and perilous seas'.

Naturally, the shock seems enhanced by such a setting. It suggests exactly the elegant English-gentlemanly mind being threatened by complicity in such New World atrocities. To tune our ears to the exact pitch of the diction in these central moments of the poem may help us to understand better Coleridge's art.

A more extended illustration of what is at work here may be taken from the passage which rises to a consciously rhetorical climax, starting in the middle of line 129.

Spare us yet awhile,
 Father and God! O spare us yet awhile!
 Oh! let not English women drag their flight
 Fainting beneath the burthen of their babes,
 Of the sweet infants, that but yesterday
 Laughed at the breast!

Such lines seem overwrought to modern taste. But it is worth placing alongside them lines from the poem on which, two years earlier, S.T.C. had declared proudly, 'I rest for all my poetical credit':

O thou poor widow, who in dreams does view
 Thy husband's mangled corse, and from short doze
 Start'st with a shriek; or in thy half-thatched cot
 Waked by the wintry night-storm, wet and cold
 Cow'rst o'er thy screaming baby!

(*Religious Musings*, lines 296-300)

The greater radicalism of politics in the earlier poem is matched by more extreme literary methods. The lines dramatise broadly, much in the Cartoonist style, and words are used daringly, even wildly. Contracted verb forms 'cow'r' at the start of lines like grotesques, sounds are strident, and shock short words are frequent. Such a passage might, indeed, have provoked a conventional reader of eighteenth-century verse to feel that the register was wrong. A word like 'doze' surely would have debased the mood in Doctor Johnson's ears? and, again, that seems to be Coleridge's intention. But the plethora of qualifying words and tricks which have a conscious intent upon the reader of *Religious Musings* produces an unhealthy condition in the verse. By contrast, the 1798 passage is tempered with a poetic as well as with a political restraint. The coarser diction of the earlier piece had allowed 'screaming baby' where the later has 'babes' or 'infants ... at the breast'. In this connection it is worth noticing that Coleridge here uses the

form 'burthen' rather than 'burden'. The nuances of this choice imply a degree of literary precision, and also of literary allusion, since the word in this spelling was frequently used to refer specifically to the child in the womb and even to the moment of birth itself: 'A greivuous burthen was thy Birth to me', cries the Duchess of York to Richard Crookback (Shakespeare: *Richard III*, IV, iv, 168). It seems legitimate to claim that the picture of the distressed mother in *Fears* would have appealed to a more discerning audience than the wild figure in *Religious Musings*.

The climactic passage offers its readers the comfort of sabbath-bells and of cartoon Frenchmen 'impious and false'. Nothing subtle there! But, again, it would be easy to find broader, cruder lines from the earlier radical works to emphasise the comparative restraint and the absence of excessive detail. What is important in the section is the moment when it rises to a sublime vision of the potential defeat of these impious and destructive forces:

Render them back upon the insulted ocean,
And let them toss as idly on its waves
As the vile sea-weed, which some mountain-blast
Swept from our shores!

The images themselves here create the grandeur. For a visual equivalent we must turn to Turner rather than to Gillray. Such writing, if only we can adjust our ear to it, can be enjoyed as an uncommon Romantic achievement - sublimity without strain.

Yet the strain is apparent elsewhere in the middle sections. At times S.T.C. leans a little dangerously on his pulpit:

I have told,
O Britons! O my brethren! I have told ...

The dangers of nonconformist preaching and the easy apostrophe are always there in early Coleridge. He was a frequent, fluent and effective preacher, as Hazlitt's account of him in the Unitarian chapel at Shrewsbury a few months earlier makes clear. Moreover, the matter of the sermon is worth hearing. At its best the message is the message of a moderate humane wisdom, necessary today as in 1798:

Some, belike,
Groaning with restless enmity, expect
All change from change of constituted power.

Forster might have said the same things a century and a half later. But still the childlike British politics of swings and roundabouts goes on.

IV

The closing paragraphs of the poem move *Fears in Solitude* back upon its own head, in the now well-recognised Coleridgean manner. At line 175 Patriotism bursts in, and S.T.C. makes the statement of faith which must banish all impious thoughts from his consciousness. Britain is his 'Mother Isle'. He repeats the phrase, which he had used already in his *Ode to the Departing Year* and in *France: an Ode*. As Wordsworth was later to claim in *The Prelude*, the poet sees Nature as his Foster-Parent, who has educated and formed his

moral being:

.. who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,
Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,
Have drunk in all my intellectual life,
All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,
All adoration of the God in nature.

It is a noble Credo, although we might note that, like other Creeds, it caused its compiler trouble in the wording. In 1802 he cut out 'lakes' for 'brooks' (an understandable change in Somerset, perhaps), and changed 'Quiet dales' to 'quiet fields', and there were other small shifts of image in 1809. To my mind such changes suggest a slight unease reflected in a momentary lack of precision. As with a passage in the companion piece, *Frost at Midnight*, the image of *lakes* may even derive from the conversation of Wordsworth rather than Coleridge's personal experience. It is a petty point, but perhaps revealing. (13)

I would like to suggest that the uncomfortable sense of jerking gear-changes with which we proceed out of the central sections of this poem, taking the homeward road for Nether Stowey, reflects an underlying mental unrest in the writer. It is worth stressing again that this poem has been about happenings in his own mind. The potential invasion happened there just as did the potential harvest of the opening. The whole experience has been one of deep 'Solitude', and that was an area of experience in which Coleridge lived very differently from Wordsworth. Coming back, at evening, he reaches the brow of the hill in an almost elegiac mood. The prospect before him is emblematic - church-tower, clustering elms of friendship, domestic cot. It is a safe little world of social relationships which has been threatened throughout the poem by larger, more disturbed imaginings and 'solitary musings'. Gratefully, Coleridge clasps to himself his cloak of faith and claims he now feels:

worthy to indulge
Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.

It is a quite unWordsworthian moment, surely? It expresses the mind that had written in March to his brother, uneasily: 'Of GUILT I say nothing; but I believe most stedfastly in Original Sin ...' (14) The poem itself would have told us as much.

Throughout his early verse Coleridge had evoked contrary states. On the one hand, a world of domestic love and happiness in an idyllic setting (although, usually, it is worth noticing, he depicts himself as, in some way, a little removed from the domesticity!). On the other hand, there is a nightmare world which denies and devastates such values, as in that terrifyingly prophetic poem, *Lines Written at Shurton Bars, September 1795*, where, a month before his marriage, he already imagined dark visions of shipwreck and storm threatening the domestic roof. For such reasons I would claim that *Fears in Solitude* is a more representative poem of Coleridge's great year than the exquisitely quiet companion piece, *Frost at Midnight*, and, together with *France, an Ode*, they make a meaningful and largely unnoticed unit. The Owllet Atheism and the 'homeless winds' that play across the cliffs in the last stanza of the 'dull ode' seem more disturbing than the rain-blast in whose momentary pauses we hear eave-drops fall, or the cry of

the young owl among woods which leaves the inmates of the cottage 'all at rest'. At the close of *Frost at Midnight* Coleridge achieved a supreme moment of *stasis* and acceptance. But, of course, it was hard-won. The version of the poem printed in Johnson's pamphlet ended with a further six lines which shifted uneasily back to images of domesticity and broke the mood of transcendental marriage to the seasons.

Returning to Stowey Coleridge carried with him the mental images of unrest, those forces that threaten to disrupt and destroy all human optimism, balance, peace. Images of the Quantocks play strangely across moments of the *Ancient Mariner* poem - the skylark, for example, singing, as in *Fears*, like an angel. But there is one moment there which seems to add a sombre undertone to this poet of evening as he walks the green sheep-track homewards:

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread. (14)

The mental fears conjured up in Solitude among the hills make a parallel with Forster once more apt. Among Indian hills Forster defined the problem as 'Boum', a sound that predated and undermined religious transcendence and 'poor little talkative Christianity'. His heroine, when she encountered this force, like Coleridge, was troubled by thoughts of rape. Writing in 1930, Forster confided to his *Commonplace Book*:

'I am like C. in many ways, though heading for a different kind of crash. I have his idleness, diffidence, self-consciousness, gentleness, and am a gentleman. Consequently find it difficult to look at his work apart from the agencies that produced or curtailed it. I see him too much under the rule of Time'. (15)

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A NOTE ON WORDSWORTH'S MATHEMATICAL EDUCATION

Charlotte Kipling

When William Wordsworth went up to St. John's College, Cambridge in October 1787 he was expected to study mathematics as his major subject. Why was this, what types of mathematics were then being taught, and what did he achieve?

At Cambridge University at that time the influence of Sir Isaac Newton, who was professor of mathematics there from 1669 to 1702, was still of great importance. Mathematics was the dominant subject in the university, and its study was compulsory for all students, together with moral philosophy and theology. The students had no choice of subjects. The final degree examination (the Tripos) was in mathematics, philosophy and theology, but honours were limited to those candidates excelling in mathematics. The undergraduates were allocated in classes before the examination, with a right of appeal for those who considered they had been placed too low. The results of the examination determined where they were placed in order of merit within the class. Consequently there was intense competition between the candidates, particularly between those intent on the highest honours. Those who achieved the highest class, first class honours, were known as Wranglers. There were two lower classes of honours, Senior and Junior Optimes, and a pass degree. Separate examination papers were set according to the standards expected in the different classes (Howson 1982).

Some Tripos examination papers from the relevant period are available in published form (Wordsworth 1877, Ball 1889). They reveal the scope of the topics studied. These can be roughly divided into arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy, optics and mechanics. A form of calculus known as Fluxions was also studied, but not differential calculus. Here are some examples of the problems set. Questions 1 - 7 and 11 - 12 were set to prospective Junior Optimes and 8 - 10 to Senior Optimes in 1802, and 13 - 14 were set by dictation to candidates in 1785. No problems were ever set to candidates for a pass degree, but they were examined in book work, which could be learnt by rote.

1. If $\frac{3}{4}$ of an ell of Holland cost $\frac{1}{4}\text{£}$, what will $12\frac{2}{3}$ ells cost?
2. Find the interest of £873.15s. 0d. for $2\frac{1}{2}$ years at $4\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.
3. Solve the equation $3x^2 - 19x + 16 = 0$.
4. Sum the following series $\frac{1}{1.2.3} + \frac{1}{2.3.4} + \frac{1}{3.4.5} + \dots$ ad infinitum.
5. Inscribe the greatest rectangle in a given circle.
6. Prove that the diameters of a square bisect each other at right angles.
7. Given the sine of an angle, to find the sine of twice that angle.
8. Given a declination of the sun and the latitude of the place, to find the duration of twilight.

9. If half the earth were taken off by the impulse of a comet, what changes would be produced in the moon's orbit?
10. Prove that in the course of the year the sun is as long above the horizon of any place as he is below it.
11. Prove that when a fluid passes through pipes kept constantly full, velocity varies inversely as area of section.
12. Define the centre of a lens; and find the centre of a miniscus.
13. Suppose a body thrown from an Eminence upon the Earth, what must be the Velocity of Projection, to make it become a secondary planet to the Earth?
14. What is the relation between the 3rd and 7th sections of Newton, and how are the principles of the 3rd applied to the 7th?

The level of attainment required to answer some of these questions is low. In present day terms, the standard is nearer to that of O level (an examination taken at about the age of 16) than to that of current university studies. It must be remembered however that at that time many of the undergraduates went to the university in their early teens, much younger than at present, and that many of them would have had no instruction in mathematics at school. Question 14 has been included to draw attention to the fact that much basic information was then learnt by rote. Sir Frederick Pollock, who was Senior Wrangler in 1806, said in a memoir that he could repeat the first book of Euclid word by word and letter by letter. At the end of the eighteenth century the minimum requirement for a pass degree was a competent knowledge of the first book of Euclid, arithmetic, vulgar and decimal fractions, simple and quadratic equations, and parts of the works of Locke and Paley (Ball 1889).

In addition to the Tripos examination, set by the university some of the colleges, including St. John's, set their own examinations in the years preceding the Tripos. The subjects were more varied than those of the Tripos. At St. John's in 1774, the subjects examined were:

Hydrostatics and optics
 2nd Vol of Locke
 Antigone of Sophocles
 6 first books of Euclid
 Hutchinson Moral Philosophy
 21 Book of Livy
 Stanyan Grecian History
 Horace's Art of Poetry
 St. Mark's Gospel.

The students were also required to be proficient in colloquial Latin (Wordsworth 1877).

The first six books of Euclid comprise:

- Book 1. Definitions, postulates, axioms: triangles, parallels, parallelograms and squares.
- Book 2. Transformation of areas, geometrical algebra.
- Book 3. Circles, chords, tangents,

- Book 4. Constructions with straight edge and compass.
- Book 5. Theory of proportion,
- Book 6. Proportion applied to geometry.

There are a further seven books.

Two colleges, St. John's and Trinity, were outstandingly successful in preparing undergraduates for the Tripos examination. For example, in the decade 1780 to 1789 the number of Wranglers from St. John's was 35, from Trinity 32; their nearest rival, Queens', had 17 and no other college more than 3. This dominant position was maintained over a long period. From 1747 to 1884 the number of Senior Wranglers from St. John's was 46, from Trinity 37, and no other college had more than 13 (Howson 1984).

In the eighteenth century there was increased interest in the study of mathematics, and some schools, particularly in the north of England, specialised in the subject. This interest did not extend to the public schools and most grammar schools, many of which taught no mathematics, sometimes because they were restricted to teaching classical subjects by their deeds of foundation. Hawkshead Grammar School was one of the exceptions. It was renowned in the latter part of the eighteenth century for the success of its pupils at Cambridge. The masters in Wordsworth's time were all Cambridge graduates, and Taylor, who was headmaster from 1782 to 1786, had been 2nd Wrangler in 1778. Many of Wordsworth's schoolfellows, contemporaries and near contemporaries, became Wranglers. These included Fleming of Rayrigg (5th Wrangler), William Raincock (2nd), Gawthrop (16th), Thomas Harrison (Senior Wrangler 1793), Sykes (10th), Younge (12th), Jack (4th), Rudd (10th), and William's brother Christopher Wordsworth was 10th Wrangler in 1796 (Schneider 1957, 'The Eagle' 1950).

What of Wordsworth himself? He had considerable advantages at Cambridge. He came from a school with an excellent record of success in the Tripos, and was at a college which was outstanding in obtaining high honours, and for part of his time there his tutor was Dr James Wood, considered to be the best mathematician in the university.

Wordsworth may even have had some doubts about his academic career before he ever arrived in Cambridge, according to a report by his cousin Mary Myers Robinson. On the way to Cambridge in October 1787 he stayed in York with her and her husband Captain Hugh Robinson. The latter said to him 'I hope, William, you mean to take a good degree'. and Wordsworth replied 'I will either be Senior Wrangler or nothing' (Reed 1967).

In the Tripos examination in January 1791 he took a Bachelor of Arts degree, a pass degree. This was clearly a great disappointment to those who had expected him to obtain high honours. Those undergraduates who wished to do well in the Tripos stayed at Cambridge to work in the Long Vacation during the preceding summer. Wordsworth's decision to travel on the continent at that time proved that he had rejected any possibility of academic success. He does not attempt to make excuses for his failure to obtain honours.

In his Autobiographical Memoranda which he dictated at Rydal Mount in November 1847 he said:

'When at school, I, with other boys of the same standing, was put upon reading the first six books of Euclid, with exception of the fifth; and also in algebra I learnt simple and quadratic equations; and this for me was unlucky because I had a full twelve-month's start of the freshmen of my year, and accordingly got into a rather idle way; reading nothing but classic authors, according to my fancy, and Italian poetry' (Wordsworth 1851), and in a letter to Miss Taylor, written in 1801; 'I did not, as I in some respects greatly regret, devote myself to the studies of the University' (Wayne 1954).

In the third book of *The Prelude* he describes his life at Cambridge.

... The weeks went roundly on
With invitations, suppers, wine and fruit,
...

and We sauntered, played, or rioted; we talked
Unprofitable talk at morning hours;
Drifted about along the streets and walks,
Read lazily in trivial books, went forth
To gallop through the country in blind zeal
Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars
Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.

and Look was there none within these walls to shame
My easy spirits, and discountenance
Their light composure, far less to instil
A calm resolve of mind, firmly addressed
To puissant efforts. Nor was this the blame
Of others but my own; ...

In these autobiographical fragments there is no suggestion that Wordsworth was incompetent in mathematics, or that he disliked the subject. Bowman, who taught him from 1785 to 1787 reported that his pupil 'did well enough under him' in both classics and mathematics. While still at school Wordsworth borrowed Newton's *Opticks* from Bowman, and in the school library were several mathematical works, including Adam's 'Essays on the Microscope' and Bonnycastle's 'Introduction to Astronomy' (Thompson 1970).

The results of the first two college examinations showed that Wordsworth was capable of achieving a high standard. He did not opt out because he thought he would fail, but he did dislike the extremely competitive system and its effect upon those involved.

Wordsworth considered both mathematics and poetry to be of extreme importance. In the fifth book of the *Prelude* he tells of a friend who mused

On Poetry and geometric Truth,
The knowledge that endures, upon these two,
And their high privilege of lasting life,
Exempt from all internal injury,
...

and how this same friend had a dream of an Arab who carried

... underneath one arm
 A Stone; and in the opposite hand, a Shell
 Of a surpassing brightness. ...
 ... the Arab told him that the Stone,
 To give it in the language of the Dream,
 Was Euclid's Elements; 'and this', said he,
 'This other' pointing to the Shell, 'this Book
 Is something of more worth'

The Shell and the Stone represented the two aspects of knowledge, Poetry and Mathematics, considered most worth preserving from the Deluge.

Wordsworth's attitude to mathematics and his opinion on its influence on his development as a poet is revealed in the sixth book of the Prelude;

Yet may we not entirely overlook
 The pleasure gathered from the rudiments
 Of geometric science. Though advanced
 In these enquiries, with regret I speak,
 No farther than the threshold, there I found
 Both elevation and composed delight:

.....
did I meditate
 On the relations those abstractions bear
 To Nature's laws, and by what process led,
 Those immaterial agents bowed their heads
 Duly to serve the mind of earth-born man;
 From star to star, from kindred sphere to sphere,
 From system on to system without end.

He continues by telling the story of a man shipwrecked without food or clothes, but having saved a treatise on geometry, and how this man would go apart from his companions and gain solace by drawing diagrams in the sand. He then compares his own state with that of the shipwrecked man:

So then it was with me, and so will be
 With Poets ever. Mighty is the charm
 Of those abstractions to a mind beset
 With images and haunted by herself,
 And specially delightful unto me
 Was that dear syntheses built up aloft
 So gracefully; even then when it appears
 Not more than a mere plaything, or a toy
 To sense embodied: not the thing it is
 In verity, an independent world,
 Created out of pure intelligence.

Wordsworth obviously found enjoyment in mathematics, particularly geometry and astronomy, and he considered it an important factor in 'Nature's laws', on which his philosophy was based. He regretted however that he had not continued to study the subject in depth, and had only attained a comparatively low level of competence.

Why did he achieve so little academically at Cambridge? He was not the first student, and certainly not the last, to be carried away by the

excitements of life at the university after the restrictions of school life, and for him the lack of a settled home at that time must be taken into account. It would appear that the thorough grounding in mathematics which he had received at Hawkshead would have been sufficient to enable him to acquire an honours degree with very little further effort. If he had done this he would almost certainly have obtained a fellowship at Cambridge and with it financial security. However he rejected both academic and financial rewards. He disliked the hypocrisy of some of the senior members of the university, and was not tempted to join them. Even more he disliked the intensively competitive system of the Tripos examination, which put tremendous pressure on those straining to obtain the highest honours. He comments in the Prelude:

Examinations, when the man was weighed
As in a balance! of excessive hopes,
Tremblings withal and commendable fears,
Small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad -
Let others that know more speak as they know.
Such glory was but little sought by me,
and little won

and I grieved
To see displayed among an eager few,
Who in the field of conquest persevered,
Passions unworthy of youth's generous heart
And mounting spirit, pitiably repaid,
When so disturbed, whatever palms are won.

If he had had the will to try for an honours degree, he could probably have done so by working hard at his studies in his final year. His decision to tour the continent was crucial, and showed that he had definitely decided against academic success, and its attendant stresses.

Wordsworth makes reference to mathematics later in the Prelude, when at the end of his visit to France he

Yielded up moral questions in despair,
And for my future studies, as the sole
Employment of the enquiring faculty,
Turn'd towards mathematics, and their clear
And solid evidence

It is plain that he had derived lasting satisfaction from the study of mathematics, in particular geometry and astronomy.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Molly Lefebure, *The Bondage of Love: A Life of Mrs. Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Gollancz, 1986, £15.95.

Sara Coleridge, the widow of the poet, died at Chester Place, Regent's Park, on 24th September, 1845, a few days after her seventy-fifth birthday. Her daughter Sara (the brilliant editor of several of her father's prose works) was away from the home which she shared with her mother, and Mrs. Coleridge was, characteristically in the middle of writing a letter making light of a heart condition and urging Sara not to worry: 'Now, dearest Child, make yourself easy about me ... and pray do not think of coming home a minute sooner than you first intended ...' She died, instantaneously and peacefully, in the middle of dressing, giving everyone around her the minimum of fuss.

Molly Lefebure's biography of Mrs. Coleridge tells the tale of a woman who learned, positively heroically, not to make a fuss. Resignation had not initially been her mode. Mrs. Coleridge was naturally energetic, courageous, clearheaded and resourceful. She repeatedly made a home in the midst of the most difficult circumstances (having begun married life in a cottage by the sea with only a double bed, a pair of old prints, an Eolian harp and a husband who was already hooked on laudanum and chronically unable to settle down to steady work and earning a regular income). When she felt that wrong had been done by or to those who were dear to her Mrs. Coleridge originally had a sharp tongue and a peppery temper. She learned iron self command in a

hard school and one is truly grateful that the last years of her life brought her a safe haven and relatively few tragedies or serious reasons for worry. Before that her troubles had been enough to quell all but the stoutest heart.

Sarah Fricker was the daughter of a would-be gentleman who managed his business affairs so ill that he went bankrupt in 1786, then died and left a widow and six young children virtually destitute. He was the first of several men who let his daughter Sarah down badly: the girl had to take up her needle and help her mother with a small dame school. In due course her sister Edith married Robert Southey. Sarah, in the surge and eddy of Pantisocratic enthusiasm, was pursued, fled from and eventually (with Southey's help) led to the altar and persuaded to drop the final 'H' from her Christian name by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The marriage, whose story Molly Lefebure so vividly tells, began rapturously, ran into difficulties as Coleridge's addiction to opium increased, collapsed painfully and messily into an eventual separation and finally achieved a rather ghostly but wanly affectionate kind of reconciliation when Mrs. Coleridge went to live in London with Sara and her husband (and cousin) Henry Nelson Coleridge in the early 1830s and visits were exchanged with the poet, now resident with the Gillmans at Highgate.

For well over a century Mrs. Coleridge was written off as violent-tempered and rather stupid. But a single page from her letters is enough to show her very real intelligence. Indeed the letters which she wrote to Coleridge, absent in Germany, when their second baby boy Berkeley fell ill and died of tuberculosis in 1799 still compel admiration for her heroism in the face of repeated alarms, false hopes, relapses and then the final tragedy which she faced on her own while ill, virtually penniless and struggling to control the natural feelings of anguish which the Thomas Day-like rationalist Tom Poole was imploring her not to impart to Coleridge lest the scholarly equilibrium of that mighty but oversensitive mind should be upset. Later, at Greta Hall, when Coleridge threatened spasms and imminent death in the face of her understandable worries and strongly-expressed opinions concerning his subservience of his own career to that of Wordsworth, Dorothy's patronising ways, and his embarrassing fixation on Sarah Hutchinson, Mrs. Coleridge virtually abandoned her attempts to nag him back onto the path of reason. She could not cease worrying, but genius must be let go its own way ... which proved to be towards Malta and, ultimately, to that separation which left her in a socially-equivocal situation relying on the goodwill of Robert Southey (who shows up well in this narrative) for a home.

Coleridge turned against his wife at Greta Hall, when they had been married for scarcely half a dozen years. His complaints were magnified for posterity by Dorothy Wordsworth who did not yet understand what laudanum was doing to his personality. Later Coleridge was to claim that the Wordsworths had turned against him, along with Sarah Hutchinson, Humphrey Davy and others of his friends. Molly Lefebure's knowledge of drug addiction and the addicted enables her in this present biography, as it did in her earlier *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium*, to find the real villain of the piece not in any single individual, as earlier writers tended to do, but in opium itself: in the early-begun and steadily-increased consumption of laudanum which produced changed mental

processes and a slacker hold of reality (together with a more aggressive fending off of his own sense of guiltiness) leading Coleridge to distrust and then reject first his wife and later the friends who had been most dear to him. It is a painful story, since everyone closely involved suffered a great deal, and at times gravely misjudged one another; it is saved from tragedy only by Coleridge's heroic ultimately - successful attempts to come to grips with his addiction, and by Mrs. Coleridge's unflinching courage throughout. In the end, with her children up and out in the world, she could find it in her heart to be compassionate, even affectionate, towards her husband.

The Lambs feature less in Mrs. Coleridge's story than in the poet's, but as always they never shirked involvement when it could be of help, and Mary Lamb in particular showed sterling good sense. Molly Lefebure tells Mrs. Coleridge's story clearly and vividly, marshalling her material with a confidence which can afford to leave unemphasised the fact that much of it is original, the fruit of first-hand research. A century and a half after Mrs. Coleridge's death, the lady who destroyed everything in her possession that might incriminate her husband or cause his reputation to suffer, and whose own reputation long suffered as a result, stands clear of rumour and false assertions, her integrity, her courage and her intelligence finally established in a narrative whose zest and energy mirror those same qualities in her own prose.

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Lucy Newlyn: *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion*
Oxford 1986 £22.50

In her *Preface* Lucy Newlyn defines with admirable clarity her intentions in this book. Allusions, she says, can 'work as figurative language to expand meaning through suggestion' providing 'a private bond: with the initiated reader, who is allowed access to hidden meanings, and with the other writer, whose words are being quoted, appropriated or misused. The writer whose work is alluded to can rarely be the same as the initiated reader; but when this is the case allusion becomes dialogue'. It is 'a dialogue of this special kind' between Coleridge and Wordsworth that is examined here and the emphasis is on the differences between the two poets, so that 'A borrowing which may appear on the surface to express shared assumptions and common aims can register, on a more submerged level, disparity, aggression or unease'. Dr. Newlyn uncovers this complicated web of allusion and cross-reference in poems written by the two friends. She selects certain periods for examination with 'the specially allusive poetry of 1802 as a centrepiece, flanked on one side by a reinterpretation of the Alfoxden period, in which differences first emerge; on the other by a discussion of major allusive texts in the years 1804-7'. Her contention is that Wordsworth and Coleridge built a 'myth' of unity which Wordsworth, in particular, clung to until it was impossible to ignore what was, in Lamb's phrase, the 'very disagreeable reality'. But the tension itself in the relationship had been creative, enabling each of them to discover his own artistic individuality.

Lucy Newlyn boldly but convincingly asserts that '*Lyrical Ballads*, which critic after critic has contrived to see as a planned and shared enterprise, is in reality a volume of heterogeneous poems which is most unlikely to have been thought out with any care'. *The Ancient Mariner*, 'the only "supernatural" poem in the volume' was composed earlier for another purpose and *Tintern Abbey* was 'put in as an afterthought'. Coleridge's account in *Biographia Literaria* was retrospective and unreliable, just as were his statements about the early impression made on him by *Descriptive Sketches* and *Salisbury Plain* as a literary one, whereas Dr. Newlyn says what probably really attracted him to Wordsworth then was political, his 'radical sympathies'. She affirms that 'It is in poems written alongside (and against) each other, not in so-called "collaborative" schemes, that one finds a true language of allusion', and on her marvellous examination of this interplay the strength of the book depends. Not only in dealing with comparisons that might not so immediately have occurred to us, such as between 'Lines left on a Seat in a Yew-tree' and 'This Lime-tree Bower', or 'The Foster Mother's Tale' and 'The Pedlar', but also in the analysis of poems we have long seen as interdependent, such as those of 1802, Dr. Newlyn shows a challenging originality and brilliance. In addition to the poets' private reference she demonstrates how they also make use of a shared public reference, for example Biblical, Spenserian or, in particular, Miltonic allusion, which becomes both a bond and an alienation.

The climax of the poets' growing divergence comes, of course, in 1802 and in her treatment of this period Lucy Newlyn is both at her most impressive and her most controversial. This central section of the book provides a particularly illuminating account of the poems from 1802 to 1804 and one is filled with admiration for her close study of the 'dialogue' that they represent. But the trouble with extrapolating from so necessarily oblique a subject as allusion is that very different diagnoses can be drawn from the same data. Just occasionally some of the conclusions that she arrives at, notably about the degree of aggression to be found, seem perhaps to be 'not proven'. For instance, in an otherwise outstanding chapter on Wordsworth's two versions of 'Resolution and Independence', she states that 'It is with an instinct for self-preservation that he writes *The Leechgatherer*. Not, as some critics have supposed, from the desire to console or sympathize with Coleridge, but with the need to assert an alternative way of seeing'. Apart from the fact that these two things are not mutually exclusive, it is perhaps a matter of responding to tone. Though ostensibly speaking of himself, surely it is hard not to see suffering on behalf of his friend, as well as some exasperation with him, in the lines that so exactly describe Coleridge:

How can he e'er expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him who for himself will take no heed at all.

Again, in this chapter, referring to the opening of the poem, she says, 'Every detail of the scene is put there for a purpose: to declare that this poet, unlike Coleridge, can see *and* feel how beautiful they are, and that he knows this beauty is not projected'. Yet who had started this particular dialogue with the lament that the world that once was 'Apparell'd in celestial light' is so no longer and that 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more'? That Wordsworth's belief in a continuing life of Nature

'outside the fallible and finite mind' contrasts radically with Coleridge's 'projection' seems rather, perhaps, a distinction without a difference, when both describe loss in the same imagery of clothing and of light, cast by the mind over the external world. That both poets are talking about a reciprocity which fails if either partner, the human mind or the external world (as when 'in city pent' for example), cannot do its part seems to be acknowledged later, on page 161, by Dr. Newlyn.

This is just one example of a tendency to be at times a little too categorical, both about the development of each poet individually and about the differences between them. As in this case, often later in the book this is corrected. For instance, in an early chapter she states that 'One is aware that Wordsworth himself is no symbolist', yet in the end she goes on to show that, in certain poems and in his own way, that is exactly what he is. One of the difficulties is that the meaning of the word 'symbolic' seems to shift.

However, these puzzling moments are rare. Usually she is most careful to provide a balance in her description of the ambivalent nature of the relationship reflected in the poetry, as where she says, '*The Pedlar* succeeds in at once celebrating the "One Life" and offering a critique of Coleridge's ways of thinking'. In the latter part of the book, where she is no longer worrying so much about *theoretical* differences, she gives an admirable account of the theme of childhood and of Coleridge's presence in *The Prelude*, and ends with his 'To William Wordsworth' and with Wordsworth's 'A Complaint', in which he faces the truth about his friend, 'a poem', Lucy Newlyn rightly says, 'of clear edges and of emotions so strong they hurt'. This was in 1806/7 and surely Dr. Newlyn is correct in thinking that the creative conflict of their years up to this time had proved for each poet 'a means of self-definition'. Like theirs, the relationship between the reader and this exciting book will surely be one both of sincere admiration and of that desire to argue by which we re-examine our assumptions and arrive at our own conclusions.

Mary Wedd

LAMB AT THE WORDSWORTH WINTER SCHOOL

The anniversary of Charles Lamb's birthday was not overlooked amid the intellectual and social delights of the Wordsworth Winter School at the Prince of Wales Hotel, Grasmere, this year. A sizeable contingent of Lamb Society members was in residence and, for that one evening alone, we grouped ourselves for dinner in splendid isolation from our friends at a separate long table in order that the birthday might be celebrated with good food, good conversation and toasts to the memory of Charles and Mary Lamb.

We were, however, beaten to it! Earlier in the evening Richard Wordsworth took advantage of the late arrival of one our lecturers (himself a long-standing member of the Charles Lamb Society: his name, therefore, shall remain shrouded!) and gave a delightful short programme of readings chiefly from *Elia*, with Mrs. Battle in particularly triumphant mood to mark the birthday of her creator. Richard Wordsworth gave a second short Lamb programme later in the week and his readings, the excellence of the January *Bulletin* (which was on display) and the general niceness of the resident

Lambians must be held to have made a lasting impression on those present: seven new members of the Society were recruited (or rather offered themselves, since no actual recruiting was done) before the Winter School came to a close. So the five days ended in a fine blaze of Wordsworthian and Lambian fellow feeling, with many hopes of reunions at the Mary Ward Centre before the next Wordsworth Winter School, which will run from 28 February till 4 March 1988.

Bill Ruddick

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

FROM Mr. R. HOWELL

Mr. Howell draws our attention to an article in *The Great Outdoors*, the Walkers' Magazine for March 1987 called 'A Winter Walk to Baldock'. The author, Glenn Domagala, describes a delightful - but lengthy, 13½ miles - walk, mainly on footpaths, from Whempstead via Great Munden and Luffenhall to Baldock. It takes in Button Snap on the way and reports a signpost 'to Button Snap, 700 metres'. The article correctly recounts the cottage's connection with Charles Lamb but must have been written while it was still in the care of the Charles Lamb Society. Perhaps some members of the Society might enjoy doing at least part of this walk, if not the whole of it. It is covered by OS 1:50,000 sheet 166.

FROM MISS FLORENCE REEVES

Although I am no longer the Membership Secretary, I am happy to say that I still receive letters from members. One such, from our New Zealand member Mrs. Hilda Hall, contained a delightful piece of news about her son Roger, who received the following message from the Governor General of New Zealand:

'I have much pleasure in informing you that the Queen has been graciously pleased, on the occasion of the New Year, to confer upon you the honour of Companion of the Queen's Service Order for Community Service. Please accept my warm congratulations. Paul Reeves, Governor General'.

We send our congratulations to Roger and our thanks to Hilda for giving us the opportunity to share in her family's rejoicing.

A NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL - FROM DR. JACK W. RHODES

The first Volume of *Nineteenth-Century Studies* is announced for Spring 1987. Its contents include subjects embracing the interplay of art, music, theatre and literature. Subscriptions are: Individual \$15, Institutional \$25 and the Editor is Suzanne O. Edwards, Department of English, The Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina 29409, U.S.A.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 4 April, 1987, at the Mary Ward Centre, W.C.1. After the adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts, the Hon. Treasurer proposed that the subscription rate, which had not gone up for four years, should be increased from 1 January 1988, if it were to cover day-to-day expenses. A new rate was agreed, according to his recommendation, as follows:-

U.K. Members	Singles	£8
	Doubles	£12
	Institutions	£12
Overseas	Individuals	\$14
	Institutions	\$21

Our admirable Treasurer having expressed his wish to retire at the end of the coming year, we have been fortunate in finding a worthy successor in Mr.N. Powell and it was unanimously agreed that they should be elected as Joint Treasurers for 1987-8.

The Hon. General Secretary reported that the Programme for next season is almost complete and we hope to include it with this *Bulletin*.

Officers and Council were duly elected and gratitude was expressed for the services of retiring members.