

THE CHARLES LAMB BULLETIN

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

NEW SERIES NO. 75

July 1991

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'Let us stimulate the Elian Spirit of friendliness and humour.'
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CHARLES LAMB AND ROBERT SOUTHEY: LONGEVITY OF FRIENDSHIP AND ITS
DISRUPTION OF IDEALS

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Friendship is a rare and precious gift which requires careful nurturing on the part of both parties to sustain it over a long period of time. In addition, the friends need common interests, perhaps common elements of background, possibly some common goals. Yet elements of diversity are also interesting in that they provide for the participants' new and intriguing vistas of thought and perspective. In the lives of Charles Lamb and Robert Southey there are some obvious differences, but there are also many similarities which I believe formed the basis of their initial friendship and afterwards helped to sustain it for almost forty years.

To begin with, although both Lamb and Southey grew to manhood with both parents living, each was much more strongly influenced by an aunt than by his parents.¹ Lamb, of course, lived at home where his 'ordering perception', as Winifred Courtney calls it,

caused him very early to relate books to life.² Southey, however, spent a number of his childhood years in his aunt's home and saw his parents only occasionally.³ From these aunts early in their lives both men acquired a deep and abiding love of the theatre. Southey recorded that some of his earliest memories were of the theatre where the standard of acting was unusually high. His first theatrical experience was Fielding's comedy 'The Fathers' when he was four;⁴ and of course Lamb, in the guise of Elia, shared with the world the genesis of his lifelong fascination with theatre in his essay 'My First Play'.⁵

Both Lamb and Southey were educated at very prestigious schools; Lamb at Christ's Hospital⁶ and Southey at Westminster.⁷ Each was able to attend because of the intervention of someone other than his parents. In Lamb's case, his father's employer, Samuel Salt, used his influence to secure Lamb's admittance.⁸ Southey's sojourn at Westminster was arranged by his uncle, the Reverend Herbert Hill, who undertook all of the expenses for Southey's education.⁹ Each writer during his school years made a few friends with whom he enjoyed lifelong friendships. In Lamb's case, the most notable friend he met at Christ's Hospital was Coleridge; and their friendship, though as early as 1798 somewhat tarnished by Lamb's dawning disillusionment with Coleridge's character, lasted until Coleridge's death on July 25, 1834.¹⁰

Even though both Lamb and Southey attended highly reputable schools and the latter spent some time at Oxford,¹¹ it seems obvious that each one profited much more from his own self-directed but awe-inspiring reading. They were both fortunate enough to have unlimited access to private libraries. Lamb joyously explored Samuel Salt's library, reading at an early age such diverse and amazingly difficult material as Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Joseph Glanvil's *Witches and Witchcraft*, and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*,¹² the Greek tragic poets, Milton and Shakespeare, Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Dr. Samuel Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith.¹³

Jack Simmons documents with meticulous care Southey's progressive programme of reading. In Southey's own words Simmons reports, 'Shakespeare was in my hands as soon as I could read . . . I went through Beaumont and Fletcher also, before I was eight years old'.¹⁴ Then Simmons goes on to mention other works which Southey absorbed such as *The Spectator* or Mrs Rowe's translation of parts of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, all of which he later read in its complete form from Hoole's version. This so delighted Southey that he moved on to the *Orlando Furioso*.¹⁵ Of these two books Simmons records Southey's own comments:

It was for the sake of their stories that I perused and reperused these poems with ever new delight; and by bringing them thus within my reach in boyhood, the translator rendered me a service which, when I look back upon my intellectual life, I cannot estimate too highly.¹⁶

According to Simmons, Southey came to his love of Spenser by studying Hoole's notes. Then in rapid succession Southey read Pope's *Homer*, Josephus, *The Arabian Nights*, Mickle's *Lusiad*, and the *Arcadia*. By the time he was nine, Southey was writing epics and eventually heroic epistles satirizing English manners which comprise his earliest extant prose.¹⁷ When he entered Westminster, he received the free use of the Bedfords' library in New Palace Yard¹⁸ where he read Picart's *Religious Ceremonies* and the works of Rousseau, Malory, and Voltaire.¹⁹

Another major influence in both men's lives was the fear of insanity. All Elians are well aware of Lamb's personal bout with insanity²⁰ as well as with his unsurpassed courage in assuming both legal and familial responsibility for Mary during her lifelong struggle with

recurring madness.²¹ What is not as widely known except perhaps among Southey scholars is that all his life he harboured a fear of insanity, a fact which becomes quite poignant when we realise that for some years before her death, Southey's beloved Edith was insane and that furthermore, he himself in his last year or two succumbed to madness.²² Even as Lamb, after his own encounter with that dread malady, kept a severe check on himself to prevent any subsequent recurrence,²³ Southey consciously sought to preclude his own mental deterioration. As Simmons asserts:

The disturbance of composing poetry with concentration -- the difficult, and sometimes agonizing, process described in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* -- was a luxury he could not afford. He chose rather to write tales in verse and light pieces, which he threw off with a fatal felicity. Presently he found even that too exciting, and he turned over almost completely to prose.²⁴

Simmons explains that Southey felt that the composing of poetry filled him with too much excitement; so much excitement, in fact, that it disturbed his delicate mental stability and brought on insomnia. Simmons further notes parenthetically that Southey's tendency toward over-stimulation must have been associated with his astonishingly weird dreams, which he recorded in fascinating detail. In a letter to Grosvenor Charles Bedford of 30 September 1797, Southey relates two strange dreams from his childhood. In one he was beheaded for cursing the king. Immediately thereafter he placed his head in his mother's lap, where periodically he looked up at her and again cursed the king.²⁵

In the matter of astounding and influential dreams, we find yet another parallel in Lamb and Southey's lives. In the Elian essay 'Witches and Other Night Fears', Lamb recounts his childish fascination with his father's copy of the book *History of the Bible* by Stackhouse. He was simultaneously repelled and drawn by the work, especially with, as he describes it, 'the Witch raising up Samuel, which I wish that I had never seen'.²⁶ The result of his preoccupation with Stackhouse's book was his childhood suffering, doubtless bearing a premonition of the terrors both he and Mary were to experience in later years:

I was dreadfully alive to nervous terrors. The nighttime solitude, and the dark, were my hell. The sufferings I endured in this nature would justify the expression. I never laid my head on my pillow, I suppose, from the fourth to the seventh or eighth year of my life--so far as memory serves in things so long ago--without an assurance, which realised its own prophecy, of seeing some frightful spectre. Be old Stackhouse then acquitted in part, if I say, that to his picture of the Witch raising up Samuel-- . . . I owe--not my midnight terrors, the hell of my infancy -- but the shape and manner of their visitations Had I never met with the picture, the fears would have come self-pictured in some shape or other--²⁷

Southey once described a walk he took from Porlock to Lynmouth, and he recalled an unusual thought he had had as he traversed the Valley of Rocks:

A palace of the pre-Adamite kings, a city of the Anakim, must have appeared so shapeless, and yet so like the ruins of what had been shaped after the waters of the flood subsided.²⁸

Of this passage Simmons says:

we have here a momentary glimpse of the fantastic inner world of his [Southey's] mind, in which the weird scenery of his epics was shaped.²⁹

Certainly both Lamb and Southey knew what it was to have dreams and excitement and fears that they could control only by exerting enormous self-control. Both were so dedicated to family that they willingly assumed responsibilities from which many people would turn away. Lamb accepted the responsibility, the sacrifices, and the sadness which Mary's illness imposed on them both.³⁰ With an equally magnanimous, dedicated, unselfish spirit, Southey devoted himself to supporting Coleridge's family as well as his own.³¹ For each man to achieve what he had set for himself, he had to exercise unceasing self-restraint in the face of great odds. Also, each at times incorporated some of his dreams, either sleeping or waking, in his writings. Hence Lamb uses his childhood nightmares as a part of his essay 'Witches and Other Night Fears'.³²

Another dominant interest which Lamb and Southey shared was a deep and abiding love for children. Southey, of course, was able to marry and have children of his own; consequently, some of his most delightful prose passages relate his experiences with his children.³³ An exemplification of this exists in *Colloquies* and *The Doctor*, specifically the sixth Colloquy:

. . . A fine day affects children alike at all seasons as it does the barometer. They live in the present, seldom saddened with any retrospective thoughts, and troubled with no foresight . . .

On such a day, a holyday having been voted by acclamation, an ordinary walk would not satisfy the children:--it must be a scramble among the mountains, and I must accompany them;-- . . . Away they went to put on coats and clogs, and presently were ready each with her little basket to carry out the luncheon, and bring home such treasures of mosses and lichens as they were sure to find. Off we set; and when I beheld their happiness, and thought how many enjoyments they would have been deprived of, if their lot had fallen in a great city, I blest God who had enabled me to fulfill my heart's desire and live in a country such as Cumberland.³⁴

After recording this engaging passage, Simmons justifiably comments:

Southey's language will always take wing when he is speaking of something that really touches his heart--whether it is family happiness or gratitude for kindness or the sense of achievement at reaching the end of a long literary task.³⁵

Considering Southey's dedication to and delight in children, it seems almost inevitable that he would write a classic for children. Following the styles of Defoe and Swift, both of whom shared with Southey, in addition to the unceasing pressure of writing for the press, the remarkable achievement of writing a children's classic, remarkable because to create for children such works as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Southey's 'The Story of the Three Bears' demands total sincerity, truth, and simplicity.³⁶

Both Mary and Charles Lamb, on the other hand, first revealed their interest in children through the tales in *Mrs. Leicester's School*. Through her letters of advice to young girls,

Mary utilised her strong maternal instincts. Then, of course, together she and Charles wrote *Tales from Shakespeare* for children; and Charles wrote for them *The Adventures of Ulysses*. In June 1820 they met a young girl, Emma Isola, the daughter of a widower in Cambridge, who captured their hearts and lighted their lives. That Christmas Emma spent with the Lambs,³⁷ and all three found the experience so satisfying that she began to make regular and frequent visits. When in 1823 her father died, the Lambs informally adopted her. She attended boarding school in Dulwich but visited as often as possible. Both Mary and Charles helped to prepare Emma to be a governess, and both felt more cheerful when she was with them. Charles especially found her conversation and her amusements at once 'both cheering and tranquilizing'³⁸ as Lord David Cecil tells us:

cheering because it provided an outlet for the strain of childishness that had never been eradicated from his nature, tranquilizing in that it soothed him to be with someone too young to be aware of the dark cloud that shadowed his life.³⁹

In addition to Lamb's prose for children, most of his verse was for children. Although none of this is of the highest order, it is simple and tender and concerns the topics with which children feel familiar: animals and birds, wasps and bees, rainbows, a clock striking, fairy stories, fables, and *The King and Queen of Hearts*. He retained a bit of the child which caused him to see his beloved London as an Arabian fairyland which had an air of mystery. As Howe tells us, 'It was that imagination, directed by the artists's hand, which transmuted mud and stone and people into a city of gold and romance'.⁴⁰ Howe later comments:

Always present with him were his own childhood memories of the Temple, of school and of the country . . . His own creation of children, Alice in "Dream-Children", the Child Angel, Barbara S--, the little girl in "Valentine's Day", the chimney-sweepers, and little Bo-bo in "Roast Pig" revealed an ability equalled or surpassed only by Shakespeare and Dickens . . . His playfulness appealed to children and, on occasions in their company, he was accepted as one of them.⁴¹

During the winter of 1794-1795, Coleridge was in London and spent many evenings with Lamb at the Salutation and Cat, reminiscing and planning for the world to come.⁴² Early in 1795, Southey went to London to persuade Coleridge to return to Bristol. He accomplished his goal in good order, but probably during his brief time in London, Coleridge introduced him and Lamb.⁴³ From the beginning of their acquaintance, Lamb and Southey apparently respected each other both as human beings and as men of letters.

Shortly after Southey's *Joan of Arc* appeared, Wordsworth termed it 'a very conceited performance' and averred 'the poem, though in some passages of first-rate excellence, is on the whole of very inferior execution'.⁴⁴ Lamb, on the contrary, wrote to Coleridge on June 8-10, 1796:

I had not presumed to expect anything of such excellence from Southey. Why, the poem is alone sufficient to redeem the character of the age we live in from the imputation of degenerating in Poetry . . . On the whole, I expect Southey *one* day to rival Milton. I already deem him equal to Cowper, and superior to all living poets besides.⁴⁵

In the first of Lamb's letters to Coleridge which Edwin Marris includes, that of May 27, 1796, Lamb writes, 'My civic & poetic compts to Southey if at Bristol-- . Why, he is a very Leviathin of Bards--the small minnow I--'⁴⁶

In early July 1797, Cottle visited Southey, bearing the newly-printed volume of poems by Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd. 'Southey commented enthusiastically, 'I know no volume that can be compared to it.'⁴⁷

Each man, then, was eager to praise the other's literary work. It is therefore not surprising to learn from Lamb's letter to Coleridge dated August 24, 1797, that he had just spent one night as the Southey's houseguest.⁴⁸

The first of Lamb's letters to Southey which Marris includes is dated 28 July 1798, and contains a list of the propositions Lamb had earlier sent to Coleridge as he was about to depart for Germany. It is clear from Lamb's quoting Coleridge's 'poor Lamb, if he wants any *knowledge*, he may apply to me'--⁴⁹ that Lamb was hurt by Coleridge's condescending remark and felt free to express himself to Southey.

Because of Lamb's temporary estrangement from Coleridge, Southey became his chief correspondent. Indeed, in 1798 Lamb wrote Southey thirteen letters now extant.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, Lamb did not preserve Southey's letters to him.⁵¹

Although Southey, unlike Lamb, detested London, a feeling doubtless accentuated by the fact that his wife invariably fell ill whenever she was there,⁵² he did visit the city periodically. Their friendship deepened steadily from 1795 through 1802, though after 1800 they were never quite as intimate as they had been earlier. Probably this was due at least in part to Southey's settling at Greta Hall. In his first letters to Southey, Lamb engaged in frank discussions of Southey's writing, writing what he himself thought and suggesting improvement of words and of lines.⁵³ He also expressed a continuous interest in Southey and in his family. Each letter reveals some characteristic trait of Lamb.⁵⁴ In turn, Southey evidently urged Lamb to read some of his favourite writers such as Withers and Quarles and encouraged Lamb in his writing.⁵⁵ Indeed, apparently they were comfortable enough in their friendship for Lamb on November 8, 1798, to question Southey's failure to grasp the brilliance of 'The Ancient Marinere', but he ended the letter on a conciliatory note.⁵⁶ Even though we do not know what, if any, response Southey made to Lamb's criticism, it is worth noting that throughout the following years of writing literary criticism, Southey never once wrote another review out of malice nor did he ever again review any of Coleridge's writing.⁵⁷

Beginning on November 20, 1798, Lamb discussed with Southey various aspects of his work on his play *John Woodvil*. Perhaps partly because of his involvement with Lamb during the composition of *John Woodvil*, Southey seems to have felt kindly toward it. At least when Mrs. Barbauld, writing in the new *Annual Review*, 1803, v.1, pp. 688-692, sneered at Lamb's theories, poetic powers, and friends as expressed in *John Woodvil*, Southey wrote in wrath to Coleridge:

Why have you not made Lamb declare war upon Mrs. Bare-bold? He should singe her flaxen wig with squibs, and tie crackers to her petticoats till she lept about like a parched pea for sheer torture. There is not a man in the world who could so well revenge himself.²⁸

Later Southey wrote to Taylor that although Lamb's tragedy was not a good one, even though it contained fine passages, Mrs. Barbauld's review consisted of 'Presbyterian sneer from one end to the other'.⁵⁹

Although Southey had a good sense of humour, he could not always understand Lamb's reactions, which, as Lamb himself readily admitted, were sometimes rather bizarre. At one point in May 1799, Southey spent three weeks in London to attend two more terms at Gray's Inn.⁶⁰ During that time he visited Lamb and reported on his visit in a letter of 16 May to his wife thus:

Lamb told me that he dined last week with his Anna--who is married--and he laughed and said she was a stupid girl. There is something unnatural in Lamb's levity; if he never loved her, why did he publish those sonnets? If he did, why tell it with bravado laughter, or why talk of it at all? My opinions are for the world, but my feelings are to myself. I would proclaim the one under the gallows, but shrink from the indulgence of the other in presence of my nearest friends . . . Lamb loves to laugh at everything he speaks of with a joke except Bishop Taylor.⁶¹

This account seems to indicate that Lamb still felt more for Ann Bertram (formerly Ann Simmons) than he revealed in letters, or at least in the extant ones; and Southey's perceptions concerning his own innate reticence are both accurate and significant.⁶²

Yet even though the two men did not always understand each other, they had great respect for each other's talents as well as mutual genuine affection. In 1801 Southey spent some time in London where Edith joined him. During that protracted stay, he saw the Lambs often.⁶³ The fact that when he was in London Southey sought out the Lambs is significant because whereas Lamb found the delights of friendship most often in the company of a few close friends, congenial souls who amused or interested him in a way that turned his attention from himself,⁶⁴ Southey never held in high esteem the pleasantries of association with literary figures.⁶⁵ We must therefore conclude that Southey found Lamb's company unusually appealing.

During a visit to London in 1805, Southey proposed to Longman a sequel to George Ellis's *Specimens of the Early English Poets* with Charles Lamb as editor. We do not know whether Longman or Lamb rejected the idea of Lamb's editorship, but ultimately Southey undertook the project.⁶⁶ The relative point of this incident is, of course, that Southey actively sought to put in Lamb's way work suitable to his talents.

Although both Lamb and Southey initially aspired to be poets, in the new century they both slowly gravitated toward prose. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Lamb had not yet discovered the literary genre which would properly reveal his genius, that of the personal essay; yet in a sense he had unconsciously done so in his letters, many of which contain some of his best writing. He had a rather wide correspondence, some of the more regular of whom were old friends, namely Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. Suffering made him more reserved. Yet in his letters to certain of his friends, Lamb expressed the full range of his mercurial moods. Sometimes his letters to Southey and Wordsworth consist of perceptive literary criticism, but more frequently his many moods race each other across his pages, replicating his conversation.⁶⁷

Over the years both Lamb and Southey worked to find the right styles for them. Both wrote criticism, and about Lamb Will D. Howe says:

Here was a young scholar in the best sense, seriously trying to perfect his criticism not by a study of formal models, but by applying the touchstone of human life and the possibilities of the written language.⁶⁸

Jack Simmons explains that Lamb, in a move away from the eighteenth century style of prose, emulated the seventeenth century writers Sir Thomas Browne and Fuller. All three, Browne, Fuller, and Lamb, shared styles basically poetic and intensely musical and evocative.⁶⁹

One of the ironies of Southey's career was that at about the same time in 1813 that he was made Poet Laureate, he turned almost exclusively to prose, the obvious exception being the commemorative odes to celebrate special occasions that were expected of the Laureate. Although Southey's major literary contributions are in prose, he himself said, 'To write poetry is the best preparation for writing prose. The versemaker gets the habit of weighing the meanings and qualities of his words, until he comes to know, as if by intuition, what particular word will best fit the sentence'.⁷⁰ Southey's prose is often replete with memorable detail, detail which paints a vivid picture or brings a character from history or biography to life. His letters are often poetic.⁷¹ Over the years Southey followed a solitary course in keeping with the stubbornness and the independence he exercised in his career. In contradiction to the Romantic direction chosen by Lamb, Coleridge, and Hazlitt, Southey strove to write plainly and briefly.⁷² As Simmons explains:

he played a great part in loosening up the muscles of the language, in releasing it from the artificiality into which at the end of the eighteenth century it had been debased by the imitators of Johnson and Gibbon and Burke. In Southey's hands, English prose became an altogether more supple instrument, something sparer, plainer, more precise: . . . He cannot rival Swift, for he has no wit and he lacks passion; but for narrative and descriptive purposes his style is a perfect model, unsurpassed in modern English.⁷³

By the 1820's each man had excavated his way through poetry, and each had come ultimately to his own special form of prose. Both were writing steadily as they had done all of their adult lives. They exchanged occasional letters and regularly reviewed each other's writing in a positive vein. *The Essays of Elia* came out in January 1823. At once Southey, being one of Lamb's oldest friends, mentioned them in the *Quarterly Review*. Unfortunately, the time he chose was inopportune.⁷⁴ In addition, Southey's comment, which he intended as a sincere compliment, came out badly. In an article titled 'The Progress of Infidelity', he observed that Lamb's book 'only wanted a sounder religious feeling to be as delightful as it was original'.⁷⁵ Having first selected 'saner', Southey at once realised that 'saner' was an unforgivably tactless adjective to use in speaking of any of Lamb's work. Being rushed to complete his article, Southey substituted the word 'sounder' with the intention of revising the entire sentence in proof when he could be more relaxed and unhurried. Sad to say, Southey never received the proof sheets; consequently, the offending word 'sounder' remained.⁷⁶

Lamb, though by then a seasoned writer accustomed to having his work criticised, felt that at three earlier times he had been poorly treated by the *Quarterly*. Also, he took exception to certain comments Southey had made in the article about several of Lamb's friends. He therefore decided to reply publicly and did so in a 'Letter from Elia to Robert Southey' which appeared in the *London Magazine* in October. Members of the press seized this controversial issue, some championing Southey and others Lamb;⁷⁷ but at this critical juncture in their friendship, the two principals revealed their true integrity by meeting this

crisis with dignity and magnanimity. As soon as Southey realised that his comment had hurt Lamb, he wrote an admirable private reply dated November 19, 1823:

My Dear Lamb--On Monday I saw your letter in the *London Magazine*, which I had not before had an opportunity of seeing, and I now take the first interval of leisure for replying to it.

Nothing could be further from my mind than any intention or apprehension of any way offending or injuring a man concerning whom I have never spoken, though, or felt otherwise than with affection, esteem, and admiration.

If you had let me know in any private or friendly manner that you felt wounded by a sentence in which nothing but kindness was intended--or that you found it might injure the sale of your book--I would most readily and gladly have inserted a note in the next Review to qualify and explain what had hurt you.

You made this impossible, and I am sorry for it. But I will not engage in controversy with you to make sport for the Philistines.

The provocation must be strong indeed that can rouse me to do this, even with an enemy. And if you can forgive an unintended offence as heartily as I do the way in which you have resented it, there will be nothing to prevent our meeting as we have heretofore done, and feeling towards each other as we have always been wont to do.

Only signify a correspondent willingness on your part, and send me your address, and my first business next week shall be to reach your door, and shake hands with you and your sister. Remember me to her most kindly and believe me--

Yours, with unabated esteem and regards, Robert Southey⁷⁸

As Marrs puts it, 'Southey and Lamb consequently exchanged marvellously gracious private letters, and the air was cleared forever'.⁷⁹

Lamb replied at once:

Dear Southey,

The kindness of your note has melted away the mist which was upon me. I have been fighting against a shadow. That accursed Q.R. had vexed me by a gratuitous speaking, of its own knowledge, that the *Confessions of a D-----d* was a genuine description of the state of the writer. Little things, that are not ill meant, may produce much ill. *That* might have injured me alive and dead! I am in a public office, and my life is insured. I was prepared for anger, and I thought I saw, in a few obnoxious words, a hard case of repetition against me. I wish both magazine and review at the bottom of the sea. I shall be ashamed to see you, and my sister (though innocent) will be still more so; for the folly was done without her knowledge, and has made her uneasy ever since. My guardian angel [Mary] was away at that time.

I will muster up to see you, however, any day next week (Wednesday excepted). We shall hope that you bring Edith with you, That will be a second mortification. She will hate to see us; but come and heap embers. We deserve it; I for what I've done, and she for being my sister.

Do come early in the day, by sun-light, that you may see my *Milton*.

I am at Colebrook Cottage, Colebrook Row, Islington: a detached whitish house, close to the New River end of Colebrook Terrace, left hand from Sadler's Wells.

Will you let me know the day before?
Your penitent, C. Lamb⁸⁰

The generous spirits of both men united to heal the one brief rift in their long friendship and to carry that friendship with renewed strength to the end of Lamb's life.⁸¹

Indeed, each man continued to rejoice in the other's literary triumphs, to exchange occasional warm letters, and when circumstances permitted, to enjoy each other's company. In 1830 Southey wrote the poem 'To Charles Lamb' as a tribute to long friendship and as an expression of pleasure that Lamb was now being recognised as he deserved.⁸² When Coleridge died on July 25, 1834, Southey did not pretend a grief he did not feel. As Simmons so poignantly observes however:

It was otherwise with Lamb, for excepting the unhappy episode of 1823 no shadow had ever come between them, and Southey spoke of him with real tenderness.⁸³

On learning of Lamb's death, the Poet Laureate Southey wrote, 'There are some reputations which will not keep, but Lamb's is not of that kind. His memory will retain its fragrance as long as the best spice that ever was expended upon one of the Pharohs'.⁸⁴

If Lamb is ranked more highly than Southey, it is probably that Lamb's touch is more agreeable to his readers. It seems that this was true in their own day. Certainly it has been true in ensuing years and seems to be true today. But who can tell? We as Elians believe with deep conviction that especially the prose of Elia, as one of Professor James Misenheimer's students once said, 'will be immortal for quite a long time'. This is not the first time that this statement from the classroom has been shared with the Society. But who can surguess the place of Robert Southey, eventually, given his vast and versatile contribution to English Romantic prose? Certainly we as Elians know that Lamb, with his unsurpassed generosity of spirit, would cheer any rise in Southey's reputation. We acknowledge, of course, the evanescence of terrestrial immortality; but that poignant cognizance can distill in only the smallest degree our belief in and our love and respect for two remarkable male friends and extraordinary contemporaries who sought to make the world a better place for all. Perhaps we need them now more than they ever have been needed before.

NOTES

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53. Howe, p.81.
54. Ibid., p.82.
55. Haller, p.195.
56. Marrs, pp.142-143, 145-152, 159-160, 161-163.
57. Simmons, p.79.
58. Haller, p.290.
59. Ibid.
60. Simmons, p.81.
61. Curry, *New Letters of Robert Southey, Volume One: 1792-1810*, p.190.
62. Simmons, p.81.
63. Ibid., p.96.
64. Cecil, p.108.
65. Simmons, p.66.
66. Ibid., p.112.
67. Cecil, p.101.
68. Howe, p.158.
69. Simmons, p.215.
70. Ibid., p.216.
71. Ibid., p.218.
72. Ibid., p.216.
73. Ibid., p.223.
74. Ibid., p.171.
75. Ibid., p.172.
76. Ibid.
77. E.V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), Vol. II, pp.157-158.
78. Ibid.
79. Marrs, III, p.133.
80. Lucas, II, pp.158-159.
81. Carolyn Misenheimer and James B. Misenheimer, Jr., 'Another Elia: Essays in a Minor Key' (London: *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, New Series No. 60, October 1987), p.121.
82. Curry, *Southey*, p.153.
83. Simmons, p.187.
84. Ibid., p.341.

The text of Professor Carolyn Misenheimer's speech as Guest of Honour at the Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon, held at the Royal College of General Practitioners' headquarters, 14 Princess Gate, Kensington, on 9th February 1991.

'A SOUL SET APART': LAMB AND THE BORDER-LAND OF IMAGINATIVE EXPERIENCE

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On the 27th September, 1796, Lamb wrote to Coleridge to tell him that

my poor dear dearest sister in a fit of insanity has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. ¹

Coleridge responds with suitably solemn and exalted religious consolation, offering, among other sentiments, the following observation upon his friend's condition following the catastrophe:

I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God. ²

Coleridge is quick to predict a familiar tragic pattern for Lamb's story - it is the classical pattern of an Oedipus or an Orestes estranged by catastrophe, i.e. condemned by the awfulness of an experience so far beyond the ordinary that they must henceforth remain permanently outside it. In this way, the tragic protagonist becomes the inhabitant of a limbo or twilight world, irrevocably removed from the mainstream social community, even while he seems to remain nominally attached to it. In the Greek tragic drama, there is a peculiar sense of power, often supernatural, attached to these figures, isolated by crime and the process of expiation, yet achieving thereby a sanctity which seems to redeem, or perhaps even grow out of, the very heinousness of the original act. Hence Coleridge's perception, similar to that which informs the character of his own *Ancient Mariner*, of "a soul set apart and made peculiar to God." It is this kind of sanctity that we recognise even in Cain:

And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

(Genesis IV, 15)

It is an interesting common element in all of these stories that the particular horror of the catastrophe usually arises from its attachment to a crime against a near relation - in Lamb's case, the deed was not his own, but his sister's, yet, as from the closeness of association between an Electra and an Orestes, it becomes surprisingly easy to blur the distinction, and there is certainly an impression gathered from the letters, that Lamb, at any rate, seems very much to take the consequences of the act upon himself. 'We are in a manner *marked*', he writes to Coleridge in May 1800.³ The Biblical resonances of that 'marked' would carry inevitable associations for both writer and recipient of the letter, and although the parallel with Cain breaks down upon the consideration of moral culpability, would still suggest an irrevocable, divinely decreed separation from the run of humanity. Lamb's overwhelming sense of the isolation or apartness brought on by catastrophe is frequently and strongly expressed:

I see nobody, and sit, and read or walk, alone, and hear nothing. I am quite lost to conversation from disuse; ..worldly hopes are at a low ebb with me, and unworldly thoughts are not yet familiarised to me,..
(letter to Coleridge 24th June 1797⁴)

It is dangerous of course to go too far in the imposition of a set dramatic pattern upon the incidents of a life; still, the dramatic elements in this case are almost too strong to be ignored, and it is tempting to read the following few sentences in the essay 'New Year's Eve' as an explicit invitation:

I would scarce now have any of those untoward accidents and events of my life reversed. I would no more alter them than the incidents of some well-contrived novel.⁵

That the novel of the essayist's life could be viewed as *well*-contrived must suggest that its incidents or events have been attended with significant or productive consequences. Given the fact that the essays - which, according to Lamb himself, do nothing else but 'talk with the reader'⁶ - are full of oblique hints about how to approach the writings in the context of the 'writer-persona' character, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to accept the above extract as an invitation to trace this created character back into the much earlier events of actual biography. Certainly, there is a recurrent image of the outsider, a denizen of a betwixt and between region, to be found in Lamb's writing, which alerts us to the biographical connection, and even discarding this connection as incidental merely, the image proves to be a valuable way into the processes of his thought.

A quality of apartness or outside-ness can be identified in the border states and half and half conditions of various kinds that proliferate in the essays of Elia. The figures exemplifying these conditions are invariably treated with a sympathetic understanding of the sensitivity, and frequently painfulness, of the limbo situation. In this understanding, we can locate, for instance, the emotional impulse of that strangely mystical piece of writing, 'The Child Angel', the fiction of a 'glorious Amphibium'.⁷

Border-persons can be identified, too, in Lamb's account of the infirm youth in 'The Old Margate Hoy' - 'He was as one, being with us, but not of us'⁸ - in the Convalescent and in the Poor Relation:

He is a puzzle to the servants, who are fearful of being too obsequious, or not civil enough, to him. ..He is too familiar by half, yet you wish he had less diffidence. With half the familiarity he might pass for a casual dependent; with more boldness he would be in no danger of being taken for what he is. He is too humble for a friend, yet taketh on him more state than befits a client.⁹

The consciousness of an almost inevitable painfulness attached to the border-condition lends a poignancy to this otherwise playful discussion:

..this theme of poor relationship is replete with so much matter for tragic as well as comic associations, that it is difficult to keep the account distinct without blending.¹⁰

In fact, the blending of comic and tragic associations, a characteristic fundamental to the half-serious, half-humorous tone that Lamb adopts most frequently, is itself a border-condition, typifying the style of his writing. Hence it is entirely appropriate that the

stylistic mode which Elia claims as peculiarly his own, is the ironic. The claim is implicit, for example, in the admission of his anti-'Caledonian' qualities in the essay 'Imperfect Sympathies':

Clap an extinguisher upon your irony, if you are unhappily blest with a vein of it.¹¹

Again, in the Preface to the *Last Essays*, it is claimed of Elia that

He too much affected that dangerous figure - irony.¹²

The view of irony as an intrinsic condition of the essayist's very being is revealed in the terms in which he speaks of the fear of death:

innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself* - do these things go out with life?

('New Year's Eve')¹³

In essays such as 'The Old and New Schoolmaster' and 'Imperfect Sympathies', the irony is contained in the way in which the writer readily admits his own condition as inferior or aberrant, yet discusses the standard in terms so unflattering as to carry out, as far as the reader is concerned, an indictment of the subjects of his discussion, in the terms of that very aberrancy.

My companion .. with great good-nature and dexterity shifted his conversation to the subject of public charities; which led to the comparative merits of provision for the poor in past and present times, with observations on the old monastic institutions, and charitable orders; - but, finding me rather dimly impressed with some glimmering notions from old poetic association, than strongly fortified with any speculations reducible to calculation on the subject, he gave the matter up;..¹⁴

Here, while appearing to defer to his 'companion' and to deprecate himself, the language in which the essayist portrays their respective attitudes, by assuming a complicity with the reader which upholds the merits of the poetic as opposed to the mundane, actually achieves exactly the reverse effect.

Thus ironic effect, for Lamb, is often a matter of perspective - the removed or border perspective which the essayist adopts upon the assumptions and rituals of everyday life, thereby achieving a kind of ludicrous transformation of the ordinary, which is often a cover for making serious moral or social criticisms upon it. This is the spirit, for instance, in which the writer reveals the inherent hypocrisy in the ritual of grace before meat at a rich man's table, or concludes an apparently frivolous account of the spectacular quality of London's beggars with an attack upon the vagrancy laws, and a plea for charity:

When they come with their counterfeit looks, and mumping tones, think them players. You pay your money to see a comedian feign these things, which concerning these poor people, thou canst not certainly tell whether they are feigned or not.

('A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis')¹⁵

The border perspective that Lamb adopts in the essays, as well as the frequency with which he refers to border conditions of different kinds, invite a view of the writer himself as

borderer. The original Preface to the *Last Essays of Elia*, as published in 1823 in the *London Magazine*, declares that Janus wept at the passing of Elia,¹⁶ thereby confirming the border-character of Elia through the empathy with a border-god. The edited 1833 text still explicitly calls the reader's attention to the border-state of the essayist, and asks that his reading be governed by this knowledge:

..while he pretended to cling to life, you saw how slender were the ties left to bind him. ..He was too much of the boy-man. The *toga virilis* never sat gracefully on his shoulders. The impressions of infancy had burnt into him, and he resented the impertinence of manhood. These were weaknesses; but such as they were, they are a key to explicate some of his writings.¹⁷

The representation of Elia as boy-man points the reader to the significance attached in the essays to the vestiges of childhood retained in adult nature, a key state of border-hood to which Lamb frequently reverts, and which he usually describes as manifested in dream – very much a half and half, or to borrow a currently fashionable term, liminal condition of being:

While childhood, and while dreams, reducing childhood, shall be left, imagination shall not have spread her holy wings totally to fly the earth. ('The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple')¹⁸

The innocence of childhood reproduced in the dreams of adult experience, is associated with a kind of prelapsarian facility of the imagination. Hence Lamb's memory of his first play:

It was all enchantment and a dream. No such pleasure has since visited me but in dreams –

('My First Play')¹⁹

The reiterated connection made between childhood and dream enables us to recognise, when he writes in the essay 'Sanity of True Genius', that 'the true poet dreams of being awake',²⁰ he is referring to the adult poetic imagination as reproducing a childlike depth of instinctive apprehension, close to that which Wordsworth describes in the 'infant Babe' passage, in the second Book of the *Prelude*.²¹ Indeed, in his comments upon Wordsworth's reverence for childhood, Lamb observes of the childhood period, 'how apprehensive! how imaginative! how religious!' ('The Excursion: A Poem').²²

The reproduction of childhood in the dream-state of adult experience is not the only border condition which Lamb associates with the imaginative function. In the essay on 'Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art', the portrayal of half-and-half conditions in general is offered as the test of the artistic imagination:

The world has nothing to show of the preternatural in painting, transcending the figure of Lazarus bursting his grave-clothes, in the great picture at Angerstein's. It seems a thing between two beings. A ghastly horror at itself struggles with newly-apprehending gratitude at second life bestowed. It cannot forget that it was a ghost. It has hardly felt that it is a body.²³

Again, in the description of a Dryad of Julio Romano, Lamb writes:

Long, grotesque, fantastic, yet with a grace of her own, beautiful in convulsion and distortion, linked to her connatural tree, co-twisting with its limbs her own, till both seemed either – these, animated branches, those, disanimated members – yet the animal and vegetable lives sufficiently kept distinct – *his* Dryad lay, an approximation of two natures, which to conceive, it must be seen;..²⁴

The connection suggested in this essay, between the portrayal of border conditions in art, and the fertility of the artistic imagination, indicates that the image of the borderer in Lamb's writing must not be dismissed as a purely whimsical or idiosyncratic peculiarity, but rather considered in the larger context of the writer's critical position. It will be found that it is possible to link the border conditions in Lamb's writing, with unrepresentability and abstraction, two crucial terms in his discussions of the imaginative and the sublime, and it is Hazlitt's remarks upon Elia which provide the insight by which we are enabled to make this link.

Hazlitt's portrait of Elia, as one who 'occupies that nice point between egotism and disinterested humanity',²⁵ is very much the portrait of a figure in limbo, a ghost. In the *Spirit of the Age*, he writes:

Death has in this sense the spirit of life in it; and the shadowy has to our author something substantial in it. Ideas savour most of reality in his mind; or rather his imagination loiters on the edge of each;..²⁶

Here, Hazlitt is associating the border quality to which Lamb himself refers in the Preface to the *Last Essays* ('while he pretended to cling to life, you saw how slender were the ties left to bind him') with his tendency towards abstraction, a consciousness of reality in the form of ideas, which last word carries in Hazlitt's writing, as with Coleridge and Lamb, the Platonic meaning of 'ideal'.

Roy Park, in his introduction to a selection of Lamb's critical writings,²⁷ appropriates Lamb's theory of the imagination into a wider contemporary stance against abstraction which constitutes Park's central thesis of the Romantic condition. In support of this view, he argues, using the essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare', that Lamb

is contending against the conversion of the poetic into the abstract²⁸

This is demonstrably untrue. When Lamb asserts, in the essay on Shakespeare, 'that vantage-ground of abstraction which reading possesses over seeing',²⁹ or when he declares that 'the reading of tragedy is a fine abstraction',³⁰ it is clear that he is actually equating the poetic with the abstract, which is also the ideal, both by common,³¹ as well as by Lamb's particular usage. Park's argument of Lamb's rejection of the abstract will hold together only if we accept his arbitrary identification of the abstract with the everyday ('familiar or mundane, as opposed to scientific abstraction ... characterises the process whereby we become habituated to our daily world',³²) surely a muddled, indeed perverse, confusion of opposite categories. A more straightforward reading of the essays in fact reveals Lamb's profound reverence for the way in which the poetic imagination relates to the abstract as *opposed* to the everyday. This can be confirmed in the manner in which he discusses the banquet scene in *Paradise Regained*:

The whole banquet is too civic and culinary, and the accompaniments altogether a profanation of that deep, abstracted, holy scene.
(*'Grace before Meat'*)³³

For Lamb, the sublimest working of the Imagination must be evidenced in the abstraction, which is synonymous with the idealism, of its effects. Thus he writes of the acting of Munden:

So the gusto of Munden antiquates and ennobles what it touches. His pots and his ladles are as grand and primal as the seething-pots and hooks seen in old prophetic vision. A tub of butter, contemplated by him, amounts to a Platonic idea. He understands a leg of mutton in its quiddity.³⁴

In spite of the flippancy of its tone, the passage expresses an assumption fundamental to Lamb's theory of the imagination, viz., that the forms which it evokes are ideal - they are, to paraphrase Wallace Stevens, the ideas of things rather than the things themselves.³⁵ According to Lamb, reality, or actual things, never measures up to the imaginative conception of these things. Hence the disappointment at his first sight of the sea, comparable to Wordsworth's reaction to Mont Blanc:³⁶

The things do not fill up that space, which the idea of them seemed to take up in the mind. ..the sea remains a disappointment. - Is it not, that in *the latter* we had expected to behold (absurdly, I grant, but, I am afraid, by the law of imagination unavoidably) not a definite object, as those wild beasts, or that mountain compassable by the eye, but *all the sea at once*, the COMMENSURATE ANTAGONIST OF THE EARTH!
(*'The Old Margate Hoy'*)³⁷

Lamb exalts the imaginative or ideal over the actual; this is the same assumption by which he declares the tragedies of Shakespeare unfit for stage representation, because the ideality of the dramatist's conception can only be diminished when presented as actual, however skilful the presentation. Again, the useful word 'abstraction' takes on an additional significance, as that which has only intrinsic form, with no element of pictorial representation. It is in keeping with his reverence for the abstract, therefore, that Lamb writes, discussing a particularly fine performance of one of the tragedies:

It seemed to embody and realise conceptions which had hitherto assumed no distinct shape. But dearly do we pay all our life after for this juvenile pleasure, this sense of distinctness. When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that instead of realising an idea, we have only materialised and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance.³⁸

This is because on the stage, according to Lamb, 'the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses.'³⁹ It is the imaginative alone which engages which the sublime, and the sublime, by virtue of its limitlessness, can only be dimly or partially apprehended. This explains Lamb's clinging to the indistinct in the above passage, as a larger or nobler quality than the clearly defined. Similarly, in the essay 'Witches, and other Night Fears', he describes the depth of feeling awakened by the disembodied, quoting a passage from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*⁴⁰ in illustration:

All the cruel, tormenting, defined devils in Dante - tearing, mangling, choking, stifling, scorching demons - are they one half so fearful to the spirit of a man, as the simple idea of a spirit unembodied following him - ..the kind of fear here treated of is purely spiritual - ..it is strong in proportion as it is objectless upon earth..⁴¹

The exaltation of the disembodied over the defined, which amounts to the exaltation of the imaginative over the sensual world, is, as Hazlitt implies in his comments upon Elia, the natural tendency of a limbo person, to whom the life of the mind is the more habitual activity than the participation in the common pursuit. Further, if by its nature, the unrepresentable can only be dimly conceived or apprehended, then the capacity for such apprehension becomes the attribute of the essayist's particular type of outsidersness. In the essay on 'Imperfect Sympathies', discussing the differences between his own mind and the Caledonian's, Lamb says of the latter:

He has no falterings of self-suspicion. Surmises, guesses, misgivings, half-intuitions, semi-consciousnesses, partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions, have no place in his brain, or vocabulary. The twilight of dubiety never falls upon him. ..Between the affirmative and the negative there is no border-land with him.⁴²

Such a border-land, occupied, by implication, by the essayist himself, is the dim or twilight zone, in which is enabled the apprehension of the unrepresentable, that constitutes genius, or the sublime. In this way, a chain of associations can be established which ultimately connects the imaginative faculty with twilight or border perspectives, through the intermediary links of dim perception, unrepresentability, and the abstraction or the ideal.

The consciousness of border-areas in the essays, awakens, then, the reader's understanding of the essayist himself as 'a soul set apart and made peculiar to God'. The sanctity attached to this figure arises from his participation in an ideal or imaginative world that is outside the everyday world of common experience. In this context, by recalling the connotations of 'detached', or 'separated' or 'removed' attached to the term 'abstract', the far-reaching significance of this key word for Lamb, stands fully confirmed. Through his *exploration* of the abstract, Lamb translates the claim made in one of his letters

I know, I am no ways better in practice than my neighbours - but I have ..an occasional earnest aspiration after perfection, which they have not.
(7th to 10th January 1797 letter to Coleridge)⁴³

into the creation of a persona in the essays, who is put forward as partaking of the profounder liberated understanding, which biographical knowledge enables us, like Coleridge, to perceive as granted by the experience of catastrophe.

NOTES

1. Marris, Jr., Edwin W. (ed.): *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, Ithaca and London, 1975, Vol 1 (hereafter referred to as *Letters*), p.44.
2. Quoted in *Letters*, p.46.
3. *Letters*, p.202.
4. *Ibid.*, p.113.
5. Hutchinson, Thomas (ed.): *The Works in Prose and Verse of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, London, 1908, Vol 1 (hereafter referred to as *Works*), p.565.
6. *Ibid.*, p.472.
7. *Ibid.*, p.777.
8. *Ibid.*, p.695.
9. *Ibid.*, p.668.
10. *Ibid.*, p.672.
11. *Ibid.*, p.547.
12. *Ibid.*, p.660.

13. Ibid., p.508.
14. Ibid., p.534.
15. Ibid., p.621.
16. See "A Character of the Late Elia", in *Works*, p.853.
17. Ibid., pp.661-62.
18. Ibid., p.584.
19. Ibid., p.595.
20. Ibid., p.705.
21. 1805 Prelude, Book II 11 237-280.
22. *Works*, p.216.
23. Ibid., p.760.
24. Ibid., p.761.
25. Howe, P.P. (ed.): *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt in Twenty-one Volumes*, London and Toronto, 1932, Vol II, p.180.
26. Ibid., p.180.
27. Park, Roy (ed): *Lamb as Critic*, London and Henley, 1980.
28. Ibid., p.13.
29. *Works*, p.136.
30. Ibid., p.141.
31. See OED
32. *Lamb as Critic*, pp.7-8.
33. *Works*, p.588.
34. Ibid., p.658.
35. See Poem: "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself".
36. 1805 Prelude, Book VI 11 452-456.
37. *Works*, p.696.
38. Ibid., p.126.
39. Ibid., p.138.
40. 'Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk with fear and dread,
And having once turn'd round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread'. - *Works*, p.557.
41. Ibid., p.557.
42. Ibid., p.546.
43. *Letters*, p.89.

WILLIAM HAZLITT: THE ESSAY AS VEHICLE FOR THE ROMANTIC CRITIC

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Genre is, of course, an old critical issue. As M. H. Abrams and others remind us, it is apparent in the ancient classical tendency to divide literature into epic-narrative, poetic-lyric, and dramatic, and it persists with varying degrees of emphasis throughout the history of literary theory.¹ From the Renaissance to the neoclassic period, genres were strictly defined and were not to be mixed lightly lest their basic purity be defiled. There was also an order of rank with epic and tragedy regarded as major forms and lyric as minor. The more striking appearances of forms like the novel, biography, and the essay in the eighteenth-century and the further refinement of categories like poetry, fiction, and drama

in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century create new effects, however, especially a certain weakening of confidence in the stability of genre theory.

Abrams places great emphasis on the emergence of certain kinds of poems--James Thompson's *The Seasons* with its combination of natural description and philosophy, the short lyric--as part of his thesis in *The Mirror and the Lamp* that a new concern with expression of the feelings of the writer further weakens a hierarchy of genres. One might question his somewhat sweeping generalization that 'from the Romantic period until the recent past, genres have been conceived as convenient but rather arbitrary ways to classify literature,'² but he does capture nicely the thinning boundary lines between genres in the period.

Alastair Fowler's recent book, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* enters a salutary warning that 'we have to allow for the fact that the complete range of genres is never equally, let alone fully available in any one period. Each age has a fairly small repertoire of genres that its readers and critics can respond to with enthusiasm. And the repertoire easily available to its writers is smaller still: the temporary canon is fixed for all but the greatest or strongest or most arcane writers.'³ Each age makes its own adjustments. Epic gave way to the novel in the eighteenth-century; the realistic novel has been challenged by fabulations in our time only to see a surge of biography that seems to satisfy a demand for real people in real situations.

Enough for the backgrounds of genre questions. Our focus in this essay is the borderline of genres, that fascinating area where one form is actually moving toward another or, as I see it, where each of the two forms is being used in the service of the other. I am concerned with literary criticism and the essay, and I will consider William Hazlitt as a special example of the blending or merging of two nineteenth-century genres, and--even more important for me--as a precursor of the trend away from writing aesthetics and criticism in a formal treatise and toward the more personal, familiar essay that was to become so popular throughout the century.

A brief word about the use of the term 'essay'. Abrams is again helpful in his ability to capture tersely certain general characteristics associated with the essay in any age. He regards it as 'any brief composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or persuade us to accept a thesis on any subject whatever.'⁴ We can build on this description, seeing the essay as formal or informal, aware of its audience, and using a general and non-technical approach to engage that audience. It had a long history before it was given its present name in Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580) and a good deal of its validity in Francis Bacon's *Essays* (1597). Leslie Fiedler sees Montaigne as a clear prototype and the beginnings of the form in that larger cultural phenomenon which he calls 'the discovery of the self,' a phenomenon which he locates at a point between the flowering of the Renaissance and the outbreak of the French Revolution as the middle classes took their place somewhat closer to the aristocracy.⁵

In eighteenth-century England, with a widening reading audience and the rapid development of periodicals, Addison and Steele in the *Spectator* and *Tatler* and Samuel Johnson in the *Rambler*, *Idler*, and *Adventurer* set a standard for the form, but seemed so concerned with the didactic bent of the time that the personal often gave way to a somewhat public voice articulating ideas in a rather formal manner and structure. Yet their success became the impetus for that later outburst of essay writing by figures like De Quincey, Hunt, Lamb, Hazlitt, and many others. While some may find examples of what Fiedler regards as whimsy and cuteness in these early nineteenth-century essayists, there

is in the essays--and the lectures--of Hazlitt a striking difference, one that seems apt in the context of our thesis.

Hazlitt is, of course, an informal essayist we remember from our earliest readings; think of 'On the Love of Life,' 'On Good-Nature,' 'On Familiar Style,' 'On Pedantry.' He takes pains to locate himself in the tradition of the essay. Montaigne is his hero, if not his exact model, 'the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man' (VI,92),⁶ a writer frank, sincere, modest in his expectations of himself. Hazlitt prefers Addison's *Tatler*, its 'sterling wit and sense' (VI,97), to the *Spectator* with 'the greater gravity of its pretensions, its moral dissertations and critical reasonings' (VI,99). Johnson's *Rambler* 'is a collection of moral Essays, or scholastic theses, written on set subjects' (VI,100).

At the same time Hazlitt is a major literary theorist and practical critic, whether advancing ideas about the force of gusto or the power of the sympathetic imagination or advancing critiques of Shakespeare's plays or Wordsworth's poetry. Indeed, the great contributions of contemporary critics from W. J. Bate to Herschel Baker to W.P. Albrecht, to most recently John Kinnaird and David Bromwich have left little doubt as to Hazlitt's importance. Yet he is seldom excessively formal in his mode of presentation or organization of argument, seldom casual in his approach to a text or performance. He is a man of strong opinions about the success or lack of success of a work of art or about how art engages the human personality. Actually he writes essays that tread the border between the personal dimension of Montaigne and the more formal dimension of Addison or Johnson. If, as David Bromwich puts it, 'criticism is as creative as poetry,' combining 'interpretative vividness and the expressive power of utterance,'⁷ then Hazlitt has stretched the boundaries of essay and literary criticism to create a new kind of critical essay, the kind that would attract more writers and command a wider audience. In stretching these boundaries, he strengthens each genre, bringing each to the service of the other, with criticism the greater beneficiary.

Why the essay, we ask, in conjunction with Hazlitt? Well, we have already alluded to the explosion of periodical publishing in his time; the greater number of literate readers interested in good writing about the arts. Then there is the obvious matter of making a living, always a pressing matter for him. There seems to be no end to his activity--in 1813, critic for the *Champion*, then the *Edinburgh Review*; in 1817, drama critic for *The Times*; from January to March, 1818, lecturer on the English poets; in 1820, contributor of dramatic criticism and 'Table Talk' to the *London Magazine*; in 1821, publisher of *Table Talk or Original Essays*, with a second volume in 1822. And more.

But these are too obvious answers to a complex question. Hazlitt simply seemed restless and dissatisfied with the form and spirit of criticism in his own and the previous age. He speaks of the 'dry and meagre mode of dissecting the skeletons of works, instead of transfusing their living principles, which prevailed in Dryden's Prefaces, and in the criticisms written on the model of the French school about a century ago.' To him a 'genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work' (VIII,217). The critics he deplores never get to the soul of a work, never communicate what passion has been moved and how. He is similarly bothered by the obsession with current tastes and fashions, with the burden of the present (to vary a critical phrase in fashion today).

Snobbery is a great *bête noire*. Such critics 'discern no beauties but what are concealed from superficial eyes, and overlook all that are obvious to the vulgar part of mankind' (VIII,225). Total mastery of a subject, he contends, brings dangers, frustrating an audience, separating the critic from the larger society, no small tragedy for Hazlitt

(VIII,282). With an almost prophetic sense, especially as we think of the current battles in our own literary academy today, he debunks two extremes, one critic who would 'torture the most obvious expression into a thousand meanings, and enter into a circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for or against its being in the best or worst style possible...not to do justice to his author...but to do himself homage' (VIII,214), and another critic committed to the principle that 'the more you startle the reader, the more he will be able to startle others with a succession of smart intellectual shocks' (VIII,216).

Well, enough for Hazlitt's dislikes although in these negatives we can see his values and especially his vision of the essay in the service of a new kind of criticism. The good essay 'plays the whole game of human life over before us' (VI,91). There should be in such an essay what he admired in Montaigne, originality and the strong presence of the self in advancing critical judgements. David Bromwich, is, of course, correct in saying that when Keats went to hear Hazlitt's lectures at the Surrey Institution, 'he went to hear not criticism, but Hazlitt.'⁸ Hazlitt wants his readers to know how he feels, how he has been engaged, not whether the work fits some body of rules or meets with some general and popular approval. He strikes us as a guide leading us through his personal museum of artistic delights, sharing his pleasures, offering his reasons of the heart and head.

Nor is the intensity of his involvement without a logic, a logic of passion. He is content to isolate one or two excellences--the sympathy of Shakespeare, the epic power of Milton, the variety of Chaucer. He eschews abstract argument in favour of strategic metaphor and quotation that illuminate and enliven. True to his empirical-associationist background, he is always ready to make quick and pointed connections to bolster a point.

We might follow Hazlitt at work first in some general commentary and then in a full analysis of one of his critical essays. Take the famous essay 'On Gusto,' for example. Aesthetics is a major concern, of course, but note the directness, the immediacy, the personal dimension of its opening. Gusto is 'power or passion defining any object.' Then follows at once the concrete example from painting, 'the colouring of Titian. Not only do his heads seem to think--his bodies seem to feel.' Then analogy bolsters his enthusiastic argument as he compares Titian with other painters. His flesh-colour is 'like flesh, and like nothing else. It is as different from that of other painters, as the skin is from a piece of white or red drapery thrown over it.' Further examples range widely in order to involve the reader. 'Rubens made his flesh-colour like Flowers; Albano's is like ivory; Titian's is like flesh, and like nothing else.' (IV,77). Then back to reinforcement of the argument: 'In a word, gusto in painting is where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another' (IV,78).

Nor is gusto of one kind. Michaelangelo's forms 'everywhere obtrude the sense of power upon the eye. His limbs convey an idea of muscular strength, of moral grandeur, and even of intellectual dignity: they are firm, commanding, broad, and massy, capable of executing with ease the determined purpose of the will' (IV,78). Claude Lorrain's landscapes, however, lack gusto. 'They are perfect abstractions of the visible images of things; they speak the visible language of nature truly. They resemble a mirror or a microscope...He saw the atmosphere, but he did not feel it' (IV,79).

Shakespeare is his favourite example of gusto. He finds the same quality of delineation in his representation of passion as he does in his treatment of character. In a typically long Hazlitt sentence, he uses style to suggest his argument about this delineation, piling image upon image to dramatize his point. Shakespeare, he argues, gives us 'not some one habitual feeling.' 'It is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations

of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, not stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent.' Iago, as Hazlitt sees him boasting about his seduction of Othello, 'enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A world, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano.' The dialogues in *King Lear*, in *Macbeth*, nearly all those where there is this intensity, exemplify 'this dramatic fluctuation of passion' (V,51-52).

As suggested earlier, we will close with a fuller analysis of Hazlitt's less celebrated, but no less insightful essay 'On Milton's *Lycidas*' from *The Examiner* of August 6, 1815 (No.15 of the Round Table series). It seems to capture well the Hazlitt essay in the service of criticism. The speaker is personal, companionable, eager to express and share his pleasure in the poem, to isolate a limited number of key features and build an argument utilizing strategic quotation and telling metaphor.

After citing the closing lines of the poem--'At last he rose, and twitch'd his mantle blue: / Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new' as his epigraph, he proceeds immediately and enthusiastically to his argument. Of all Milton's shorter poems, '*Lycidas* is the greatest favourite with us,' Samuel Johnson's objections to its 'pedantry and lack of feeling' notwithstanding. At the same time he is reluctant to overestimate it as a monumental work, given the age of the author at the time of composition. Yet it is 'the final emanation of classical sentiment in a youthful scholar--"most musical, most melancholy."

Hazlitt's special kind of critical argument accompanies his personal involvement. He is lyrical in noting how 'a certain tender gloom overspreads' the poem, and yet is quick to observe how there is 'a forgetfulness of his subject in the serious reflections that arise out of it.' Typically metaphor reinforces argument or indeed becomes a part of it as he confronts the text. 'The gusts of wind come and go like the sound of music borne on the wind.' There is, of course, the loss of a friend, yet, and here Hazlitt seems almost to anticipate the argument of John Crowe Ransom many years later,⁹ the lament triggers 'with double force, the reality of those speculations which they had indulged together; we are transported to classic ground, and a mysterious strain steals responsive on the ear while we listen to the poet, "With eager thought warbling his Doric lay"' (IV,31).

Again quotations from the text rather than abstract theorizing support the argument. Twenty-five celebrated lines--the mourning voice of the speaker, one Greek shepherd mourning the death of another--are cited 'for the truth and sweetness of the natural descriptions' and 'the characteristic elegance of the allusions.'

Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
We drove a-field

.....

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!

.....

As killing as the canker to the rose,
 Or taint-worm to the weaning herds that graze,
 Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear,
 When first the white-thorn blows;
 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear!

Another fifteen lines are quoted, those following the apostrophe to Fame, quoted enthusiastically as examples of 'perfect art.' The lines begin with 'Oh fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood, / Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds, / that strain I heard was of a higher mood; / But now my oat proceeds.' Playing the companionable role of the essayist drawing his readers into a circle of admiration, he says, 'Nor do we wish for anything better.' Still unconcerned about elaborate explication of text but aware of the pitfalls of pure impressionism, he proceeds to praise the meter, the evocative sound of the proper names. He offers no apologies to some of the contemporary snobbish criticism about allusions to the classics. 'To ask the poet not to make use of such allusions as these,' he argues, 'is to ask the painter not to dip in the colours of the rainbow, if he could.' He dismissed the charge of 'pedantry and affectation. Pedants consistently are blind to the beauties of both nature and art. Milton saw both and saw the fascinating interrelationships of the two, the ways in which one could enhance the other. 'He was a passionate admirer of nature; and, in a single couplet of his, describing the moon,—"Like one that hath been led stray / Through the heaven's wide pathless way,"--there is more intense observation, and intense feeling of nature (as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her), than in twenty volumes of descriptive poetry' (IV,32-33).

How interesting and helpful Hazlitt is in pointing up both Milton's power of imaginative association as a poet and his own associative technique as essayist in the matter of Milton's combining the classical and Christian in those lines in which Hazlitt finds a 'wonderful correspondence in the rhythm...to the ideas which they convey!' The yoking of classical ('Camus, reverent sire') and Christian ('The pilot of the Galilean lake') seems inappropriate only to the mechanical understanding; it is thoroughly natural to the associative imagination. Such seeming opposites 'constantly co-exist' in the imagination. Hazlitt, making a serious critical point with the light touch of the essayist, argues that 'every classical scholar, however orthodox a Christian he may be, is an honest Heathen at heart' (IV,34).

Further he develops the growing romantic emphasis on the power of fiction, not technically, but in the manner of familiar essayist, drawing the reader into a comfortable and familiar metaphorical world. 'And, as we shape towers and men, and armed steeds, out of the broken clouds that glitter in the distant horizon, so, throned above the ruins of the ancient world, Jupiter still nods sublime on the top of blue Olympus...and still we hear--"The Muses in a ring / Age round about Jove's altar sing:...Have sight of Proteus coming from the sea, / And hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn"' (IV,34). For Hazlitt, even if these imaginative creations really existed, they could not have moved the human psyche more deeply.

The 'Lycidas' essay rounds to a close nicely with a return to his praise of the poem as the best of the shorter works and a rejoinder to Johnson's remark that Milton's genius was too capacious to show itself in smaller world, contending that *Paradise Lost* 'is not more distinguished by strength and sublimity than by tenderness and beauty. The last were as essential qualities of Milton's mind as the first' (IV,36).

In Hazlitt the Romantic phenomenon of genres evolving from genres is an interesting one. Whether discussing aesthetic issues or considering major figures like Shakespeare and

Milton, or reviewing contemporary stage production, he brings to the writing of essays and the delivery of lectures the perceptiveness of the critic and to criticism the charm and accessibility of the essay.

NOTES

1. See *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 70-71
2. *Literary Terms*, 71.
3. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 226-27
4. *Literary Terms*, 55
5. *The Art of the Essay*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1969), 1.
6. All quotations from Hazlitt are from *The Complete works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe (London and Toronto: J.M.Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1930). Volume numbers are in Roman and page numbers in Arabic numerals.
7. *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), ix.
8. *Hazlitt*, 14
9. See "A Poem Nearly Anonymous" [Lycidas] in *Milton Criticism: Selections from Four Centuries* (Rhinehart and Company, Inc., 1950) 225-238

UNPUBLISHED DRAFTS OF SONNETS BY LAMB AND FAVELL

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During 1794-5 Coleridge compiled a fair copy notebook of his Cambridge poetry which he presented to Sarah Estlin, the wife of his friend, John Prior Estlin, in April 1795.¹ It is now in the Bristol Central Library. In addition to poems by Coleridge, it contains two sonnets by other authors, including one by Charles Lamb. As Winifred Courtney observes, its title indicates that it was composed during Lamb's holiday in Margate with his sister in October 1790 (commemorated in the Elia essay, 'The Old Margate Hoy').² The poem is unpublished in this early form, and I present it here:

Written by the Sea side

O I could laugh to hear the midnight winds
That rushing on their way with careless sweep
Scatter the Ocean Waves, and I could weep
Ev'n like a Child! -- For now to my rapt mind
On wings of Winds comes wild-eyes Phantasy,
And her strange Visions give a rude delight.
O winged Bark! How swift along the Night
Pass'd they proud Keel! nor shall I let go by
Lightly of that drear hour the Memory
When wet and chilly on they deck I stood
Unbonnetted, and gaz'd upon the Flood,
And almost wish'd it were no crime to die!
How Reason reel'd! What gloomy Transports rose!
Till the rude Dashings rock'd them to repose.

Lamb³

Despite the attribution at the end of the draft, the text in the notebook is not identical with that sent by Lamb to Coleridge. Shortly after drafting was complete, Coleridge deleted 'rude' in line 6 and replaced it with 'dread'. More strikingly, the entire final couplet is Coleridge's, substituted for one in which Lamb's gloom probably went unrelieved; we cannot be certain of this, however, since Lamb's original draft is no longer extant.⁴

He remained unaware of the liberties taken by Coleridge until the sonnet's publication, in further revised form, in Coleridge's *Poems* (1796),⁵ under the title 'Effusion XIII. Written at Midnight, by the sea-side, after a voyage', and over the initials 'C.L.' (pp.57-8).⁶ It varies from the draft in minor details only, including a new reading of line 6: 'And her dread visions give a rude delight!' This did not bother Lamb; it was the couplet added by Coleridge to which he objected.⁷ Writing to Coleridge on 10 June 1796, he criticized its misrepresentation of his emotions:

I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times. To instance, in the 13th 'How reason reeld' &c.--, are good lines but must spoil the whole with me, who know it is only a fiction of yours & that the rude dashings did in fact not rock me to repose. I grant the same objection applies not to the former sonnet, but still I love my own feelings. They are dear to memory, tho' they now & then wake a sigh or a tear. (Marrs i 20)

The 'fiction' in which the narrator's gloom is 'rock'd ... to repose' is truer to Coleridge's optimism than to Lamb's pensive state following his residence at the Hoxton asylum earlier that year.⁸

In November 1796 the poem was published again by Coleridge in his *Sonnets from Various Authors*⁹ as 'Sonnet XXV' (p.15), in a text identical to that which appeared in *Poems* (1796). The following spring it appeared a third time, in the second edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, as 'Sonnet V' (P.221). This new text incorporates further revisions, including another version of line 6: 'And her rude visions give a dread delight.' But by far the most striking alteration is that, in deference to Lamb's objections, Coleridge omits the concluding couplet and replaces it with two rows of asterisks. By presenting the poem as unfinished, he ensures that its melancholy remains unresolved (as Lamb wished), while at the same time suggesting the possibility of further emotional development: in the missing couplet, it is implied, the poet *might* have cheered up. Coleridge's editorial activities in this interesting case highlight the essential difference between his temperament and Lamb's.

The sonnet did not appear in print again until 1818, when Lamb published it in his two-volume *Works* as *Sonnet X*. This is a revised version of that published in 1797 -- thus, the 1818 reading of line 6, 'And her rude visions give severe delight', is emended from that of 1797. The biggest difference is the conclusion, in which the poet recalls how he

gazed upon the flood,
Even till it seems a pleasant thing to die, --
To be resolv'd into th' elemental wave,
Or take my portion with the winds that rave.
(11.11-14.)¹⁰

The poem has finally acquired a resolution in which the gloom of its opening is preserved, and the poet's suicidal tendencies elucidated as its author wished. It was to be altered no more, and the 1818 text is that reprinted in all editions of Lamb's poetry to the present. It can be found at Courtney 64-5.

The other sonnet not by Coleridge in the fair copy notebook now at the Bristol Central Library is of no less interest to Elians:

On leaving a Place of Residence
 Where oft Unkindness rous'd th' indignant Tear
 Why hence depart I with no joyous Song?
 And with strange ling'ring roam these scenes among,
 Mute Chroniclers of many heavy year!
 Is it, that Time has wound a mystic Tie
 Around my Heart? Is it, those Days now flown
 Of Trouble, on their peaceful Hours alone
 Fond Memory dwells, while to [t]he soft'ning Eye
 Ev'n Sorrows a peculiar Charm assume?
 Is it, that launching on an unknown Sea
 Pauses the boding Soul? Whate'er it be,
 I droop -- as one who from a Prison's gloom
 Releas'd, yet trembling on it's verge awhile
 Fears with weak Eye to meet the Noontide Smile.

F.¹¹

The first thing to be said is that this is a bad poem -- far worse than anything produced by Lamb or Coleridge in 1795; in fact, it makes their efforts look expert by comparison. But it is important for reasons other than its content. The initial, 'F.', at the bottom of the draft, indicates that its author was probably Samuel Favell, a friend of Lamb and Coleridge at Christ's Hospital, and the author of the original draft of 'Effusion XVI' as published in Coleridge's *Poems* 1796).¹² More familiarly, Favell is 'W-----' in Elia's 'Poor Relations'.

Elians will recall that Favell 1775-1812 moved away from Cambridge because he was ashamed of his father, who was a house-painter there. He had been matriculated in 1795 at Pembroke, Cambridge, where he became a pantisocrat. Having failed to graduate, he became a captain in the army and dies on the plains of Salamanca.

In 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', Elia recalled Favell or (or 'F-----') as a friend 'who ought to be now alive', and who had been 'dogged, faithful, anticipative of insult, warm-hearted, with something of the old Roman height about him.'¹³ But we learn most about Favell in 'Poor Relations', where his shame at his father's profession is described in painful detail. Lamb and Coleridge always remained fond of him; another of his sonnets can be found in Coleridge's letter to Southey of 1 September 1794 (Griggs i 100).

NOTES

1. This interesting volume survives in its original green morocco boards. It is a quarto notebook, and consists of a single gathering of 13 sheets. Its watermark reads, 'J Larking 1794', and is illustrated in Alfred H Shorter, *Paper Mills and Paper Makers in England 1495-1800* (Hilversum, 1957), P.321 Fig.97. The countermark is that illustrated as no.2754 by Edward Heawood, *Watermarks mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Hilversum, 1950). The verso of the front flyleaf contains the inscription: 'S: Estlin -- given to her by the Author -- April 1795'.
2. Winifred Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802* (London, 1982), hereafter Courtney, P.64.
3. I am grateful to the Bristol Central Library for permission to publish from the Coleridge notebook in their possession. The Lamb sonnet appears at 20v.

4. Marris asserts that the original reading of the final couplet was the same as that in the 1818 text. I find no evidence for this, and he supplies none; see *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W Marris, Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), hereafter Marris, i 25.
5. This volume is available in facsimile, published by Woodstock Books, 1990.
6. The precise date of publication of the volume, as Griggs records, is 16 April 1796 (see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Letters* ed. E.L. Griggs [6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71], hereafter Griggs, i 201n).
7. Coleridge's couplet in the published text is the same as that in the draft, except that 'transports' (1.13) and 'dashings' (1.14) are decapitalized.
8. Lamb's fragility of health cannot have been helped by the fact that he started smoking and drinking in the summer of 1796; see Courtney 109-112.
9. Three copies only of this pamphlet have survived. It is published in facsimile as *Coleridge's 'Sonnets from Various Authors'* ed. Paul M Zall (California, 1968).
10. *The Works of Charles Lamb* (2 vols., London, 1818); the poem is published at i 67.
11. The draft appears at 15v.
12. The latter attribution is acknowledged by Coleridge in his Preface: 'For the rough sketch of Effusion XVI. I am indebted to Mr. FAVELL' (p.xi).
13. Charles Lamb, *Elia and The Last Essays of Elia* ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987), p.25.

BOOK REVIEWS

Emile Legouis. *THE EARLY LIFE OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH 1770-1798: A study of The Prelude*. With a New Introduction by Nicholas Roe. Libris, London, 1988. £29.50.

It is one of the misfortunes of scholarship that the strain of keeping up with 'the latest thing' may sometimes cause us to neglect earlier seminal studies which are intrinsically far more valuable. Lip-service, in the form of the title in the bibliography, avoids the necessity for reading the book, particularly if it is hard to come by. How fortunate, then, that Legouis' *Early Life of William Wordsworth* has been reprinted some fifty-odd years after his death. The translation by J.W. Matthews is reproduced from the 1921 edition which included a second Appendix, not in the 1897 edition, to take account of new data, most notably the discoveries of J.M. Harper. This is a beautifully produced book, handsome and easy to read, an uncommon bonus these days.

In a new Introduction Nicholas Roe puts the book into the context of subsequent knowledge, not available to Legouis, and of recent criticism. Dr. Roe's own work on this period, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, qualifies him well for the task and in a short essay he provides an admirable framework for a reading of the book in the 1990s. What emerges is that, though in view of later developments one may need to modify or correct certain of Legouis' attitudes and statements, he was not only a pioneer in 1896, when his study first appeared in French, but remains 'a fertile resource' today.

De Selincourt said that 'Legouis was the first to realise the paramount importance of *The Prelude*' which till then had been relatively neglected and, as Roe says, 'never before "an object of serious study"'. Legouis was first, too, to focus on the early 'formative period of the poet's life'. He was the first exponent and few 'have shown a clearer grasp of the poet's place in his own time'. As a Frenchman, Legouis was well able to relate the experience of the Revolution to Wordsworth's poetry. For example, consider the implications of a throw-away line about *The Borderers*: 'Now Oswald the *Montagnard* is surrounded by weak and virtuous *Girondins*'. Though his view of the play - and of *Lyrical Ballads* - 'as an attack upon Godwin's philosophy' may now seem over-simple, Roe

says Legouis provided 'the first serious criticism of Wordsworth's play'. For a study of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, one must still turn first to Legouis. As Roe comments, 'His account of Wordsworth's use of the language and poetic techniques of earlier writers in these two poems has not been surpassed'.

There remains the problem of literary fashions. As the Introduction points out, Legouis' method of looking at the poem 'in the light of Wordsworth's other poems and his correspondence, and by "a suitable account of its relations to history"' has long been frowned upon. For many years we were told that all we needed was the poem on the page. We were beyond the pale if we supposed that some knowledge of the circumstances attending its composition might illuminate it. Since then a long series of theoretical edifices have been built, sometimes on inadequate foundations of scholarship.. Nicholas Roe cites Marilyn Butler's argument that 'from 1796 onwards Wordsworth's poetry celebrates "the Burkean conservative ideology"'. This she bases on a passage from *The Borderers* which is not present in the earliest surviving text of 1797-9. Like the praise of Burke in the 1850 *Prelude* it was a later addition. With today's knowledge and access to the Cornell editions, if not to the manuscripts themselves, these things are easy enough to check, after all. Legouis, with only the 1850 *Prelude* to work on and with far less available information, understood much better the need for consolation felt by 'a disheartened and sceptical generation'. Wordsworth, says Legouis, was 'anxious to make the most of the power of resistance to despondency, both in himself and others'. This would not have been necessary if he were indeed 'the poet of counter-revolution', as Marilyn Butler puts it, and were not still deeply affected by the poverty and distress which he had hoped the Revolution would bring to an end. 'And if no purely human hope suggests itself whereby human suffering may be assuaged, he seeks in the external world some cheering token which may enable him once more to consolidate within his heart and the hearts of all men the shaken foundations of happiness.' Thus Legouis puts his finger on the essence of Wordsworth's feelings at the turn of the century without recourse to what Roe calls 'unhelpful clichés'. Though he may overstate Wordsworth's ultimate optimism, he would not, either, have wasted energy wondering why Wordsworth's poem set 'a few miles above Tintern Abbey' did not overtly concern itself with the beggars in the building, which in any case from where he was he could not have seen. Legouis knew too well the reason for Wordsworth's 'erasure' of social or political themes and, as he says, 'at that very time what genuine causes for heart-sickness he was concealing from every eye'. As Roe points out, the latest critical fashion, if it is still the latest, the 'New Historicism', was anticipated, but without jargon, and the point laboured by Kenneth Johnston and Marjorie Levinson was clearly stated, nearly a hundred years ago, by Legouis.

In his admirable survey in the Introduction Dr. Roe leads us to an inevitable conclusion. Legouis did not try to fit recalcitrant facts into a preconceived theory. Despite an over-idealized conception at first of '*The Prelude* as autobiography', Legouis came to anticipate our 'more wary, sceptical criticism of the poem'. As his added Appendix shows, he was able to weigh new evidence as it came to him, such as the unexpected revelations of Harper about Annette Vallon, and modify his opinions accordingly. Roe says, 'His response is, in fact, a measure of the "sound perspective, subtle and penetrative appreciation, and sane judgment" that De Selincourt found in all Legouis' critical writings'. These are qualities rare in our theory-obsessed times. We need to be reminded of them and Roe is right in saying that Legouis' book 'remains indispensable to an understanding of Wordsworth's life and work'.

Edmund Baxter, *De Quincey's Art of Autobiography*. Edinburgh University Press, 1990, pp. 218.,

Edmund Baxter is already known to De Quincey scholars as the editor of three pieces of fiction recently attributed to De Quincey, the novel *The Stranger's Grave* and two shorter tales, *The Peasant of Portugal* and *The Cacadore*. Baxter's latest work, *De Quincey's Art of Autobiography*, incorporates these three pieces into a much broader discussion, one that considers everything from *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and the biographical sketches of Coleridge and Wordsworth to *The English Mail-Coach* and the tracts on political economy.

Baxter begins with some remarks that succinctly define the current state of De Quinceyan studies. He points out that 'an adequate text of De Quincey's writings' does not exist and that 'Masson's edition of the *Writings*, ordinarily considered the standard text....has several disadvantages which disqualify it from being accepted as definitive.' For the original version of a text, then, Baxter returns to periodicals like *The London Magazine*, *Blackwood's* and *Tait's*, and for revised versions he employs *Selections Grave and Gay*, De Quincey's own edition of his works. This is a disadvantage in that most readers will not have access to either the old magazines or the *Selections*. But the break with Masson is still a welcome one. For the first time De Quincey is assessed largely on the basis of what he originally wrote, not in terms of the work he recast (and often damaged) and not in the altered and truncated form that came about as a result of Masson's editing. More significantly, going back to the original texts encourages the incorporation of a great deal of material missing from Masson, particularly the *Blackwood's* political essays from the 1830s and the marvellous autobiographical pieces from *Tait's* and *Hogg's Instructor*, later revised as 'Autobiographical Sketches.' The result is a livelier, more complex De Quincey than is often assumed.

In addition, Baxter's 'Introduction' takes apart what he calls 'the three main obstacles...which have prevented and retarded' an unbiased assessment of De Quincey's works: 'the notion of De Quincey's writings as psychoanalytic evidence; the notion of De Quincey as a drug addict who wrote; and the notion of De Quincey's texts as intrinsically flawed.' Baxter is especially concerned with the line that must be drawn between 'the failure of De Quincey's text...the text's inadequacy to operate as the author would wish' and 'the general accepted critical idea of the "flawed" text.' 'It would be futile to deny that De Quincey's writing is often tedious and digressive', he remarks. 'But this is not a "fault" (and it might even be the opposite).' Sensible words.

Baxter's formal discussion is heavily influenced by contemporary critical theory and is as much concerned with the problematic nature of language and text as it is with De Quincey. 'Repeatedly', he declares,

[De Quincey's] autobiographical text suggests an unresolved fear that resurrection, grounded in the delusive possibility of realising the ideal text, may be denied: that his writing is not read, that his self does not exist, that the ever-revolving fact of his own death cannot be positively charged. The form of experience for De Quincey remains essentially the same throughout his writings.

This perspective produces striking and often useful results. The economic insight of Ricardo, for example, is seen as corresponding 'roughly to the persona of the Opium-Eater, a procrastinatory detective or interpreter who has access to an apparently obscure and impenetrable system of hieroglyphics'. Coleridge appears as De Quincey's doppelgänger,

someone whose intellectual and opium-eating abilities threaten to invalidate or erase the boasts of the 'English Opium-Eater.' In cases such as these themselves throughout the De Quinceyan canon, and how De Quincey's preoccupation with the production of the self is both explored and obliterated by the act of writing.

There are occasions, however, when Baxter's conclusions seem somewhat forced and De Quincey's writings less important than the theory they are being made to serve. Thus the fictions are considered 'dramatisations of the death-wish which is often repressed in the autobiographical pieces.' The murderer in the posthumous 'Murder as a Fine Art' is said to represent 'an ideal state in which the external resourcelessness of Ricardian economics may be overcome by recourse to an internal power.' And 'the disfigurement...and burial of Elizabeth' in *Suspiria* is compared 'to the disfigurement (revision) and burial' of the *Suspiria* text. Conclusions such as these are consistent with Baxter's critical method, but the effect is to reduce resonant episodes to theoretical building blocks: one wishes for more De Quincey and less De Quincey deconstructed.

Baxter has a keen interest in the nature and instability of language but he is not persuasive when working to reveal the autobiographical patterns in De Quincey's writing. He himself summarises the book admirably: 'The present work is intended as a piece of constructive (if also deconstructive)...criticism.'

Robert Morrison
University of Edinburgh

SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES FROM MEMBERS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 11th May 1991

Dr D G Wilson, OBE (Tim Wilson to us) retired as Chairman after ten eventful years, during which our Library was transferred to Guildhall, Buttonsnap was sold, the 150th anniversary of Lamb's death was fittingly commemorated, the Society achieved Charity status, and an annual programme of lectures and visits was maintained. We owe Tim a lot and are delighted that he will continue as a member of our Council and will be the Guest of Honour at our Birthday Celebration Luncheon in February 1992.

David Wickham was elected Chairman - on past form as Vice-Chairman, we are confident that he will energetically promote the Society as it meets the new challenges and obligations of its Charity status.

The other Officers remain in post, as do the members of the Council. The nomination of Duncan Wu as a new member of Council was gladly accepted. Nick Powell, our Treasurer, presented the 1990 Accounts (circulated with the April Bulletin) which showed the transfer of assets from the Society to the new Company. Nick also proposed Resolutions relating to prizes/bursaries which the Society might award in furtherance of our Objects. These were agreed in principle - details were referred to the June meeting of the Council. Members were sorry not to have Bill Ruddick with us in person - we wished him a speedy recovery, expressed appreciation of the "Bulletin" and noted his plea for more members' contributions.

M. R. H.

A CHARLES LAMB STUDY WEEKEND

Moves are afoot to lay on a Charles Lamb Study Weekend at the Summer School and Weekend Course centre at Missenden Abbey, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, over the weekend of October 18-20, 1991. The speakers lined up are Mary Wedd, David Wickham and myself. We aim to give talks on Charles Lamb's life, relationships and work and on his single Continental visit, to Paris, (David Wickham); on the two series of *Elia* essays and on 'Charles Lamb in his Letters' (Mary Wedd), and on Lamb as a writer before *Elia* and as a critic of the arts and the theatre (Bill Ruddick), as well as engaging in some close reading and discussion of Elian material.

The Missenden Abbey programme for Autumn 1991, containing details of the Charles Lamb Weekend, should now be available from April Halton, Head of Residential Adult Education, Missenden Abbey, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire HP16 0BD (Tel: 02406 6811). David Wickham knows Missenden Abbey well and says that as a venue for study it is delightful. The tutors are looking forward to it all immensely! We hope to recognise some of 'the old (and young) familiar faces' in the group and promise to put our best feet forward in honour of the occasion, the Society and (of course) Charles Lamb himself.

Bill Ruddick

COLERIDGE BOOKS

The *Bulletin's* good friend and contributor Reggie Watters has entered into retirement from the academic life with vigour by opening an antiquarian bookshop in Nether Stowey, a place dear to the heart of the young Charles Lamb. Reggie would be very pleased to greet Members on his new premises, and he has furnished the following details concerning the shop:

COLERIDGE BOOKS

Coleridge Books is an antiquarian bookshop specialising in works by and about Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb and their circle. Open normal business hours, April-September inclusive; otherwise by appointment. Catalogues will be issued periodically and may be obtained from:

Reggie and Shirley Watters, Coleridge Books, 11 Castle Street, Nether Stowey, Bridgewater, Somerset TA5 1LN. Telephone (0278) 733338.

Reggie points out that in addition to the charms of his bookshop, Nether Stowey also offers the Coleridge Cottage (National Trust), good walking, and good food nearby. Who could resist?

CHARLES LAMB AND THE QUALITY PRESS

D.R. Wickham

"I don't read hardbacks", said a young man near me on a commuter train recently. He was speaking of the *Daily Telegraph*, which did a lot for Charles Lamb in its issue of 2 March 1991. Three references, no less.

On page XV, so numbered to distinguish the Supplement from the main newspaper, David Holloway's article to celebrate thirty years of the *London Magazine* in its present incarnation ran under the title *Following in the footsteps of Hazlitt and Co*. In the first paragraph readers learned that the magazine owes much 'to the illustrious periodical of the same name that ran from 1820-29, boasting Lamb, Hazlitt and de Quincey as members of its staff'. [Um, er...no, don't complain, it means well and the names are spelled correctly.]

The last paragraph ends '...it is surely not unreasonable to hope that it will be able to carry on a grand tradition. Otherwise, where will the Lambs and Hazlitts of tomorrow go?'

On page XVII Eric Christiansen's convoluted and generally hostile review of *The Oxford Book of Essays*, edited by John Gross, OUP, £17.95, includes the statement 'Meanwhile Leigh Hunt and Lamb are running races in fanciful egotism; Mr Gross lets "Dream Children" and "Getting Up on Cold Mornings" stand in for what these cunning men could do when they were really trying'. Not so much a statement to be followed by 'Discuss', is it? More like 'Explain', I think, with the explanation coming from the reviewer. And it gives you that awful sick feeling in the pit of the stomach that you ought to be able to dazzle everyone (or at least the other members of the Charles Lamb Society) not just with your opinion but with an instant *ex cathedra* statement of what is positively known to be the best that this cunning man Charles Lamb could do when he was really trying. No, I would not dare to say. I am only writing this note.

The review contains one reference, however, that made me sit up. Mr Christiansen is playing the usual game of listing the essayists he thinks should have been included or excluded: 'James could be sacrificed [Clive, not Henry!] and something by Francis Grose added: a fat wit with a love of words who flourished in the small wig period, and wrote among other things, "On the ludicrous incongruity of names given to ships in the Royal Navy"'. I had some imaginative fun of my own with this subject (*H.M.S. Sullen? Skittish? Gazelle?*) but then traced the original in Grose's work *The Olio*, 2nd edition, 1796 [BL: 722.c.7(4)], which prints several essays from *The Grumbler* not published in that collection during the author's lifetime. He points out the incongruity of remarks like: The *Jupiter*, yes, she is a fine man of war - The *Queen* gave the *Monsieur* a complete broadside - and the *Princess Royal* has much injured her bottom. Other names are 'liable to ludicrous equivoques' in the mouths of common sailors, when the *Eolus* is degraded to the *Alehouse*, the *Bienfaisant* to the *Bonny Pheasant*, and *Boreas* is pronounced as a mis-emphasised disyllable. Grose cannot even recommend boastful names in case one has to read that the *Invincible* has been overpowered and the *Inflexible* forced to yield. He suggests that ships be named after counties or after qualities befitting their feminine gender, like *Terrible* or *Spitfire*, or after the admirals of his time whom he considered to be a lot of old women.

I preferred a charming Blakesware-ish *Sketch of some worn-out characters of the last age*, including a description of a country squire and his old-fashioned house, and a *Complaint of a wife at her husband's rage for antiquities*. There is also an anecdote of a man shunned by all at a north country bowling green because he had shot a pregnant vixen. But I digress.

MOXON'S FRIENDSHIP WITH CHARLES LAMB

D.E. Wickham

Once upon a time and in a previous incarnation at an American-run management-training course, I created a sensation by joining up nine dots with four lines and then drawing the correct moral. The lines join only if they meet outside the square implied, but not actually enforced, by the points. The moral is that one must not assume limits of one's own and then suppose that they are insisted upon by others.

In the January 1991 *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, page 31, I asked about the date of the start of the friendship between Charles Lamb and the young Edward Moxon. I said that they knew each other by September 1826 and that 'no authority seems to date the start of the acquaintance much earlier than that'.

What I meant was that Lucas' edition of the *Letters* dates Lamb's first mention of Moxon to September 1826, and the *Lucas Life*, Lord David Cecil, and our own Mr Prance's *Companion* do not contradict that. Alackaday! Mr John E. Moxon, our new member and a great-great grandson, has sent me a splendid letter quoting H.A. Merriam's *Edward Moxon - Publisher of Poets*, Columbia University Press, 1939, which dates the first meeting to 1824, with a reference to Talfourd's *Memoirs*, of which I have three copies in my collection, obviously all insufficiently read. Mr Moxon then points out that both Katharine Anthony's *The Lambs*, 1948, and 'Neil Bell's ill-thought-of *So Perish the Roses*' also say 1824. I own both! Still, at least I can continue wondering about the month - whereupon my reference to an expensive inscription dated Oct 16/24 gains a new importance and (?) desirability.

**THE PORTRAIT OF JOHN LAMB, FATHER OF CHARLES AND MARY:
INFORMATION REQUESTED**

The following request for information has been received directly from Mr John E. Moxon, descendent of Edward and Emma Isola:

I'm sure many members of the Charles Lamb Society will be familiar with the only known likenesses of John Lamb, the father of Charles and Mary. The sketch has found its way into several books on the Lambs over the years, from Barry Cornwall's *Charles Lamb* of 1866 to Katherine Anthony's *The Lambs* of 1947. The sketch is, in fact, a copy of an original oil painting that has been in my family's possession since (I assume) the death of Mary Lamb in 1847.

The portrait itself is in good condition. It is naive in style and hence unlikely to have been painted by a known artist.

I wonder if any member of the Society could lend weight to my assumption that the portrait formed part of Mary's estate? I would be grateful for any information relating to the painting and its history.

John E. Moxon

KATHLEEN FORD BEQUEST

Older members, especially those active in the Dramatic Group, will remember with affection JACK FORD who joined the Society in 1935. Jack was a business colleague of Stanley Huxstep, a former Treasurer. At his home at Leigh-on-Sea he built up a fine Library of books by and about Charles Lamb, and in his scrapbooks lovingly pasted newspaper cuttings, theatre programmes and photographs of Elian interest.

Sadly, his widow, Kathleen, died on 23rd February 1991 and has generously bequeathed Jack's collection of some 80 Lamb volumes (some signed by the author or the editor), together with the scrapbooks and other material, to the Charles Lamb Society's Library.

We are currently consulting with Christ's Hospital (to whom Mrs. Ford wished any books not required for the Society's Library to go), so that fitting homes may be found for this collection.

M.R.H.

LEAFLET FOR PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

A leaflet giving details of the history of the Society and of its future plans is in print. Copies are available from the Membership Secretary or the General Secretary. This is a valuable aid in the recruitment of new members.

A reminder: we have a panel of speakers available to talk on Charles Lamb to interested organisations. Please contact the General Secretary for details.

M.R.H.

ALBATROSS UP-DATE FOR COLERIDGIANS

D.E. Wickham

Forty-four thousand wandering albatross, the largest and least numerous of the species, are killed every year by tuna fishermen, according to the British Antarctic Survey, as reported in the *Daily Telegraph* for 30 November 1990. This is a good shock-horror headline, somewhat amended in the small print. A survey conducted on a trawler [one trawler!?] fishing off Australia found that 0.4 of the birds were caught per 1,000 hooks. 'If this is true generally of the fleets fishing for this tuna species then some 44,000 albatross perish each year', said the survey. [And if not, not, of course.]

Long-line fishermen, seeking blue fin tuna in the South Atlantic, cast lines with hundreds of baited hooks out of the sterns of their trawlers. The albatross swoop down, get caught on the hooks, and then drown as the weight sinks down. Satellite tracking of specially-tagged birds during the summer of 1990 showed for the first time that they were attracted to deep sea fishing grounds.

Albatross are restricted to the southern oceans. The first study for thirty-two years of survey data concerning their third most important breeding ground, Bird Island, off South Georgia in the Falklands, showed that the number of breeding pairs had fallen by 40% since 1957. The overall picture suggests that the wandering albatross is disappearing at a yearly rate equivalent to one per cent of its total numbers. Long line fishing for tuna is thought to be the main cause of death in wandering albatross, and possibly in other albatross species. A spokeswoman for the World Wide Fund for Nature said "It really is very sad". The Fund is campaigning for the lines to be made heavier so that they sink more quickly.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY remain as follows:

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|-------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <i>Personal:</i> | U.K. | (single) | £8.00 |
| | | (double) | £12.00 |
| | Overseas | | US\$14.00 |
| <i>Corporate:</i> | U.K. | | £12.00 |
| | Overseas | | US\$21.00 |

Cheques should be made payable to the Charles Lamb Society and sent to the Hon. Treasurer, Nicholas Powell, 30 Camberwell Grove, London SE5 8RE. Existing subscriptions should be renewed in January.