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LAMB'S *SPECIMENS OF ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS*: THE PUBLISHING CONTEXT AND THE PRINCIPLES OF SELECTION.

Gillian Russell

*University of Salzburg*

Within the last few years our perceptions of eighteenth-century culture have been subtly changing. Historians and literary critics are paying greater attention to the circumstances of literary production in this period, particularly the effects of the extension of reading and the increasing sophistication of the book trade. (1) One of the most significant casualties of these changes was the eighteenth-century theatre. New patterns of reading and play publication elevated the status of the dramatic text at the expense of performance, leading to the emergence of 'closet' drama and causing the perception of the terms 'dramatic' and 'theatrical' to be fundamentally altered. The aim of this article is to consider Charles Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakspeare* in the light of these changes, to define its historical status as a dramatic text and to examine the nature of Lamb's reading of the Elizabethan dramatists.

I

The various kinds of published drama in the eighteenth century reflect its importance as a commodity to be modified according to the needs of the reader. At the one end of the scale there is the kind of playbook which the diarist Syllas Neville brought with him to Drury Lane when, in 1767, he saw *The Suspicious Husband* and *The Beggar's Opera* -- a modest duo-decimo volume which could be easily slipped in and out of his pocket as he read

these plays between the acts. (2) At the other end of the scale, however, we find 'dramatic poems' such as William Mason's *Elfrida* and Horace Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* printed in large unwieldy formats with scholarly notes and prefaces that suggest an affinity with the solitary closet rather than the bustle of the theatre. (3) D.F. McKenzie and Peter Holland have drawn attention to the significance of the format of the printed play in relation to Restoration drama; title pages and cast lists can often tell us a great deal about how plays of this period should be interpreted. (4) Eighteenth-century texts followed this practice -- the publication of Garrick's adaptations is a prime example -- but there are also signs of an increasing dissociation from the stage, of texts, like those of Mason and Walpole which in their shape, size and very typography connote a rejection of the theatre.

The tendency to aestheticize the dramatic text, thus divorcing it from the theatre, is nowhere more apparent than in the eighteenth-century fashion for 'old plays' -- Elizabethan and Jacobean quartos -- the pursuit of which became a kind of literary sport for the rich and influential. Edmond Malone, acting as agent for Lord Charlemont, complained about having to surrender a quarto of *Much Ado About Nothing* to no less than George III while in 1800 Lamb himself wrote despairingly to Wordsworth that the prospects of finding old plays were bleak -- 'Beaumont & Fletcher in folio, the right folio, not now to be met with'. (5) Until now, scholars have placed Lamb's *Specimens* firmly within this antiquarian and scholarly tradition with its attendant images of old quartos mouldering in dark country house libraries. In the 1930s Wasserman and Williams challenged the view that Lamb had single-handedly discovered the Elizabethan dramatists by showing his indebtedness to previous scholarship in the eighteenth century, while James Shokhoff successfully redressed the balance on Lamb's behalf by emphasizing his original contribution to a revival of interest in Ford, Dekker and especially Marlowe. (6)

Accepting that the question of the relationship between the *Specimens* and previous scholarship is now settled, it would seem that there is more to be said about Lamb's achievement in terms of the general history of published drama in the eighteenth century. Firstly, it is necessary to rid the interest in old plays of some of its suggestions of elitist connoisseurship. The most important precedent for the *Specimens* was Robert Dodsley's *A Select Collection of Old Plays* (1744) which was a successful attempt to make old plays more accessible to the general reader, to ensure that they were not simply the preserve of aristocrats, kings and scholars. (7) In an advertisement to the *Collection* Dodsley noted the fact that old plays were 'scarce and extravagantly dear' and declared his intention of printing a series of pocket volumes 'at so cheap a rate that they shall not exceed Sixpence each play'. (8) Although he stressed the scholarly respectability of the texts he assured his potential customers that they would not be burdened with the apparatus of criticism. The original orthography of the old plays was not adhered to because it would be 'very disagreeable' to the 'Generality of Readers'. Dodsley also seems to have hoped that some of the plays might even be performed on the London stage and indeed, the appearance of the *Old Plays* in 1744 was followed four years later by Garrick's production of Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. The success of Dodsley's *Old Plays* lay in divesting Elizabethan and Jacobean texts of the aura of obsolete artefacts and also in demonstrating the marketing potential of the dramatic collection to John Bell, among others. (9) By the late

eighteenth century old plays had become essential and above all, accessible elements of the library of the general reader.

In his preface to the *Specimens*, Lamb acknowledged his debt to Dodsley when he claimed that two-thirds of the texts came from 'Dodsley's and Hawkins's collections, and the works of Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger'. (10) The debt, however, goes further. Dodsley made the *Specimens* possible by extending the readership for old plays; like the *Select Collection* Lamb's book is aimed at a literate middle ground rather than a scholarly elite. (11) Lamb shares with Dodsley a conviction of the vitality of these plays and their relevance to contemporary life, a desire to 'show in what manner' the Elizabethans 'felt' rather than display curiosities of orthography. (12) This is apparent when we compare the *Specimens* with the work of the other editor to whom Lamb acknowledges a debt -- Thomas Hawkins, whose *Origin of English Drama* was published in 1773. This is a collection of those plays which Hawkins had discovered in the course of preparing a new edition of Hanmer's *Shakespeare* for the University of Oxford. Convinced that their 'beauties' had been distorted in contemporary editions, Hawkins located 'the earliest and most correct impressions of them', largely through the assistance of Garrick. (13) *The Origin of English Drama* is a much more scholarly work than either Dodsley or Lamb's *Specimens*. In the case of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, for example, Hawkins sought to remove many of the 'gross errors' in Dodsley and establish a kind of authoritative text. With reference to the *Specimens* as a whole Lamb acknowledges in his preface that where 'a line or two was obscure, as having reference to something that had gone before, which would have asked more time to explain than its consequence in the scene seemed to deserve, I have had no hesitation in leaving the line or passage out'. (14) Clearly, the *Specimens* was not intended for the scholarly endorsement of people like Hawkins.

Lamb, like Dodsley, was therefore a populariser of old plays. But while the *Specimens* may owe a greater debt to the *Select Collection* than to Hawkins, there are still significant differences between the two works. As bookseller and publisher of the *Select Collection* Dodsley claims little more than commercial title to these plays; he does not attempt to interpret or interpose between them and the reader. Lamb's *Specimens*, however, represent a personal reading of the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods; the editor's presence is a constant factor in this book. The other overwhelming difference between the two texts, related to Lamb's role as editor, is the fact that in Dodsley's case the integrity of the original texts is largely maintained. They are presented entire, with in many cases lists of *dramatis personae*, and even the author's preface to the original printed play, thus making Dodsley's role as editor even more of an impersonal one. Lamb's text, however, represents 'specimens' of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, a personally selected collection of extracts from these plays. In this respect the *Specimens* demonstrates its affinity with another significant tradition in eighteenth-century published drama, represented by *The British Muse* (1738) and *The Beauties of the English Stage* (1756). (15) These were dramatic commonplace books which consisted of quotations from a variety of texts grouped under such headings as 'Avarice' or 'Gaming'. The stated purpose of *The Beauties of the English Stage* was 'to shew the different Modes of *theatrical* Expression, from the Time of Shakespear to the present Day' and as such the collection complements Dodsley. (16) Later books of extracts showed a bias towards the contemporary theatre. *The*

*Beauties of the Stage: or, Dramatic Companion* is an interesting example aimed primarily at the amateur actor in the spouting club. Scenes and soliloquies from such long established plays as *Douglas* and *George Barnwell* were selected as histrionic for the aspiring Kemble or Siddons. (17) Walley Chamberlain Oulton's *Beauties of Modern Dramatists* and *The Beauties of Kotzebue* (both 1800) also followed the commonplace book formula, the latter including extracts under at least seven different permutations of 'affection' from 'filial' to 'conjugal'. (18)

The equivalent of the modern *Oxford Book of ...*, these collections of dramatic extracts were well suited to the needs of the casual reader. Entertainment could be usefully combined with moral instruction as the publishers isolated the 'valuable' elements of the old plays leaving all 'impurities' behind. The underlying assumption was that these texts were ossified, irrelevant, to be raided only for their sentimental aphorisms and for any light which they might throw on the far superior works of Shakespeare. Any sense of the old plays as living drama was ignored. In a letter to Robert Lloyd, Lamb objected strongly to this aspect of the 'extracts':

How beggarly and how bald do even Shakespear's Princely Pieces look, when thus violently divorced from *connexion & circumstance!* when we meet with To be or not to be -- or Jacques's moralizings upon the Deer -- or Brutus and Cassius' quarrel & reconciliation -- in an Enfield speaker or in Elegant Extracts -- how we stare & will scarcely acknowledge to ourselves (what we are conscious we feel) that they are flat & have no power ... Every thing in heaven & earth, in man and in story, in books & in fancy, acts by *Confederacy*, by juxtaposition, by circumstance & *place*. (19)

He repeats these views in the preface to the *Specimens*: 'I have chosen wherever I could to give entire scenes, and in some instances successive scenes, rather than to string together single passages and detached beauties, which I have always found wearisome in the reading in selections of this nature'. (20) It is this factor which sets Lamb apart from the two traditions in published drama which I have been describing. His approach is to focus on significant scenes which for him represent the essence of the play rather than to select lines or speeches which may illustrate some kind of extraneous morality, foreign to the experience of the original writer. On the other hand, he does not, like Dodsley, merely present the text as a whole for our consideration but mediates between the reader and the old play, offering us a reading of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that is, in effect, a radical interpretation of what constitutes 'drama' and the 'dramatic'.

## II

The nature of Lamb's approach to the dramatic text is apparent from the very beginning of *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* in his selection from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Lamb prefaces the extract with an account of the events in the play which have immediately gone before:

Horatio the son of Hieronimo is murdered while he is sitting with his mistress Belimperia by night in an arbour in his father's garden. The murderers (Balthazar his rival, and Lorenzo, the brother of Belimperia) hang his body on a tree. Hieronimo is awakened by the

cries of Belimperia, and coming out into his garden, discovers by the light of a torch, that the murdered man is his son. Upon this he goes distracted. (21)

By summarizing the plot of *The Spanish Tragedy* in such a way, Lamb effectively removes any possibility of suspense or surprise from the subsequent extract; clearly the reading of each 'specimen' is not designed to be analogous to experiencing that play for the first time. The events of the play are dealt with in these few lines and Lamb then goes on to present the scene in which Hieronimo asks a painter if he can illustrate his grief. The fact that Lamb chose this particular passage, in spite of Hawkins's doubts about its authorship, brings into question the nature of his interest in it. Was he fascinated with it because it is concerned with the difficulty of representing reality, with finding words or visual images that could convey the full meaning of suffering and horror? In terms of Lamb's text the tragic events of the play remain on the periphery, summarized so devastatingly in the brief synopsis. Hieronimo's interchange with the painter is essentially post-dramatic; it is a moment of stasis, a contemplation of an action which is also a contemplation on the metaphysical impossibility of all action.

So from a tragedy rich in the melodrama of revenge, the drawn dagger, the murderous confrontation, Lamb chooses a scene in which nothing superficially 'dramatic' happens, in which the very significance of dramatic action itself is suspended and questioned. Whereas we experience a play as a linear progression of the sequence of actions on stage and we are conscious of the passing of time itself, such a passage, like the epiphanic 'spots of time' in Wordsworth's poetry, effectively suspends this process. Reading it is thus to be at odds with the dimensions of a play in performance, and by abstracting it in such a way from *The Spanish Tragedy* Lamb is emphasizing just how much, in terms of both structure and content, it stands outside the logic of the play's events.

Lamb's concern with situation rather than action, with the slipstream of tragedy in which the actuality of events is perceived at a remove, is apparent throughout the *Specimens*. Marston's *History of Antonio and Mellida* is not represented by a scene of crisis but by a dialogue between a page, Lucio, and his master who have been abandoned on the territory of an enemy: Lamb notes that the 'situation ... resembles that of Lear and Kent, in that King's distresses'. (22) In this case, only one scene is selected to represent Marston's play but even when Lamb uses 'successive scenes' as he noted in the preface, they are presented in such a way that the overwhelming impression is still one of 'situation' rather than dramatic process. One of the most poignant pieces in the *Specimens* is the selection from Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, an Elizabethan domestic tragedy which would have appealed to an era when the German sentimentalists such as Kotzebue were reaching the peak of their popularity. Lamb's selection begins with the scene in which 'Frankford discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him' followed by her flight: he then goes on to show the servant Nicholas overtaking Mrs. Frankford on her journey to give her the lute which she has left behind; finally, the selection culminates with a scene in which Frankford forgives his errant spouse on her deathbed. By orientating the play according to these elemental scenes Lamb gives it the emblematic significance of the progresses of Hogarth or the pictorial narratives of marital infidelity so loved by the Victorians. The pictorial analogy is important because it indicates the extent to which the reading of the *Specimens*

is a refinement of our ways of reading a conventional eighteenth-century dramatic text. Lamb presents us with a series of elemental scenes which represent a distillation of the play; his directions concentrate those elements of plot development, characterisation and incident at work in the text as a whole giving the specimen the intensity of a well-wrought short story.

A determining factor in Lamb's selection from the old plays is therefore a tragic aesthetic which focusses on situation rather than process, but equally important is the suspicion of theatricality which dominates his later essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakspeare, considered with reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation'. This is apparent in Lamb's reading of *The Duchess of Malfi*. His selection of scenes from the play begins with the Duchess's marriage proposal to Antonio, its pastoral overtones serving to intensify the horrors of the fourth act with which the rest of the extract is concerned. As in *The Spanish Tragedy* Lamb summarizes the events in prose of brutal exactness: 'The Duchess's marriage with Antonio being discovered, her brother Ferdinand shuts her up in a Prison, and torments her with various trials of studied Cruelty. By his command, Bosola, the instrument of his Devices, shows her the Bodies of her Husband and Children counterfeited in Wax, as dead'. And, later: 'She is kept waking with noises of Madmen: and, at last, is strangled by common Executioners'. (23)

In his comments on the play, Lamb expresses his shocked admiration for Webster's capacity to turn the screw of the tragedy so skilfully and contrasts the ineffectualness of traditional tropes of suffering with the audacious reality of the theatrical images which are used to drive the Duchess to despair: 'What are "Luke's iron crown", the brazen bull of Perillus, Procrustes' bed, to the waxen images which counterfeit death, to the wild masque of madmen, the tomb-maker, the bell-man, the living person's dirge, the mortification by degrees!!'. (24) However, in the text of the play in the *Specimens*, these images and events are not quoted directly, but paraphrased in directions and summaries such as that quoted above. Lamb, as before in *The Spanish Tragedy*, is more concerned with the responses of the characters than with the events on stage which stimulate them; but whereas in Kyd's play this contemplation of horror at a remove is integral to the meaning of the tragedy, in *The Duchess of Malfi* it is more clearly an expression of Lamb's own attitude towards this kind of theatre. The dance of the madmen, the doll-like figures of death, are so shocking in their potential reality that Lamb must confine them to his summaries and scene directions, the interstices of the text as presented in the *Specimens*. This is not a diminution of the tragic power of *The Duchess of Malfi*; on the contrary, by paraphrasing the events onstage in such a way, excluding them from his direct transcription of Webster's text, Lamb ensures that their reality is heightened and intensified -- but in a way entirely different from how they would affect us in the theatre. For Lamb, the central scenes of *The Duchess of Malfi* evoke the horror of a nightmare suddenly remembered, a response of shocked meditation -- not the kind of engagement which such events would create in the theatre, where their immediacy is continually counteracted by our awareness of the mechanics of the illusion. This capacity for what S.L. Bethall defined as the multi-conscious apprehension of events in the theatre is often directly represented in Elizabethan texts. (25) An example is the final reconciliation scene in *A Woman Killed With Kindness* when Nicholas the servant interjects Frankford's declared wish

to die with his wife, which has been echoed by those assembled at her deathbed, with the comment: 'I'll sigh and sob, but by my faith not die'. As John Coates points out, Lamb omitted this line from his extract from his play in the *Specimens*, perhaps because he felt that it was inappropriate in a scene of such consummate pathos. (26) In doing so, he ignored its important theatrical dimension, the way in which Nicholas's wry comment objectifies the scene, and reminds the audience of the limitations of involvement. For Lamb, however, involvement is everything. His specimen of *The Duchess of Malfi* represents a reading of the play which purges it of its theatricality, producing an experience for the reader which is still shocking in its intensity but essentially different from how the tragedy would be apprehended in the theatre or even in the form of a complete acting text.

*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* is a text which is heavily indebted to two significant traditions in drama publication -- the play collection in the form of Dodsley and play extracts in the form of *The Beauties of the English Stage* -- but which also departs significantly from them in its emphasis on the dramatic moment. It is thus of fundamental importance to the history of the relationship between the text and performance and also to the development of narrative forms. As Joseph W. Donohue and Martin Meisel have shown, the emphasis on situation exerted an important influence on nineteenth century drama and the visual arts. (27) On the one hand this influence was deforming, producing a kind of closet drama which was concerned with states of mind but remained theatrically inarticulate; on the other hand it led to the development of particularly twentieth century narrative forms such as that of the cinema which unfolds its story by means of discrete visual units. With its interest in situation Lamb's *Specimens* prefigures these changes and can thus be seen as an important stage in the transformation of eighteenth-century culture into the narrative forms and media that dominate the culture of today.

#### NOTES

1. See Isabel Rivers, ed. *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Leicester, 1982); John Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1985).
2. *The Diary of Syllas Neville 1767-1788*, ed. by Basil Cozens-Hardy (Oxford, 1950), pp.9-10, p.22.
3. William Mason, *Elfrida, a dramatic poem* (London, 1752), Horace Walpole, *The Mysterious Mother: a tragedy* (London, 1781).
4. D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London, 1986); Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge, 1979).
5. *The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont*, Historical Manuscripts Commission, Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Part VIII, Volume II 1784-1799 (London, 1894), p. 52; *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. by Edwin W. Marris Jr, 3 vols (Ithaca, New York, 1975-78), II (1976), 146.
6. E.R. Wasserman, 'The Scholarly Origins of the Elizabethan Revival', *ELH*, 4 (1937), 213-43; R.D. Williams, 'Antiquarian Interest in Elizabethan Drama before Lamb', *PMLA*, 53 (1938), 434-44; J. Shokhoff, 'Charles Lamb and the Elizabethan Dramatists: A Reassessment', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 4 (1973), 3-11.

7. Robert Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays*, 12 vols (1744).
8. Ralph Strauss, *Robert Dodsley: Poet, Publisher and Playwright* (London, 1910), pp.63-64.
9. *Bell's British Theatre*, 20 vols (London, 1776-1778) was a collection of the contemporary acting drama.
10. Preface to *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the Time of Shakspeare* in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E.V. Lucas, 7 vols (London, 1903-05), IV, xi, hereafter referred to as *Works*.
11. This was acknowledged by the reviewer of the *Specimens* in *Monthly Review*, 58 (1809), 349-356.
12. *Works*, IV, xii.
13. Thomas Hawkins, *The Origin of English Drama*, 3 vols (London, 1773), I, xvi.
14. *Works*, IV, xi.
15. *The British Muse*, 3 vols (London, 1738); *The Beauties of the English Stage*, 3 vols in 1 (London, 1756), third edition.
16. *Ibid.* Vol 1, ii.
17. W. Stone, *The Beauties of the Stage: or, Dramatic Companion* [London, no date; 1792 given in catalogue, University Library, Cambridge].
18. Walley Chamberlain Oulton, *The Beauties of Modern Dramatists*, 2 vols (London, 1800); Walley Chamberlain Oulton, *The Beauties of Kotzebue* (London, 1800).
19. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, II (1976), 35-36.
20. *Works*, IV, xi.
21. *Works*, IV, 5
22. *Works*, IV, 62.
23. *Works*, IV, 173, 174.
24. *Works*, IV, 179.
25. S.L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (Westminster, 1944).
26. John Coates, 'Lamb's Bias in Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, no. 39 (July, 1982), 125-38.
27. Joseph W. Donohue Jr., *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1970); Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1983).

A MYSTIC PEREGRINATION - THE ANCIENT MARINER

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It is an ancyent Marinere,  
 And he stoppeth one of three:  
 'By thy long grey beard and thy glittering eye  
 'Now wherefore stoppest me?



'The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide  
 'And I am next of kin;  
 'The Guests are met, the Feast is set, -  
 'May'st hear the merry din. -

But still he holds the wedding-guest -  
 There was a Ship, quoth he -

And the tale of the miraculous voyage is, yet once again, about to begin.

*The Ryme of the Ancyent Marinere*, as first planned in outline by Coleridge and Wordsworth together, was, let us remind ourselves, to be a best-selling supernatural ballad, recounting the adventures of a doomed seaman, forever condemned to circumnavigate the oceans of the world, accompanied by two spectres playing dice for his soul. The poem, from the start, held a peculiar fascination and excitement for Coleridge which, totally engulfing him, carried him headlong into a millrace of composition; so that Wordsworth, apart from the well-known suggestion about the killing of the albatross, and the working of the ship by dead men, felt himself to be, as he put it, 'a clog' and left the poem entirely to his partner.

If Wordsworth, by his own admission, had little influence upon the development of the *Ancyent Marinere*, Charles Lamb had considerably more. Lamb and Coleridge shared a deep interest in the shadowy places of men's hearts and minds; there was also the factor of Lamb's personal tragic experience of insanity. At the turn of the year 1795 - 6 Lamb spent some six weeks confined in 'a mad house at Hoxton' afflicted by a temporary bout of acute mental disturbance - in his case fortunately never recurrent. In June 1796 Lamb wrote to Coleridge, 'I have recovered ... At some future time I will amuse you with an account ... of the strange turn my phrensy took'. (1)

Though Lamb records that in fact he 'did not talk much' (2) during his visit to Nether Stowey during the summer of 1797 I think it highly improbable that he did not give Coleridge some account of his 'phrensy' and that this may have influenced Coleridge in his handling of the Ancient Mariner's psychotic state of 'loneliness and fixedness', in other words, personality disassociation, which occurs in Part IV of the poem.

Experience of insanity apart, Lamb, as I have said, was always interested in the dark side of the imagination's moon. Like Coleridge, from his early years he loved old folios and the worm-eaten pages of seventeenth century authors. One of the books he much pored over in childhood was Joseph Glanville's *Philosophical Considerations Touching Witches and Witchcraft* (of 1616) and in his essay, *Witches, and Other Night-Fears*, Lamb speculated upon the primeval nature of the instinctive fears which created witches spontaneously in the imagination 'when no law of agency was understood', going on to contend that, 'It is not book or picture, or the stories of foolish servants, which create these terrors in children. They can at most but give them direction ... Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimaeras ... may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition - but they were there before. They are transcripts, types - the archetypes are in us, and eternal'.

Lamb, in his thinking here, is anticipating Jung by well over a century and a half; revealing a perception into the psychology of the collective unconscious and its archetypes, or primordial images, which (as Jung tells us), 'can rise up anywhere at any time quite spontaneously, without the least evidence of any external traditions'. (3) *The Ancient Mariner*, dealing as it does in archetypal symbols and imagery linked with the polaristic dynamic of human personality disturbance, is one of the outstanding instances of a work of genius so far in advance of its day that it goes wholly misunderstood and undervalued by the contemporary opinion (Robert Southey was speaking for the many when he wrote of the 'Mariner' in the *Critical Review* of October 1798, 'Genius here has been employed in producing a poem of little merit'). Lamb's exceptional powers of insight, on the other hand, enabled him to say of that same poem, 'I was never so affected by any human tale. After first reading it I was totally possessed with it for many days'. (4)

Not only did Lamb's direct experience of personality disassociation enable him to enter into and sympathize with the Mariner's predicament; furthermore Lamb's dedicated perusal of old folios and seventeenth century authors (and, lightly worn as it was, we should never underestimate Lamb's erudition) provided him with the knowledge necessary to appreciate exactly what Coleridge was essaying in his approach to, and handling of, the poem.

We must remind ourselves here of the initial stipulations for the work: it was, Coleridge tells us, to be a supernatural ballad in *the style as well as the spirit of the older poets*. And these stipulations Coleridge pursued with that thoroughness of which genius alone is capable.

Coleridge once observed, 'It is impossible to understand the genius of Dante, and difficult to understand his poem, without some knowledge of the characters, studies and writings of the schoolmen of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for Dante was the living link between religion and philosophy for his own age'. (5) The same might equally be said of Coleridge, and of *The Ryme of the Ancyent Marinere*, which, fundamentally, while dealing in psychological concepts far in advance of their day, simultaneously is a circumnavigation of the medieval mind and a capturing of the spirit and philosophy of medieval man. This was undoubtedly recognised and understood by Lamb, though not by less erudite contemporary readers.

The poem contains clear clues that the Ancient Mariner is pre-Reformation, pre-Magellan man; that is, a man living before 1520 (the year in which Fernando Magellan discovered the Pacific - in the poem, of course, this pioneer break-through is credited to the Mariner's ship). Thus the Ancient Mariner is fully medieval man and therefore intensely pious, and simultaneously steeped in the symbols and tenets of alchemy. And if we suppose that these two states of mind are contradictory, then that is because we no longer understand the nature and purpose of alchemy: the overriding philosophy of the medieval era.

In a well known letter to Thelwall, of November 19, 1796, Coleridge wrote, 'I am ... a great reader, and have read almost everything - a library cormorant. I am *deep* in all out of the way books ... Accounts of all

the strange phantoms that ever possessed "your philosophy"; dreamers, from Thoth the Egyptian to Taylor the English pagan, are my darling studies'. (6) John Livingstone Lowes, in his celebrated search for sources of material used in *The Ryme of the Ancyent Marinere*, indicates the truly astounding extent of Coleridge's reading in alchemystic literature (we should note, however, that Lowes, like many another, did not realize that these works which he referred to as the writings of 'shadowy ante-diluvian patriarchs' and accounts of 'ancient cults', and which Coleridge called his 'darling studies', were, in fact, alchemystical).

Coleridge makes it clear that he himself was fully aware that with his darling studies he engaged in alchemystical, as distinct from meta-physical, philosophy.

Historically, recorded alchemy originated in the first centuries A.D. in the Hellenistic culture of Alexandria; here mingled the three streams from which alchemy was formed: namely, Greek natural philosophy, Egyptian technology and the religious mysticism and astrological studies of Egypt's neighbours. When the Arabs conquered Egypt in the seventh century and overran Syria and Persia, alchemy entered its great Arab period which, in turn, evolved via Gnostic, Neoplatonic and ultimately Christian influence, into medieval western alchemystical philosophy.

## II

The problem of opposites and their union was fundamentally the chief concern of the alchemists. Indeed, among themselves they referred to alchemy as 'the spagyric art'; seeing the very essence of that art in separation and analysis on the one hand and synthesis and consolidation on the other: the maxim of alchemy being, 'Dissolve and coagulate'.

For the alchemist there was an initial state, *the chaos*, in which opposing tendencies or forces were in conflict. However this initial chaos was not self evident but had to be sought as the *prima materia*. This discovered and established, there followed the aforesaid procedure of isolation and analysis of the conflicting elements composing the chaos, in turn followed by the search for a formula which would bring the hostile elements into a state of unity.

The turning of the philosopher's stone into gold, in the metallurgical sense, was a kind of secular secondary activity, engaging a breed of men who, at the best, were serious experimental chemists, but in the main were, broadly speaking, charlatans. Ben Jonson's marvellous study of this kind of alchemist says all that can, or ever need be, said on the subject. However for the alchemystical philosophers, the pure theorists, the process involved in gold-making represented a ritual of transcendent profundity: gold symbolizing, in the first instance, that essential pagan deity, the Sun, and ultimately Christ, the Son of God himself. In the *Musaeum Hermeticum*, a Christian medieval collection of alchemical writings, it is firmly stated that, 'Christ is composed and united with the earthly philosophical stone of the Sages, whose material and preparation is a ... lifelike image of the reincarnation of Christ'.

In sum, to quote Jung, 'Alchemy, with its wealth of symbols, gives us an insight into an endeavour of the human mind which could be compared with a religious rite ... The difference between them is that the alchemical opus

was not a collective activity rigorously defined as to its form and content, but rather, despite the similarity of their fundamental principles, an *individual* undertaking on which the adept staked his whole soul for the transcendental purpose of producing a *Unity*. It was a work of reconciliation between apparently incompatible opposites, which were understood not merely as the natural hostility of the physical elements but at the same time as a moral conflict. Since the object of this endeavour was seen ... as both physical and psychic, the work extended as it were through the whole of nature, and its goal consisted in a symbol which had an empirical and at the same time a transcendental aspect'. (7)

From this we can surely see why Coleridge, with his firm insistence that, 'An idea, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but with a *symbol*', (8) and his lifelong concern with the problem of the reconciliation of opposites, should have become profoundly interested in alchemy and the alchemists. He appreciated that alchemistical philosophy, exercising as it had the best speculative intelligences over a period of some seventeen centuries, was not to be deprecated or dismissed as no longer worthy of attention simply because it had ultimately been superseded by Kantian metaphysics. Generations of men regarded as the most enlightened of their day had devoted themselves to alchemistical philosophy and its related avenues of thought: men like Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Silesius, Roger Bacon. Coleridge saw this as a convincing reason for giving the subject serious attention himself; moreover this field of study proved deeply rewarding for him.

In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge speaks of the 'Mystics', as he called his 'darling studies', expressing (I quote), 'The feeling of gratitude I cherish towards these men ... Their writings acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head: gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentiment, that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of death, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter, into which a sap was yet to be propelled, from some root to which I had not yet penetrated, if they were to afford my soul either food or shelter'. (9)

Coleridge goes on to voice his particular indebtedness to Jacob Boehme and Giordano Bruno; especially his obligation to Bruno's 'polar logic and dynamic philosophy', or System, going on to expound how it was subsequently reintroduced 'in a more philosophical form' (meaning a more metaphysical form) by Kant, with his insistence upon the dynamic as the tension of two opposing forces.

*The Pym of the Ancient Mariner*, an exercise in the exploration of that dynamic, is, in essence, an early chapter in Coleridge's *magnum opus* dealing with the subject of polarities and their possible synthesis; a vast work spanning his entire literary lifetime, from youth to old age. In *The Ancient Mariner* exploration is conducted on two, complementary, levels; firstly, that of alchemistical philosophy married to inherent Christian piety: the intellectual and spiritual climate of 'the elder poets' and of medieval man in general; and, secondly, the dynamic encountered in the realm of human personality disturbance, or as Lamb called it, 'phrensy': Lamb and Coleridge both, immensely in advance of their day, comprehending

as Jung puts it, that the structure of the psyche is polaristic, in common with all natural processes; these being essentially (again to quote Jung) 'phenomena of energy, arising out of a state of polar tension'. (10)

### III

The coniunctio is the basic and most mystic of all alchemical symbols, as it is also for the church. The opposing factors which come together in the coniunctio either confront one another in enmity or attract one another in love. Initially they form a dualism: such as East/West, Sun/Moon, heaven/earth, light/dark, good/evil. Often the polarity is presented as a quaternio, with the two opposites crossing one another. The golden circle, or solar table, conjoins the four opposites of the quaternio, and is symbolized by the philosopher's stone, of which the *Ars chemica* (an alchemical text printed in Strasbourg in 1566) tells us that, 'In this stone are the four elements, and it is to be compared to the world and the composition of the world'.

The synthesis of the elements is effected by the circular movements of the sun through the houses, or temples, of the Zodiac (or, as Coleridge calls them in his gloss to the *Ancient Mariner*, 'The courts of the sun'); these courts, the four seasons of the sun, being namely Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn. This circular progression of the sun is known in alchemy as the *circulatio* and is symbolic of the Original Man, who was a sphere. Ostances, an ancient Greek alchemist quoted in *The Book of Knowledge Acquired Concerning the cultivation of Gold* (collated by an eminent Persian alchemist Ibn Ahmad al Iraqui) describes himself as a man caught between the opposites of the polar quaternio; the injurious effect of which is due to the fact that each of the four components exerts its specific influence on him and makes him a conflicting diversity of persons, when he should be a harmonious One.

That the action of *The Ancient Mariner* is concerned with polar tension, both geographically and psychologically speaking, is made clear in the Argument at the commencement of the 1798 version of the poem 'How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole: and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the great Pacific Ocean: and of the strange things that befell: and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country'.

Coleridge, in 1798, did not consider it necessary to be more explicit in introducing the poem, its subject matter and its central character. That the Old Navigator, the Marinere, will experience intense psychological conflict is something that the reader is expected to deduce from the Argument's statement that the man voyages over uncharted seas stretched between opposing poles, and has crossed the Line and entered the Pacific, traditionally the most malignant of oceans. The poem itself, Coleridge expects, will make apparent the psychic and moral predicament of the Mariner and the alchemical nature of his adventures.

The reception of the 1798 version of the poem proved Coleridge wrong. He had overrated his readers' grasp of alchemy and their understanding of the spirit of medieval man, let alone their comprehension of personality disturbance. Upon the reappearance of the poem in 1805 the Argument was dropped entirely. In 1817 when the Mariner made a further reappearance in *Sibylline Leaves* Coleridge provided new and, doubtless in his opinion,

blatant signposting: heading the poem with a quotation from the seventeenth century English divine and alchemist, Thomas Burnet, who, with his allegorical treatment of the Mosaic account of the fall of man had so incensed conventional churchmen and Establishment that the king had had him removed from the office of Clerk to the Closet which Archbishop Tillotson had obtained for him.

Furthermore Coleridge buttressed the Burnet quotation by composing a marginal gloss to the poem (reminiscent of the gloss to *The Pilgrim's Progress*). Mention in this gloss of Josephus and of Michael Psellus (both of importance within the context of alchemy, the latter particularly so) together with the instances of alchemical symbolism and imagery with which the gloss abounds, were doubtless intended to indicate unmistakably that the writer of the gloss was himself a learned alchemistical philosopher, drawing material from celebrated alchemical texts.

Lowe tells us that the germ of the tale of the Ancient Mariner was almost certainly derived from a fourth century Latin epistle of Paulinus, then bishop of Nola, to Marcurius, vice prefect of Rome, concerning an Old man, sole survivor of a shipwreck, who was saved by a band of angels sent by the Lord to bring the ship safe to harbour. Lowe also emphasises that Coleridge had his imagination much seized upon by the tale of the Wandering Jew. Michael Maier, an alchemistical philosopher and an early leading spirit of the Rosicrucian society, is often put forward (though not by Lowe) as the originating source of this tale: in Frankfurt, in 1616, he published an account, which subsequently became famous (influencing Bunyan among others) of a 'mystic peregrination'; a journey embracing the four quarters of the globe together with the four elements: Europe, which he equated with the earth, being to the north; America, equated with water, to the west; Asia, equated with air, to the east; and Africa, equated with fire, to the south. In short, a peregrination around a mystic quaternio, the ultimate aim of which transcendental journey was to attain a state of wholeness. As we shall see, there is evidence that Coleridge was acquainted with Maier's seminal work.

#### IV

From the very start, *The Ryme of the Ancyent Marinere* deals with symbols and opposites. The Mariner, solitary, a social outcast, forever in a state of recurrent guilt and penance for terrible transgression in the past, is telling his story to a wedding guest, lightheartedly about to attend the bridal breakfast, with its feasting, music and festivities; an occasion bursting with life, and promise for the future.

The ocean is the *prima materia*, which in alchemical tradition is the original chaos as well as being, paradoxically, 'the baptismal bath of regeneration'. The action, throughout the poem, is alternately influenced by the sun and the moon.

Sol, the sun, is traditionally monarch of the sky, which he floods with light unfailingly each day. But in alchemy, where every image must have its opposing face, Sol, deriving his name, as he does, from sulphur, also plays a major role in the daemonic world of darkness; sulphur being an arcane substance, simultaneously divine, and the personification of evil.

Luna, the moon, is the counterpart of Sol. Traditionally feminine, in pagan mythology she and the sun are marriage partners who embrace on the twenty-eighth day of each month. The sun, the male, is dominant. In his glorious role in the realm of light he is incorruptible, wise, and dependable. The moon, on the other hand, is bafflingly changeable: the sun has two faces, but she is many faceted.

Like the sun she has a share not only in the world of light but also in the daemonic world of darkness; but infinitely more so than the sun, for she stands always on the borders of the sublunary world ruled by evil. She is the personification of mystery, of sorcery. When she turns her fullest radiance upon man her other side is in total mysterious darkness. As she withdraws from the sun, until she is in full opposition to him, so does her light upon the human planet earth, increase, and diminishes upon the side that looks upward and sunward.

'This', says Thomas Norton, in his alchemical 'Ordinall', 'This should teach us that the more our intellect descends to the things of sense, the more it is turned away from intelligible things, and the reverse likewise': a highly significant remark when placed within the context of *The Ancient Mariner*:

The full moon was seen by alchemy as benevolent, divine. The new, or horned moon, was, in exact reverse, highly dangerous, her special sphere being magic; especially love magic. Most dangerous of all was the time of the *dark new moon* - hence *black magic*. The darkness of an eclipse, when the sun has his light obliterated by the moon, was notably a time of danger and disaster. The patristic church, we should bear in mind, associated the moon with death which came into the world through original sin and the seductive wiles of woman.

The moon is given a myriad of names, has a myriad of guises. She is Ka, the bird spirit, which is the indestructible spirit of life. She is the Old One: Isis the Black One 'in her robe of deepest black': the dark new moon, since furthest antiquity reputed to possess 'the elixir of life' (within this context it is fascinating to note, in passing, that Coleridge referred to *his* elixir, the Kendal Black Drop, the strongest tincture of opium available, as 'Old Black' - as usual he was nicely precise in his terminology). Says Thomas Norton, 'The moon is the mother of all things ... she consists of opposites, has a thousand names, is an old woman and a whore; as Mater Alchima is wisdom and teaches wisdom; is Mary Queen, the mother of the Saviour; is the earth, and the serpent hidden in the earth; is the blackness and the dew and the miraculous water which brings together all that is divided'.

The voyage of the Mariner starts in fair weather and bright sunshine. 'The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd' and the sun came up upon the left,

Out of the Sea came he;  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the Sea.

The attention paid to the sun, and his position in the sky, in these opening stanzas is intended, as we are always told, to indicate the passage of the

ship across the Line and towards the South Pole. Compass considerations apart, the stable cheery sun, rising and setting exactly where he is expected to rise and set, indicates the steady, stable, cheerful atmosphere of the ship, her crew and her course, and the stable, soundly-oriented state of mind of the Mariner himself.

And then the ship crosses the Line and is borne by storm and wind into the desolate regions of the South Pole. The ice closes round the vessel and locks it in; ice and fog; nothing living to be seen, 'Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken', while 'thro' the drifts the snowy clifts / Did send a dismal sheen'; that weird white brightness of the arctic summer. And everywhere the pack ice, dangerously disintegrating; cracking and growling, roaring and howling - until out of the fog comes the Albatross.

From its very first appearance the Albatross is clearly far more than an ordinary bird: indeed it is a magic bird. The magic bird featuring in Maier's peregrination was the Phoenix: Coleridge preferred an Albatross; one must concede that a Phoenix, born in the deserts of Arabia, would have been a virtual impossibility in the Antarctic.

Coleridge, as a result of having written *The Destiny of Nations*, with all its remarkable polar images, not so long before embarking upon *The Ryme of the Ancient Mariner*, had the Albatross, in the guise of Vuoko, the Icelandic bird spirit of the Pole, ready to fly out of the mists and perch for vespers nine in the rigging of the Mariner's ship.

As Jung points out, alchemy was fundamentally the child of mythology (although the alchemists themselves did not perceive this) and the archetypes in mythology being (to requote Lamb) in ourselves, and eternal, are consequently capable of rising up, as Jung says, anywhere at any time, spontaneously. Therefore we should not be in the least surprised to find that the giant bird Vuoko, in Icelandic mythology representing a divine soaring spirit, or immortal soul, bears a marked fundamental resemblance to the immortal firebird, the Arabian Phoenix.

Luna, the moon, is associated, as I have just observed, with Ka, the bird spirit, the indestructible spirit of life. Luna is also moisture: the sea, the tides, dew and salt, Sal: in alchemy a cosmic principle. Mylius, alchemist and author of an important alchemical treatise, *Philosophia reformata*, published in Frankfurt in 1622, mentions salt, or sea-spume, in connection with Luna as bird, as synonyms for the philosopher's stone (in Arabian alchemy the Phoenix, of course, was synonymous with the philosopher's stone: the nature of the archetypal bird favoured by the philosopher depends upon whether he belongs to the northern, or southern, hemisphere). The bird is a parallel of salt because salt itself is alchemically a spirit, a volatile substance; a lunar substance. It is a stroke of alchemystical genius on Coleridge's part that his Albatross, his polar bird spirit, comes gliding out of a shimmering white sea fog.

As for the Albatross's friendliness towards man, this too is an attribute found in the Phoenix; while Laurentius Ventura, a Venetian physician and alchemist of the sixteenth century, writes of the two feathered birds, spirits of Sol and Luna, 'who cannot relinquish the society of men'. Coleridge's Albatross flying round the ship and being fed biscuit worms by the crew, and piously participating in communal worship and prayer, is decidedly a bird



inspired by the tenets of alchemy,

And so we come to the lines,

'God save thee, ancyeut Marinere!  
'From the fiends that plague thee thus -  
'Why look'st thou so?' - with my cross bow  
I shot the Albatross.

As is so often the case, following a deed of criminal folly or intent, deceptively all at first seems to go well. Despite the shooting of the Albatross the sun continues to shine and the breeze to blow. Indeed the sun shines most splendidly, in a marvellously clear sky, as Coleridge tells us with a stroke of magnificent symbolism, 'like God's own head / The glorious sun uprist'. The gloss tells us, 'The fair breeze continues; the ship enters the Pacific Ocean and sails northward, even till it reaches the Line'.

The sailors, who at first had accused the Mariner of slaying the bird of good omen that made the breeze to blow, now are all delighted and declare that the Mariner was right to have slain a bird that had brought fog and mist: the mass popular voice acquiescing in a crime by bestowing approval upon it.

With the arrival of the ship at the Equator, that alchemystically most dangerous of places, the ship suddenly and dramatically becomes becalmed, and the sun no longer shines gloriously like God's own head, but shows his other, malignant aspect, that of sulphur, the personification of evil,

All in a hot and copper sky  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand  
No bigger than the Moon ...

The very deeps did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy Sea.

About, about, in reel and rout  
The Death-fires danc'd at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green and blue and white.

The material for these lines is drawn from observations recorded by Captain Cook, but Coleridge uses these effects of phosphorescent plankton to heighten his alchemical theme of the sun now in his sulphuric, daemonic sphere of influence.

Perishing of heat and thirst and haunted by the Polar Spirit of the South, out to avenge the death of the Albatross, the seamen remove the holy cross which the Mariner has hitherto always worn round his neck and replace it with the stinking cadaver of the Albatross.

The holy cross, the sacred quarternio of Christianity, which hitherto has protected the Mariner, has now been replaced by a symbol of total nihilism: offering the Mariner no protection whatever; leaving him hopelessly fixed at the bisecting point of the dreaded polar quarternio; the injurious effect of

which is due to the fact that each of the four components exerts its specific influence on Man and splinters him into a diversity of persons when he should be One. This, in psychological terms, requires no explaining to a modern reader. In terms of alchemy it represents the procedure of isolation and analysis of the conflicting elements composing the chaos, and precedes the search for a formula which will bring the hostile elements into a state of unity.

And now appears the spectre bark, driving suddenly 'betwixt us and the sun', to quote the Mariner. In symbolic terms this, of course, is the moment of eclipse, when the moon, the female, destroys the sun, the male. In the poem it is the moment when the eternal seductress and whore - Life-in-Death - (who in alchemy is also the malignant moon) appears, dicing with Death himself for the soul of the ship's crew.

As the spectre bark with its ghastly dicing occupants draws close to the Mariner's ship, the crew have a clear view of the black skeletal Death's Head and of his leprously pallid partner. She is gaming for the soul of the Mariner and they hear her shriek of victory, 'I've won! I've won!'

Then, 'With never a whisper in the Sea / Off darts the Spectre-ship', to vanish as mysteriously as it had appeared. Simultaneously 'the horned Moon', the new moon, in alchemy that most dangerous symbol of all, climbs up the eastern sky.

One by one the ship's crew drop down to the deck, 'a lifeless lump'; leaving the Ancient Mariner the sole survivor, utterly alone at the mercy of Life-in-Death, who, says the gloss, 'begins her work' on him. He tries to pray, but finds that he cannot,

I look'd to Heaven, and try'd to pray,  
But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

But now the poem changes mood under the influence of the moon who, no longer new and malignant, is assuming her benign, indeed divine, personality as she travels through the heavens,

The moving Moon went up the sky  
And no where did abide:  
Softly she was going up  
And a star or two beside.

The Ancient Mariner, as the gloss tells us, 'in his loneliness and fixedness yearneth towards the journeying moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival'.

We should note that Coleridge specifically uses the word 'fixedness', spelling out that the Mariner is caught betwixt polar tensions and controlled by compulsion of the stars: that condition dreaded by ancient and medieval men

alike, who at the best of times always felt themselves to be influenced by the movements and phases of the heavenly bodies.

For this very reason the mystic, or transcendent, peregrinations of the alchemists invariably included an ascent and descent through the planetary spheres: the purpose of which was to unite the polar tensions and the conflicting influences of Above and Below; thereby relieving the pilgrim traveller from his 'fixedness' and inducing the widened understanding and harmonious state of being which has always been the spiritual goal of all philosophies and religions, and in Christian terms is the fulfilment of which St. Paul spoke in his message to the Ephesians, 'That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height'.

Of course, medieval mystic space travel had of necessity to be symbolic. Michael Maier resorted to visiting the legendary seven mouths of the Nile, which symbolized the seven planetary houses with their respective archons, or lords - phraseology used by Maier and repeated by Coleridge. The Ancient Mariner has to satisfy himself with gazing up at the moon and stars and imagining them as lords travelling to and entering their own homes and in this was associating himself with their travels.

And now, this passage of quest for a formula to bring the hostile elements into a state of unity being brought to a close, the moment of revelation and grace is at hand. We are given a description of the moonlight upon the water surrounding the ship:

Her beams bemock'd the sultry main  
Like morning frosts yspread ...

In terms of alchemy we are witnessing the *albedo*, or whitening; during which illumination, or revelation of the truth, will take place. But, adds the poem,

... where the ship's huge shadow lay  
The charmed water burnt away  
A still and awful red.

In alchemy a red, or fiery, sea signified purification; fire purifies, and melts opposites into unity. In patristic texts a red sea signified baptism, and the blood of Christ.

The Mariner stares at water which he no longer sees as rotting and writhing with death fires in malignant witch's hues and squirming with repulsive slimy crawling things: now the truth is revealed to him: he sees a redemptive red sea alive with shining beautiful and happy water snakes,

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare ...

Their phosphorescence, or sulphur, formerly corrupt and diabolical, has now been transformed, to become divine and wonderful. The alchemists believed that, at the moment of conjunction, the blackness and all the colours of the world would appear and integrate, as in the rainbow, symbol itself of unity and indication of the coming of God, or even of his presence. It is significant

to note that the colours of the water snakes moving 'in tracks of shining white', are specified by Coleridge as, 'Blue, glossy green and velvet black'. Black, in alchemy, is the colour of the world of the human condition; green, the colour of the divine spirit, of procreation and resurrection, through a series of transitions becomes blue, which like purple symbolizes unity; 'whereat the philosophical tree will blossom'. It is of significance, too, that in alchemy snakes are symbols of divinity, and in patristic literature sometimes of Christ himself.

The Ancient Mariner feels a spring of love for the snakes and spontaneously blesses them: whereupon he finds himself able to pray once more - and the Albatross falls from his neck and sinks like lead into the sea.

In the verses which follow this liberation from the Albatross two important things occur; the polar tension is relaxed, and the Holy Mother relieves the Mariner with sleep, and dew. In alchemy, as we have already noted, the Holy Mother is a synonym for the moon; high goddess of the sky (and equally, of course, the Redemptrix, Mother of the Saviour, Mary Queen is the opposing persona of Life-in-Death, the eternal whore).

The relation of the moon to the soul was much stressed in antiquity by the Greeks. According to alchemy Luna / Redemptrix is 'the bountiful nurse of the dew': secreting the *aqua mirifica*: the miracle-working water that extracts souls from bodies, or, in reverse, gives bodies life and soul; dew, in both alchemical and early patristic terms, was the elixir, or sap of life. For this reason it would not have been sufficient for Coleridge merely to have relieved the Mariner's parched throat and body with rain; dew is the vital factor in terms of medieval significance.

The Ancient Mariner now experiences a moment of great joy, for he supposes that he has died and become a blessed Ghost: but alas, it is not so, as events soon prove. He has had revelation of grace, and been afforded certain relief; above all, he can pray again. But he is still chained to his mortal condition.

In patristic and alchemical texts revelation is often accompanied by a rushing wind from no ascertainable source. And, sure enough, following the episode when the Mariner perceives and loves the beautiful snakes and is freed of the Albatross and is refreshed by sleep and heaven-sent dew, we meet 'the hidden wind': roaring in the distance at first but then drawing closer: a miraculous wind; never overtaking the ship, but nonetheless filling her sails,

The loud wind never reached the ship,  
Yet now the ship mov'd on!

We find that this 'hidden wind' is described in texts derived from the alchemy of ancient Egypt as the *pneuma* (air, or breath) hidden in the *prima materia* and is associated with 'commotions in the sky and the elements'; to which, of course, Coleridge refers in his gloss. In the poem the hidden wind is accompanied by fire-flashes (that is, the *Aurora australis*); the stars dance between them; the rain streams down from one black cloud, from the side of which shines the moon, suddenly changed from Redemptrix to sorceress, and lightning pours from the sky.

Beneath the lightning and the moon the dead men lying on the ship's deck groan, stir, and rise like ghastly automatons. They resume their various stations and work the ship - but with no word spoken. When dawn breaks they gather round the mast and sweet angelic sounds come from them: the Mariner is once more filled with delight. After which the ghastly crew return to work as before. And now the ship is no longer propelled forward by the hidden wind, but by the Polar Spirit and instead of sailing smoothly and sweetly assumes a short uneasy motion and travels northward too fast for human life to endure the speed, so that the Ancient Mariner falls down in a swoon. While lying in this trance-like state he hears two of the Polar Spirit's fellow daemons discussing how the Ancient Mariner is to do further penance, under the curse of the Polar Spirit, for having slain the Albatross. At length the Mariner comes out of his trance; but the memory of what the daemons have said fills him with dread of what is to come.

The ship returns into the home harbour bay from which the Ancient Mariner originally set forth. The crew become shining spirits once more and vanish, having first signalled to the shore from which, in reply to the signal, a Hermit, a Pilot and the Pilot's boy put out in a dinghy. The Hermit cheerily sings hymns as he approaches and at the sound of his voice the Mariner is overjoyed, for, thinks he,

He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away  
The Albatross's blood.

The rescue party gradually becomes first puzzled, then downright alarmed, as they draw near to the ship and find it dark and deserted, 'Why, this is strange, I trow!'. 'Where are those lights so many and fair / That signal made but now?' And the nearer they get to the ship, the less they like it, 'Dear Lord, it has a fiendish look ...'

Then, abruptly and dramatically, the ship sinks in a species of earthquake, or more correctly, seaquake: in alchemystical terms always a symbol of traumatic transition, as well as being an allusion (as it undoubtedly is here in *The Ancient Mariner*) to Christ's descent into hell and his resurrection. The bodies of the crew sink with the ship; the Ancient Mariner himself, as he recounts, is stunned into insensibility, 'Like one that hath been seven days drown'd / My body lay afloat'. When he comes to, he finds himself in the Pilot's boat.

The final part of the poem concentrates upon two rather different things which, thanks to his consummate art, Coleridge contrives to make seem related. The first might be described as problems of the coniunctio within the context of the medieval theme of the poem; the second, ensuring that the poem ends on a fully supernatural note guaranteed to freeze the blood of the modern reader.

From the earliest times the alchemists saw the joining of the body with the soul, or spirit, the making of the inanimate object animate, as the supreme achievement of the coniunctio. To quote an early Greek alchemystical text, 'After the body had been hidden in the darkness, (the spirit) found it full of light. And the soul united with the body, since the body had become divine through its relation to the soul, and it dwelt in the soul. For the body clothed itself in the light of divinity, and the darkness

departed from it, and all were united in love; body, soul and spirit, and all became one; in this the mystery is hidden.

In corresponding Christian definition, Easter Day was the day of miracle, of the supreme coniunctio, when Christ's soul was reunited with his body, after he had descended into hell to rise again from the dead on the third day.

The soul, for early and medieval man alike, was by no means merely a concept; it was visualized sensuously as a breath-body or a volatile but definite substance (which might, by alchemy, be chemically extracted and 'fixed' by means of a suitable procedure). The Christian coniunctio of necessity involved death and a period in purgatory. For pre-Reformation man this went without saying: he required no explanations. But by 1817 Coleridge had discovered the necessity for giving modern, Protestant man, explanations. The gloss tells us that, 'The bodies of the ship's crew are inspired ... (that is, regain breath and movement) but not by the souls of the men, nor by daemons of earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint'. The poem itself explains, 'Twas not those souls that fled in pain / Which to their corpses came again, / But a troop of spirits blest'.

Notice Coleridge's nice distinction, in true medieval vein, between body, soul, spirit, and daemonic possession.

And now the ship sinks in the seaquake, the seraph men vanish, and the Ancient Mariner finds himself in the Pilot's boat. The revived Mariner is rowed ashore and there begs the Hermit to shrieve him, but the Hermit, shaken to his roots by the appearance of the Mariner, can only gasp, 'Say, quick, I bid thee say - what manner of man art thou?'

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd  
With a woeful agony;  
Which forc'd me to begin my tale,  
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,  
That agony returns:  
And till my ghastly tale is told,  
This heart within me burns.

I pass like night from land to land,  
I have strange power of speech:  
The moment that his face I see  
I know the man that must hear me,  
To him my tale I teach.

And so we are back with the Wedding Guest, listening, stunned, to the Mariner's 'ghastly tale'.

But *why* the Wedding Guest? Why should the Mariner have chosen him as a recipient of the tale? The Wedding Guest himself asks that question, 'Now wherefore stoppest me?' A perfectly ordinary chap, on his way to a wedding breakfast; nothing really extraordinary about him at all to draw attention to him from a passer by. However, in Christian terms, the Wedding Guest may well

be a soul in mortal danger, as the Ancient Mariner perceives at a glance. The Wedding Guest is proposing to become immersed, as St. Peter puts it, in 'lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries': in other words, the wedding feast. The Ancient Mariner for his part makes it quite clear that he shares St. Peter's low opinion of wedding feasts and such junketings,

What loud uproar comes from that door!  
The Wedding-Guests are there ...

All male, by the sounds of it, and already pretty drunk. 'A merry din'. Meantime the bride and bridesmaids have removed themselves and are singing blithely in the Garden-bower. However the bride won't be permitted to stay *there* for long; in robust medieval times the bride and groom were undressed by the wedding guests and put into bed, as it were, cheered on. The Ancient Mariner goes to pains to point out to the Wedding Guest an alternative voice, 'The little Vesper-bell / Which biddeth me to prayer'.

O sweeter than the Marriage feast,  
'Tis sweeter far to me  
To walk together to the Kirk  
With a goodly company.

And the message gets across. For compare the Wedding Guest's behaviour *before* he hears the Mariner's tale with its coda of warning and precept, and after he has heard it. Before the recitation the sound of the bassoon almost drives the Wedding Guest mad with impatience since he is being prevented by the Ancient Mariner from joining in the fun; whereas *after* having heard the Mariner's tale the Wedding Guest eschews the festivities and turns away from the bridegroom's door 'a sadder and a wiser man'.

Sadder, because the Wedding Guest has been profoundly moved by the dreadful predicament of the Ancient Mariner for whom the supreme miracle of the mystic coniunctio, the coming together of body and soul after they have been separated by death, must be denied as long as the daemonic curse of the Polar Spirit has power over him. This is what *The Ryme of the Anoyent Marinere* is really all about: the supreme unification cannot take place without death having first brought about the separation: 'dissolve and coagulate', the prime precept of alchemy. The curse laid upon the Ancient Mariner by the daemon Polar Spirit is that he *cannot* die: says the gloss, 'The penance of life falls on him'. Life; being obliged to remain alive: no possibility of death; doomed to remain corporeal and therefore with no hope of blessed resurrection. Despite the fact that he begs to be shrived, that he heeds the vesper bell and goes to church and prays - that he repeatedly tells a tale urging Christian virtues of penance, love and prayer, says the right Christian things, does the right Christian things, the Ancient Mariner cannot, however hard he strives, attain to the miraculous ultimate blessing, the coniunctio of body and soul. Medieval man would understand that the reason why the curse of the daemon remains stronger than this display of Christian faith and prayer is that the Ancient Mariner has not yet expiated his sin. A daemonic curse is immensely powerful; greatly to be feared. The Ancient Mariner has sinned grievously; he has been cursed fearfully; repentance is not enough: there *must* be full expiation. An example indeed to cause the Wedding Guest to be cast into depression as he compares his own danger as a sinning and sinful man and

realizes, in itself an intimation of wisdom, that he himself is in peril.

His wisdom is further extended by the final message which the Mariner gives him before departing; a message emphasizing the necessity of transcendental love, and of prayer, and of the impossibility of prayer without pure love in the heart,

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell  
To thee, thou wedding-guest!  
He prayeth well who loveth well,  
Each man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best,  
All things both great and small:  
For the dear God, who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

With these words the Ancient Mariner turns away, to resume his peregrination, leaving the Wedding Guest 'like one that hath been stunn'd';

## V

Many modern readers of the poem are left with the feeling that, for the Wedding Guest to have been devastated in this fashion, the Ancient Mariner should have delivered a somewhat more forceful farewell message. Are we really to believe that the burden of this miraculous poem simply boils down to advice that we should all learn to love water snakes? (It was Robert Penn Warren who originally asked that question but I am sure it is one that many of us at some time or another have asked ourselves). Of course there is profound truth in the Mariner's seemingly simple statement of love, but nonetheless we expect something stronger, something more dramatic, bearing in mind the *stunning* effect that it had on the Wedding Guest. True, six hundred and nineteen lines delivered non stop from out of the blue on the way to a wedding feast might well have a pulverising effect on the strongest of men - but to send him away *stunned*!

But consider - the Wedding Guest is a medieval man and has been made to realize that his immortal soul is in danger. Moreover, the actual message with which the Mariner concludes his tale is of relative unimportance; the theme has been evolving, revealing itself, throughout the course of the tale; in *The Ryme of the Ancyent Marinere* the medium *is* the message. Furthermore the Wedding Guest has *physically encountered* the Mariner, has *seen* the look in his glittering eye, has *felt* the touch of his skinny hand.

Coleridge makes it clear, throughout the final passages of the poem, that everyone who encounters the Mariner is badly scared by him. The Pilot of the rescue boat shrieked and fell down in a fit; the Pilot's Boy went mad on the spot, supposing the Ancient Mariner to be the devil. Even the Hermit was horribly alarmed by the stranger, 'Say quick, I bid thee say / What manner man art thou?'

The Wedding Guest doesn't like the look of the Mariner from the first, and by the time he has heard the account of how all the crew, with the exception of the Mariner, dropped down dead, his hair is standing on end,



'I fear thee, ancye[n]t Marinere!  
 'I fear thy skinny hand;  
 'And thou are long and lank and brown  
 'As is the ribb'd Sea-sand.

'I fear thee and thy glittering eye  
 'And thy skinny hand so brown -

The Ancient Mariner does his best to reassure him:

Fear not, fear not thou wedding guest,  
 This body dropt not down.

But how can we believe him? He may be lying - Or, even more appalling thought, he may be dead - and does not know it. For you see, he looks so exactly like a dead man. We are told, very precisely, how he looks; he is 'long, and lank and brown /As is the ribb'd sea sand'; which is an exact description of a body that has been lying out on an open deck in hot sunlight and strong salt wind and has become naturally mummified.

No: the Wedding Guest is *not* convinced by the Mariner's assurances that he dropped not down; and no more are we.

'Marinere! ...  
 'that which comes out of thine eye, doth make  
 My body and soul to be still'.

Once read, the poem never leaves you. Once encountered, the Ancient Mariner remains with you for always. He is an archetype deep within us all; to rise up, to be rediscovered in a flash of recognition, not as a character in a poem but as a man hauntingly met for real, and to be met yet again, in the shimmering fog of eternity.

The Wedding Guest was left to brood upon the Mariner's tale. The Mariner himself continued, continues, his agonized mystic peregrination in pursuit of a blessed state of coniunctio which may never be vouchsafed. He is there, somewhere outside, stalking across the world. We may, any one of us, at any time, be seized by this skinny old man, who will fix us with his glittering eye and begin, 'There was a ship ...'

#### NOTES

1. C.L. Letters, Mi 18-19.
2. *Ibid* Mi 117-118
3. Jung, C.G. *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 48.
4. C.L. Letters, Mi 266.
5. *Table Talk*
6. Col. Letters i.260.
7. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 554.
8. *Biog. Lit.* i. Lx.71
9. *Ibid* i.lx.73.
10. *M.C.* xvi.

On Saturday, 3rd October, 1987, the Society's meeting was devoted to informal Bicentenary Tributes, of which the following was the first.

CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE

Florence Reeves

Charles Cowden Clarke, or '3 Cs' as Lamb called him, was born in 1787. His father, John Clarke, was a schoolmaster, the Head of a school in Enfield, far in advance of his time. He abolished corporal punishment, gave rewards for good work, and a part of the garden was set aside for the boys who wished to grow their own flowers and vegetables. Many years later fruit and flowers from this garden were taken to Leigh Hunt in prison. Each boy kept a record of his performances at his lessons and of his behaviour, and prizes were awarded. Plenty of books were available for the boys.

Charles Cowden Clarke became his father's assistant. He was a born teacher and it was said of him, 'Books were no longer dead things once Charles Cowden was your friend. The past became full of explorers, lovers, deities and you could charge down on them, through the pages of a book, take what you would, and feel that you were an adventurer. He converted the school library into a pirate's ship with the world's treasure at command for anyone who had the courage to make the assault'.

Under his father's influence Charles became a lifelong Liberal in politics, and part of his education was weekly discussions of Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*. He began writing poems too and was an accomplished pianist and singer.

To this school came John Keats and, as we know from his poems, he keenly enjoyed the music that floated up to his bedroom each evening. When he left at fourteen years old he was apprenticed to a medical man and filled his spare time easily, for he returned to the school on days when CCC had free periods, and his love for poetry was increased and he began to compose his own. When Clarke came to London these meetings continued and later Keats was introduced to Leigh Hunt at the Vale of Health - a red-letter-day in the young poet's life. A sonnet by Keats, 'Much have I travelled in the Realms of Gold' was included in a survey of young poets in *The Examiner*, which had already published his poem 'O Solitude', thus first bringing him to notice.

Clarke's love of music and the theatre led him to visit the London theatres: 'he trudged the ten miles to the City and after a long wait in the queue outside would enjoy Kemble and Edmund Kean on the stage and then plod back through the dark rural lanes in the early morning'. He began to go to parties in London and met Vincent Novello and Leigh Hunt. This, Clarke says, 'was the opening of the proudest and the happiest period of my existence'. Leigh Hunt describes one evening's musical delights, among them CCC 'who groaned a hundred times of an evening in the fulness of his satisfaction - (I hope to hear shortly that benevolent grind of his epiglottis)'.

By the time Clarke renewed his visits to the Novello home the eldest daughter, Mary, was growing up and at the age of 'sweet sixteen' considered herself one of the adults, able to observe the interesting men and women around her. She and Clarke met often and in the summer of 1826 they became engaged, but as she was so young - only seventeen - the engagement was kept secret. 'She

recounts a droll circumstance during this time. Walking through smoky streets, some flying soot chanced to leave a smut on her face. Clarke, seeing it, blew it off and continued the conversation. Next time they met Hone said, "You are engaged to Miss Novello, are you not?" "What makes you think so?" "Oh, when I saw you so familiarly puff off that smut on the young lady's cheek, and she so quietly submitted to your mode of doing it, I knew you must be an engaged pair!".'

They were married on July 5th on a fine summer day, she being twenty years his junior. Their honeymoon was spent at Enfield. The Lambs, then living at Chase Side, pretended to be hurt that they, who were so near, had not informed them of the fact. They invited the happy couple to stay with them, which they did. In the afternoons 'over by Winchmore Hill, through Southgate Wood to Southgate and back'. The evenings were spent in easy talk and the account ends thus:

Charles Lamb had three striking personal peculiarities - his eyes were of different colours, one being greyish blue, the other brownish hazel, his hair was thick, retaining its abundance, and its dark brown hue with scarcely a single grey hair among it until even the latest period of his life, and he had a smile of singular sweetness and beauty.

In 1825 Cowden Clarke became a publisher with Leigh Hunt's brother John and an imposing number of works were produced and planned, but the firm failed in 1829.

Charles and Mary Clarke and Charles and Mary Lamb enjoyed many happy times together. Mary Lamb had taught Mary Clarke Latin before the marriage and letters were passed between them: there was 'a happy intimacy which lasted till Lamb's death'. Here is a rather delightful little quote:

On a certain midnight ... the Novellos, Clarke and Holmes ... had already said good-night to the brother and sister and started home. Suddenly, from a distance of many paces, came the familiar voice of Charles Lamb uttering an afterthought. 'You're very nice people' he assured them through the darkness, as indeed they were.

No allusions to the failure of the firm appeared in the Clarke memoirs. Charles Clarke turned to journalism and reporting developments in the Arts and he and his wife travelled widely. Urged on by Leigh Hunt, Clarke began a campaign to bring Chaucer to the people with his *Tales from Chaucer in Prose* 'designed chiefly for the Use of Young Persons', to do for Chaucer what Lamb had done for Shakespeare. For a variety of reasons it failed to achieve much popular acclaim.

There followed a new interest, prompted by his wife, that of a public lecturer, a career that lasted for twenty-one years. These lectures were delivered at Mechanics' Institutes. Without impersonating his characters he managed to interest his listeners in Shakespeare, Richardson, Cowper and Chaucer, and to make them enthusiastic enough to read the authors themselves after the lecture. One of his listeners commented 'he had a pleasant, cheerful ruddy face, a charming humour of expression, a clear and pleasant voice, and a heartiness and drollness of manner'. This was one of the happiest times of

his life. Wherever he went he was entertained at private homes, his hosts pleased to have such a guest and after dinner the whole family would go to the lecture and we are told that one of the children 'would solemnly carry his lecture book each page written out in his bold clerkly hand and the whole to last exactly one hour'. At this point Mary Clarke set out to compile a Concordance to Shakespeare - but that is another story.

As the years passed they went out less and less and in 1856, after the death of Vincent Novello, they left England and settled with the Novellos in Nice. In order to return the hospitality offered them Charles entertained the company with drawing-room lectures that had been so popular with English and Scottish audiences, and Mary undertook a tremendous new edition of Shakespeare's works, which with the help of her husband took two years to complete.

The final home of the Clarkes, a short distance from Genoa, was a spacious old mansion, which became a show-place. It commanded splendid views, had a paved marble hall, a picture gallery, a music room, a library where the Clarkes worked and which housed rare books and mementos of Shakespeare. The bedchamber contained portraits of the family and other treasures. Charles Clarke in his seventies seemed ageless and from the writing room he prepared for the press *Shakespeare Characters, Chiefly those Subordinate* (1863) which was a success. An important new work appeared in weekly numbers from February 1864 - 68, Cassells' *Illustrated Shakespeare* in three large volumes with some 14,500 notes provided by Mary, and later on an expurgated edition was requested, a Shakespeare safe for family reading.

During the years in Genoa interest in Keats, Lamb, Shelley and other literary men grew rapidly and Clarke received requests for further information, and this was always provided. The letters and papers preserved by Charles and Mary were given away to anyone who asked, and in fact Clarke has been known to cut a letter from Keats into pieces to give to his friends and the draft manuscript of 'I stood tiptoe upon a little hill' he snipped into thirteen pieces and for years Keats's editors have tried to locate them.

Twenty-seven years after Keats's death Clarke wrote his 'Recollections of Keats', which presents a true portrait written with affection and it has been the foundation of every Keats biography. It recalls school events known only to Clarke and Keats and presents 'a view of Keats' character which the passage of more than eighty years has failed substantially to alter' and one wonders if Keats the Poet would have appeared at all were it not for Clarke's help.

Realizing that they possessed a fund of information about their friends and that public interest was aroused, Charles and Mary set to work to provide the information in *Recollections of Writers*. This consisted of a short sketch of their own lives and reminiscences of people they had known and corresponded with. To this other material was added 'Recollections of Keats', a paper on Mary Lamb by Mary Clarke and the whole was published in London and New York in 1878 as *Recollections of Writers*. Some critics damned with faint praise but *Notes and Queries* were kinder. 'There is not a "recollection" of a single person that leaves the recollectors open to the charge of envy, hatred, malice, or any uncharitableness', and of how many books of this kind could such a remark be truthfully made? But, as Richard Altick says in his admirable work on Cowden Clarke, 'If the papers did not exist, all we should

then know about Keats before 1816 could be set down in a page or two, we should lack a great many of Hunt's letters and the 1848 Dickens theatricals would have receded into the mists'.

Like most of the Novello tribe CCC lived a long life. On his eighty-ninth birthday all his adopted children from the Novello side celebrated the occasion with a party and verses composed by his wife.

Huzza for eighty-nine!  
 What age so rare and fine,  
 When health and peace combine,  
 Is heaven's gift divine.

What need is there of wine  
 To honour eighty-nine?  
 Outpouring love is fine  
 Beyond the juice of vine.

A health to Uncle Charley,  
 To darling Uncle Charles!  
 May blessings be in store  
 For him for ever more!

But his health gave way, catarrh which had troubled him for some time attacked him and on 13th March he died. Mary says, 'Patient, contented was he throughout and true to his beautiful trusting nature'. He was buried in a cemetery near the Villa Novello.

#### NOTE

Richard D. Altick's book *The Cowden Clarkes* was invaluable to me and most of the quoted passages are extracts from it.

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Donald H. Reiman, *Romantic Texts and Contexts*. University of Missouri Press: Columbia, Missouri, 1987. pp. xii + 395. \$ 32.

*Romantic Texts and Contexts* presents Donald H. Reiman's selections from two decades' work in the field of scholarly criticism. Despite its longterm convictions and commitments, the book ranges widely. The nine eclectic essays of Part II have a common (and sometimes eccentric) interest in the biographical contexts of familiar Romantic works. Among them is a fascinating investigation of Shelley's references to Roman architecture in *Prometheus Unbound*. More substantial are the ten reviews and articles of Part I, in which the recent history of editing 'Romantic Texts' and Reiman's own career as an editor are fellow-travellers, from his antagonism to Neville Rogers and the Oxford Shelley in the early 1970s, to his responses to the Bollingen Coleridge, Cornell Wordsworth and Norton *Prelude* in the late '70s, and to the Oxford Byron in the early '80s. Each essay is preceded by a headnote in italics, placing it within 'the context of its composition'. Both the typographical relief and the contextualising follow Reiman's practice as the editor of *Shelley and his Circle* (which he inherited from Kenneth Neill Cameron, 1973 - ). As is fitting in a book on editing standards

the presentation is virtually flawless; but the record of 'personal and situational factors that governed the approach or even the tone' of each piece is perhaps the least satisfactory context that Reiman provides. The strident views on 'Editing Shelley' with which he chooses to open the volume sufficiently reveal that his discipline as a 'scholar-critic' began in opposition to incompetence among editors of the nineteenth century in general, and Rogers in particular.

From his early disillusionment with Rogers, Reiman learnt, and hoped to teach other Romanticists, to keep pace with 'editorial theorists of the Greg-Bowers-Tanselle tradition', trained in the field of 'Renaissance drama'. Textual scholars will find that Reiman uses his editorial expertise and historical learning to describe the intricacy and breadth of skill that go into preparing editions. More general readers may applaud his demand for the production of accurate texts as the basis of

a program of scholarly criticism that is practical,  
accessible, and democratic as an alternative to systems  
that are theoretical, esoteric, and elitist.

Yet Reiman's 'Emersonian roots' sustain a fairly lofty growth of their own. For much of Part I we breathe the rarified air of 'definitive' editions, where questions of orthography and punctuation are raised far more often than those of readership. The primary focus is the editor's responsibilities to the text, not his relation to an audience.

In reviewing the Oxford Shelley, and throughout Part I, Reiman states the criteria for selecting and editing a copy text so as to 'follow *all* aspects of the author's final intention'. These few, deceptively simple, terms are the central context that Reiman brings to his assessment of Romantic texts. On this principle, modernisation (such as that set out, for instance, by F.W. Bateson in founding the Longman Annotated English Poets) is forsworn. Both Erdman, in the Bollingen *Essays on his Times*, and McGann, in the Oxford Byron, are rebuked for silently emending punctuation that 'obscures meaning', or is 'clearly inadequate to carry the sense of the verse'. On this principle too, only 'texts that the authors themselves finally selected and approved for publication' are to be regarded as authoritative by historical editors. There is little legitimate room for stages, or indeterminacies, of authorial intention. Not surprisingly, then Reiman is initially hostile to the aims of the Cornell Wordsworth, when reporting to the Center for Scholarly Editions in 1977. Faced with reading texts of the earliest complete versions of Wordsworth's poems, Reiman invokes the issue of readership, fearing that in this case 'preparation for wider dissemination of the text may be better than it really needs -- or ought -- to be'.

The irony is, modern scholarly editing lends itself to our curiosity in the more private texts from which a writer's public statements emerge. The Cornell Wordsworth systematises a literary archaeology such as Reiman himself mastered, when editing *The Triumph of Life* (a version of which Shelley neither completed nor approved for publication). But this is debateable ground, and Reiman will find support for the view that the late Wordsworth and his executors should be our textual arbiters, and that the earlier is not also the better poet. Of greater interest, and symptomatic of the volume's range, is the last essay of Part I, which argues just as forcefully in favour of 'versioning'. In this unpublished article, dating from 1985,

Reiman admits to 'moving toward ... ideas of ultimate indeterminacy in recent years'. The move involves accepting the historical value of being able 'to study the development of (an) author's work', and the need to make the materials of such study widely available. Here, the future of scholarly publishing lies in different versions rather than definitive editions, and must include editorial choices about the 'best text' of a work. While Reiman is aware of a long history of 'versioning', his essay is a positive acknowledgement of the Cornell Wordsworth and more populist Norton *Prelude*. For the purposes of *Romantic Texts and Contexts*, it is also his 'final intention'.

Nicola Trott

St. Catherine's College, Oxford

Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge, The Radical Years*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, £27.50

This book will be welcomed because we have been without one like it for far too long. Until now we have not had a detailed account of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's radicalism during the 1790s. This book charts the two poets' separate political courses and their eventual friendship. The divergence of their introduction to politics -- Wordsworth through his travels in France and Coleridge through the tradition of radical dissent at Cambridge -- is of interest in itself. But contrasting Wordsworth and Coleridge, Roe combines the study of indigenous radicalism and the events of the French Revolution with their bearing on each other. Because he is dealing with two biographies, because he is writing about the immediate impact of events and ideas on two significant people he brings great liveliness to the study of the interchange of ideas and of the alterations of perspective that occur at times of such public excitement.

In one sense, we already know the plot; we know that Wordsworth and Coleridge will form an intense friendship that will fragment and that Wordsworth will continue his career as a poet and that Coleridge will not. The book has a pace and movement to it that is almost like a novel in that it portrays a coming together and a breaking apart; it tells a dramatic story. This comment is not in any way intended to slight the professional and scholarly character of the book but to point out the step by step nature of the writing. Events are fully realised by Nicholas Roe's ability to define the qualities of a public event and to analyse its impact on a particular character at a particular time. Less familiar figures such as George Dyer, William Friend, Beauclerk and Gorsas are brought more clearly into focus, and their impact on Wordsworth or Coleridge is fully explored. In fact, one gains a sense of Wordsworth and Coleridge thinking through ideas and of sometimes finding themselves confounded by the turn of events. The carefulness of the research and the attentive reading of Wordsworth's poetry especially fill in the gaps of the plot perhaps as much as they ever can be filled.

Also to the book's credit, it allows its readers to disagree with it freely. It is clearly written and the amount of evidence in favour of a particular argument is honestly calculated. Disagreements and regrets can be readily

identified as the book is entirely unobscure. As for some of my own, I regret that Thelwall's frequent call for non-violence is characterised as a Godwinian idea. It was that, but Thelwall also had more urgent reasons for fearing mob violence. Thelwall's political ideas have been considered as Godwinian before and it is regrettable that they have yet to be considered without reference to Godwin's. Thelwall's emphasis on domestic affection as a motive for political concern was unusual, and it is relevant to a study of Coleridge.

Nicholas Roe describes Coleridge as having an influence on Thelwall, but such a judgement cannot be made without reading Thelwall's *Peripatetic*, which is unmentioned in the bibliography. I am still uncertain as to the extent that Wordsworth associated with middle or working class radicals. Coleridge's radicalism appears to have taken him further beyond the limits of the literati as a social class than Wordsworth's. Possibly Wordsworth did work extensively with Daniel Isaac Eaton to produce the *Philanthropist*, as Nicholas Roe suggests in an appendix. It will take more than his contributing an essay or two, however, to match the extensive labour and the social adventuresomeness of the Bristol lectures and the production of the *Watchman*. And finally, as the book concludes with the trip to Germany, we are left without the advantage of knowing what Nicholas Roe thinks of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, that most interesting and equivocal text.

What makes these comments minor is that the book contains a great deal of material of which the above is only a small part, and the book is not merely about what Coleridge and Wordsworth did at a particular time. It is about a group of extensively educated radicals, to which Wordsworth and Coleridge belonged, who were attempting to direct social change. It is equally about the relation of their writing poetry to their political beliefs and it is particularly regarding Wordsworth that the book has the most to say. The Epilogue of the book compares 'Fears in Solitude' and 'Tintern Abbey' as poems that summarize 'Coleridge's and Wordsworth's respective experiences in the period covered by this study, and suggests the contrasting implications of political failure for their subsequent careers' (p.262). Nicholas Roe's reading of the two poems stands as a corrective to scholars and critics whose readings were not based on detailed historical knowledge of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's experience of the 1790s. Some did not grasp the extent of their political commitment. Others did not fully appreciate the personal motives for their political withdrawal.

After detailing the emotional and personal costs of the counter-revolution, Nicholas Roe interprets 'Tintern Abbey' as a psychological victory. His chapter 'Inner Immigrants' portrays the broken lives, the deaths, and the disillusionment among Wordsworth's and Coleridge's contemporaries: it makes for a grim tally. 'Tintern Abbey' was Wordsworth's map away from this threatening territory, a means of asserting the resources that would enable him and possibly others to maintain their well-being and their talents.

It is all to the good that Nicholas Roe has brought this fully to the fore and without doubt his book will contribute significantly to our understanding both of the poets and of the history of the 1790s. But I continue to find it strange that a book this interested in the democratic



movement, and this aware that private acts have public consequences can conclude happily with Wordsworth's 'self-reconstruction as a poet' as if that were all that was involved.

Olivia Smith Storey

FIFTY YEARS AGO (Continued)

*CLS Bulletin No. 35 (Fourth Year)* With Two Supplements November 1938

The [October] meeting was notable for the introduction of an "instrument" not a *Bell*, a *gong*), presented by Mr. E.G. Crowsley, which was sounded at intervals by the Chairman.

[There is also a long and 'priceless' quotation from a Columbia Pictures publicity magazine about a 300-year-old oak cradle in which Charles Lamb was rocked as a baby; it was then used by his aunt Martha Lamb; taken to America by her son c. 1900; passed from Mrs. Elizabeth Lamb Fellows to her grand-daughter Edith Fellows, star of the new Columbia picture 'Thoroughbred', who used it when a baby and lent it as prop for the film. '(To which our only comment /in 1938/ must be: Oh, *boy!*)']

*CLS Bulletin No. 36 (Fourth Year)* With Two Supplements December 1938

Some Members may not receive their copy of the Bulletin until a day or two after 1st December, owing to lack of supplies of headed paper.

[There is also a reference to a talk given by S.M. Rich on "Things in Lamb's Clothing": deliberate imitations, unconscious imitations, parodies, and resuscitations.]

*CLS Bulletin No. 37 (Fourth Year)* With Supplement January 1939

[There is a communication from Mr. W. Farrow, the Chairman, concerning the intention of the Charles Lamb Society to present Christ's Hospital with a bronze plaque of Lamb by the Hon. Gilbert Coleridge, a member of the Society.]

From Mrs. Berta Lawrence

MARY LAMB AND ALICE KING

The Brendon Hills are a beautiful if unspectacular hill-range inside the Exmoor National Park on its Somerset fringe. Hidden among them is the tiny village of Cutcombe a few miles from Dunster, well-known to tourists for its Castle and Yarn Market.

In the 19th century the Rev. John King was Vicar of Cutcombe for 55 years, his parish covering many acres of Exmoor and their isolated farms. He was a fine classical scholar whose translations of the *Odyssey* and other works were published and esteemed. His four children included a blind daughter Alice who was a talented and remarkable girl. If we believe her contemporaries she was so well-educated by her father that she 'could understand' seven languages including Latin, could use a typewriter, knit complicated patterns, play the guitar and make long country excursions on foot with her sister and ride her pony fearlessly over miles of Exmoor, absorbing many details of landscape and making close contact with Exmoor people and their activities. She also taught in Sunday School and organised a class for working boys. Her sister opened the world of books for her and by the age of twenty Alice King had started writing novels that attracted a considerable number of readers. Their romantic titles speak for themselves:- *Hearts and Coronets*, *A Tangled Skein*, *Spellbound*, and *Forest Keep* which was historical. In addition to these she contributed articles on literary and historical subjects to various magazines including the monthly *Argosy* which in August 1878 published her article on Mary Lamb.

There is nothing learned or critical about this article but its writer shows clear comprehension of Mary Lamb's circumstances, personal relationships, character and tragic handicap. The background of Mary's girlhood is vividly sketched, the busy sociable middle-class household with little money but with many friends and social contacts, a world in which the dutiful, domesticated daughter performed various household duties while snatching odd half-hours for miscellaneous reading that included poetry and novels and 'a brother's school-books'. Alice King, involved with the duties of a Victorian vicarage daughter yet absorbing all the written matter her sister and father could provide, certainly saw similarity between her own situation and Mary Lamb's.

In places Alice King's article is sicklied over by Victorian sentimentality, for instance her account of the death of Mary's mother. Moving on from this she portrays the lifelong alliance between Charles Lamb and Mary, 'one of the most touching stories in the whole history of humanity'. Obviously she gathered her details from acquaintance with Elia's essays which she calls 'pictures cut out of Charles Lamb's own life'. Visits to the theatre with seats in the gallery; field walks out of London; picnics; sea-excursions 'in a rickety old tub of a packet', the enjoyment of ancient folios, all these are quoted when she traces the life-pattern of Charles and Mary Lamb. The Essays had made her familiar with Charles Lamb's 'genial sympathies' for friendless little chimney-sweeps and with his love for Alice W. She gives her readers a rounded, warmly sympathetic portrait of Lamb, mentioning his ability 'to sparkle over with lively puns and quaint sayings', the originality of his writing, his capacity for friendship, his self-sacrifice on Mary's behalf. Then she adds a solemn, pious paragraph lamenting that this man 'whose genius was charming the educated world' became 'the slave of intemperance' so that Mary lay sleepless and weeping while she waited for Charles to return from some too-convivial gathering.

A brighter passage in the article re-creates a happy party at the home of Charles Lamb and Mary. Mary puts the finishing touches to the supper-table laid in the parlour. She wears a sober grey-and-lilac dress and a white cap; her face is calm, a little sad, but it brightens when Charles joins her to await their guests who find Mary an intelligent listener. Among them poets are

prominent, Barry Cornwall, now forgotten, and Samuel Rogers, writer of such melodious verse as 'Mine be a cot beside a hill'. But one man standing on the hearth-rug dominates the scene and the conversation by his flow of rich language, his command of a hundred subjects, his fiery eloquence, and not least his refusal to stop talking while supper cools on the table - the poet Coleridge.

On the edge of this company stands a quieter man, an observer, a shrewd-faced listener to all the talk. It is Crabb Robinson with whose Diary Alice King must have been familiar. It is he, she says, 'who will enlighten those of latter days about these giants of the past'.

Was Alice King's interest in Mary Lamb awakened by certain parallels in their lives? - each unmarried, a talented writer, each a reader and lover of books, each burdened with a great disability, each owing a great debt to a sibling's constant devotion, Mary Lamb to her brother's, Alice King to that of her sister who was her lifelong companion and amanuensis.

#### REVIEWING ROMANTICISM

A Conference to be held at King Alfred's College, Winchester 4-6 April 1989

This residential three day conference will comprise a series of main lectures and a full and varied programme of seminars. The aim is to draw together those currently working in the field with a view to the founding of an Association of Romantic Studies with a regular conference and a publishing outlet. The main speakers will be Kelvin Everest, Angela Leighton, David Pirie, Nick Roe and Timothy Webb. 'Reviewing Romanticism' will debate the place, function and potential of Romantic studies at the present time. It should interest readers, teachers or researchers of English Romantic writings, and is pitched at an affordable price. All are welcome. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Dr. P.W. Martin (Conference Organizer)  
or Ms Marian Read (Conference Secretary)  
Department of English  
King Alfred's College  
Winchester  
SO22 4NR.

#### SOCIETY NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

##### IN THE SALEROOM

Charles Lamb's manuscript of the essay 'In praise of Chimney Sweepers' was auctioned at Sotheby's (London) on 27 September 1988. The hammer price was £22,000 (well above the estimate) - with Buyer's premium and V.A.T. the total cost will be £24,530.

The Secretary carried out a 'straw poll' by telephone and otherwise of Officers and Council members before the sale and the consensus was that we should not use so large a part of our resources for this one (highly desirable) item.

A somewhat telescoped version of the Secretary's comments appeared in *The Independent* newspaper on 27 September.

At the same Sale, a Coleridge letter (28/6/1793) went for £4,000; Jane Austen's

autograph MS of *Juvenilia* Volume the Third fetched £120,000 and *The Watsons* £90,000. De Quincey's MS of the first part of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* realised £26,000.

M.R.H.

#### ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

Member Societies were invited to send representatives to a meeting in Birmingham on 8 October 1988. Robin Healey agreed to represent the C.L.S. and will, no doubt, be reporting on progress towards giving the Alliance a more formal structure.

FOR THE RECORD From Mrs. C.M. Gee, Curator Keats House, Hampstead.

Regarding Stanley Jones's comment in his lecture on 'B.R. Haydon, Hazlitt and Lamb', C.L.S. *Bulletin* July 1988, that it is difficult to get a sight of B.R. Haydon's paintings, your readers may care to know that, apart from Haydon's magnificent portrait of Wordsworth in the National Portrait Gallery, there is at Keats House in Hampstead his 'Milton at the Organ' together with the preliminary pencil sketch for the painting. Both works are on display in the Brawne Rooms.

QUOTED By Mr. D.E. Wickham

from *Quest: Journal of the City University, London, No. 31, Summer 1976:*  
in an article about acrostics:

- |                                 |         |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| 1. By Apollo was my first made. | Lyr E   |
| 2. A shoemaker's tool           | Aw L    |
| 3. An Italian patriot           | MazzinI |
| 4. A tropical fruit             | Banan A |

#### SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

As details were not ready in time for the *Bulletin* deadline, they will be sent out separately. Please note that this meeting to consider resolutions to set up a charitable company will be held on Saturday, 14 January, 1989.

#### RENEWAL OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions are due for 1989 and remain unchanged as follows:-

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