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.....  
'Let us stimulate the Elian Spirit of friendliness and humour.'  
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## BLAKE, LAMB AND THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER

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William Blake's two poems on 'The Chimney Sweeper' and Charles Lamb's essay 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers' are among the earliest literary works on the painful subject of the child chimney-sweeper. The subject occurs more widely in Victorian literature, the most famous examples being in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837)<sup>1</sup> and Charles Kingsley's fairy-tale *The Water Babies* (1863). Drawing on literary and popular traditions, Blake and Lamb established a range of images associated with the child chimney-sweeper, of blackness, imprisonment, oppression and pathos, and a series of plot motifs on which later writers drew. A late example is Benjamin Britten's children's opera, *The Little Sweep*, with libretto by Eric Crozier, produced in 1949.

It was not until the late middle ages that houses in England started to have chimneys; that is solid ducts for the removal of smoke from the domestic fire. (The alternative, which survived in poor cottages for many centuries, was to let the smoke find its way out of the room by means of a hole in the roof, or by any chink or cranny). In the towns of Elizabethan England the use of brick as a building material made the construction of chimneys easier, and the burning of coal rather than wood meant that they were more necessary, because of the fumes emitted by a coal fire.<sup>2</sup> Chimneys had to be cleaned regularly, to avoid the dangerous accident known as having 'a chimney on fire', when the

collected soot caught fire. The sixteenth century sees the coming of a new urban trade, that of the chimney sweeper.

The chimney-sweeper enters literature as a black man. In Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* the King and his attendants tease Biron for his love of a dark lady:

*Dumaine:* To look like her are chimney-sweepers black.  
*Longueville:* And since her time are colliers counted bright.  
*King:* And Ethiops of their sweet complexion crack. (IV, iii, 264-6)

The most haunting reference to chimney-sweepers in Shakespeare is in *Cymbeline*:

Golden lads and girls all must,  
 As chimney-sweepers, come to dust. (IV, ii, 263-4)

These lines are in the song which starts 'Fear no more the heat o' th' sun' which is sung by the brothers Guiderius and Arviragus over the body of Cloten. It is an elegy:

Fear no more the heat o' th' sun,  
 Nor the furious winter's rages.  
 Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
 Home are gone and ta'en thy wages.  
 Golden lads and girls all must,  
 As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

The phrase 'come to dust' refers primarily to death, the dust of the grave,<sup>3</sup> which comes to 'Golden lads and girls' as to black chimney-sweepers. But it is typical of the complexity of Shakespearean language that 'dust' in association with chimney-sweepers brings in associations of besmirching other than death (general dirtiness in the course of wage-earning) which are additional threats to the 'Golden lads and girls'. Does this passage imply that the chimney-sweeper was a child, or at least a lad? Usually, however, Elizabethan references to chimney-sweepers do not indicate age: the chimney-sweeper was black.

In eighteenth-century literature the chimney-sweeper is part of the urban scene. Swift contributed to *The Tatler* in 1709 a poem called 'A Description of the Morning'. In it he describes those seen and heard on the streets early in the day:

The Smallcoal-Man was heard with Cadence deep,  
 'Till drown'd in Shriller Notes of Chimney-Sweep, ... (11-12)

It is clear that the 'Cadence deep' of the Smallcoal-Man is that of an adult; the 'Shriller Notes' crying 'Chimney-Sweep' are those of a child. It is thought that the use of children to sweep chimneys did not become widespread until the eighteenth century, because of the more complicated and narrow chimney systems of eighteenth-century houses. John Gay published in 1716 a poem called *Trivia, Or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*. In it he warns walkers on the streets to beware those who will dirty their clothes:

Three sully'ng Trades avoid with equal Care;  
 The little *Chimney-sweeper* skulks along,  
 And marks with sooty Stains the heedless Throng;  
 When *Small-coal* murmurs in the hoarser Throat,  
 From smutty Dangers guard thy threaten'd Coat:

The *Dust-man's* Cart offends thy Cloaths and Eyes,  
When through the Street a Cloud of Ashes flies; ... (II, 32-38)

Again we have the pairing of the chimney-sweeper and the small-coal man, and the chimney-sweeper is clearly a child.

These passages indicate that the child chimney-sweeper was a well-known figure on the streets. Eighteenth-century engravings make the same point. Dorothy George remarks that in engravings of London street scenes the child chimney-sweeper is usually visible.<sup>4</sup> An example is William Hogarth's 'The March to Finchley' (Plate 1a).<sup>5</sup> Its date is 1745, and the subject is the march of soldiers out of London on the news of the Jacobite army's march south from Scotland. It is a typically Hogarthian scene. The army is marching into the distance in the background; in the foreground in the central group a young soldier is stopped by two remonstrating women. In the group immediately to the right of the women there is a child chimney-sweeper, a black figure, with a brush over his left shoulder, and holding out his black cap with his right hand. To the left of him a soldier is roughly kissing a milk-maid. As she loses her balance another soldier takes the opportunity to pour some of her milk into his tricorne hat. The chimney-sweeper is putting forward his cap to claim a share of it, with a merry smile.

It was not uncommon in cities for various traditions to be established on behalf of chimney-sweepers, either of popular origin or through private patronage. In eighteenth-century London it was the custom for chimney-sweepers to dance in the streets on the first of May. There is a plate by S. Collings, engraved by Blake in 1784, which illustrates the popular tradition of chimney-sweepers and milk-maids celebrating May Day (Plate 1b).<sup>6</sup> Entitled 'May-Day in London' it shows child chimney-sweepers, dressed in wigs and hats and with their clothes ornamented, dancing with one of the lowest grades of women street workers, the milk-maids. They have complicated head-dresses involving pyramids of plate and garlands. A musician is there to lead the dancing. At the church of St George the Martyr in Queen Square, London, near where the Charles Lamb Society meets, Captain James South's Charity provided Christmas dinners for apprentice chimney-sweepers in the eighteenth century. At the end of the century Mrs Elizabeth Montagu entertained them to a dinner on May Day outside her house in Portman Square.<sup>7</sup>

The use of children to sweep chimneys was one of the worst instances of child labour. The movement to make it illegal was particularly long-drawn out. It was started in the second half of the eighteenth century by a philanthropist called Jonas Hanway.<sup>8</sup> One result of Hanway's activities was the passing of an Act in 1788 which made it illegal to employ children under eight years old as chimney-sweepers. Further acts to deal with the abuse were blunted on their way through Parliament and after enactment were evaded. An act of 1864 was precipitated by the publication in the previous year of *The Water Babies*, the tale of a child chimney-sweeper who runs away from his master. In 1875 the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury wrote this in his diary:

One hundred and two years have elapsed since the good Jonas Hanway brought the brutal iniquity before the public, yet in many parts of England and Ireland it still prevails with the full knowledge and consent of thousands of all classes.<sup>9</sup>

In that year, 1875, Shaftesbury brought about the passing of an act which finally ended the practice.

Blake wrote and engraved two poems on 'The Chimney Sweeper', one in his *Songs of Innocence* of 1789, and one in *Songs of Experience* of 1794. Charles Lamb's 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers' was published in 1822. It is not known exactly when Blake's first poem on 'The Chimney Sweeper' was written (Plate 2a), but it may have been influenced by Jonas Hanway's agitation on behalf of the chimney-sweepers which led to the Act of 1788.

When my mother died I was very young,  
 And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
 Could scarcely cry 'weep 'weep, 'weep 'weep!  
 So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

The first stanza is factual and autobiographical. The motherless child was sold by the father into an apprenticeship as a chimney-sweeper. He was so young that he could scarcely utter the cry of his trade, 'sweep'. In the second stanza the speaker turns his attention from himself to another child:

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
 That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd; so I said,  
 'Hush Tom, never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
 You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair'.

The speaker has the status of one who can give advice to a newcomer. He is not able to stand outside the situation and express any conscious protest; what he offered is a technique for survival. At least if the white hair is shaved off it will not be spoiled by the soot. It has been suggested that Tom Dacre may have got his surname from Lady Dacre's almshouses between James Street and Buckingham Road.<sup>10</sup>

As the next stanza indicates, Tom Dacre took the advice to 'Hush'; he fell asleep and while asleep had a vision which in turn had some effect on the speaker:

And so he was quiet, and that very night,  
 As Tom was asleeping he had such a sight -  
 That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,  
 Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an angel, who had a bright key,  
 And he opened the coffins and set them all free;  
 Then down a green plain leaping, laughing they run,  
 And wash in a river and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
 They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind.  
 And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
 He'd have God for his father and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,  
 And got with our bags and our brushes to work,  
 Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;  
 So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

Tom Dacre's vision was of 'thousands of sweepers' who were 'locked up in coffins of black', the black chimneys which were too often coffins to the children as they faced the

dangers of falling, of burning, or of suffocation as they climbed up them burdened with brushes and scrapers. Freedom is brought to them not by human intervention, but by an angel who frees them to run, leap and laugh on a green plain, all the activities of the happier children in the *Songs of Innocence*. The blackened children are washed back to their natural colour; freed of their bags they 'rise upon clouds and sport in the wind' like the many naked, spiritualized figures who desport themselves in the plates of the *Innocence* collection. It is a vision of freedom. It is also a vision of death and resurrection. The children 'wash in a river and shine in the sun', apparent allusions to the river of death and the sun of heaven. (The classical river of death had long been Christianised; and if it had needed further sanctification it had received it in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*). The angel is an eighteenth-century angel, and addressed Tom in what sounds to us like an admonitory tone:

if he'd be a good boy  
He'd have God for his father and never want joy.

He would have a new father, more satisfactory than the parents he had lost in the first stanza. And he would have joy, that quality so markedly absent from the chimney-sweeper's life.

The last stanza gives the consequences of this vision for the two boys. It did not make for any immediate change in their lives: 'we rose in the dark'. The speaker notices the effect of the vision on Tom: 'Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm'. It is not clear that the vision had quite such an effect on the speaker. Tom is promised joy by an angel. All the speaker hopes for, receiving the message at second hand, is to be free from harm. Tom is given only a personal responsibility, to 'be a good boy'. The speaker makes a larger reflection which applies to all: 'if all do their duty, they need not fear harm'. (He shows no awareness of who might be included in 'all'. The society which tolerates child chimney-sweepers?) The speaker's experience of earthly life is larger than Tom's and in one sense contains Tom's experience. In another sense the reduction of Tom's positive vision to the guarded moral statement of the last line seems to imply that the full dimension of Tom's vision is not communicated to the speaker. He observes, rather than shares the fact that 'Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm'.

In the engraved plate of 'The Chimney Sweeper' there is so much text that there is not much room for illustration. It has a vignette at the bottom, and a border of trees and tendrils which branch out between the stanzas. There is a slight appearance of soot on the vegetation round the edges of the plate, and nestling in the C of Chimney is a tiny sweeper with his bag. The vignette at the foot illustrates Tom Dacre's vision. A figure on the right is opening a black coffin from which the naked children are set free.<sup>11</sup>

The engraving of the poem on 'The Chimney Sweeper' in *Songs of Experience*, is more visually striking (Plate 2b). It expresses the desolation of the child chimney-sweeper. A barefoot child with blackened clothes and ragged trousers, a bag on his back, is walking in the snow in a desolate urban setting. It is the most friendless picture in *Songs of Experience*. The first three lines of the poem are spoken by someone who has come across the child and has spoken to him:

A little black thing among the snow  
Crying 'weep, 'weep in notes of woe!  
Where are thy father and mother, say?  
'They are both gone up to the church to pray'.

In the song in *Innocence* the child had been parted from his parents through death and poverty. In this song the young chimney-sweeper had both parents, but 'They are both gone up to the church to pray'. The speaker in *Innocence* does not comprehend the social dimension of his suffering. The child in *Experience* is more knowing, and can offer an explanation as to why his parents treated him as he did:

'Because I was happy upon the heath  
And smiled among the winter's snow,  
They clothed me in the clothes of death  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

The explanation appears to be not economic but psychological. *Because* he was happy his parents clothed him 'in the clothes of death'. In Blake's world of *Experience* adults resent innocent happiness as the Nurse does in 'The Nurse's Song'. And because his capacity to be happy miraculously survives, the child's parents never recognise that they have done him any injury:

'And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury -  
And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,  
Who make up a Heaven of our misery'.

This seems to be a reference to the dancing and singing of the chimney-sweepers on May Day, the scene which Blake had engraved in 1784. But as Blake's early readers would have known, the chimney-sweepers only danced and sang on one day in the year; their one day of relief is being exploited by the parents as an excuse for overlooking their fate on all the other days. The poem is hostile to the church (in Blake spiritual messages are conveyed by angels) and to the oppressive power of the hierarchy which starting with parents reaches up beyond priest and king to God. The unholy trinity encapsulates the forces of entrenched power which exercised Blake particularly in the 1790s.

Blake engraved, illuminated and printed his own works. He was also his own bookseller, and at that he did not succeed. The result was that his works, even the most accessible of them, were not widely known. Coleridge was shown Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in 1818 by Charles Augustus Tulk. In returning them Coleridge made a list of the poems indicating by signs the degree of pleasure he had derived from each. Both the 'Chimney Sweeper' poems got his lowest rating, a sign which 'means that I am perplexed - and have no opinion'.<sup>12</sup>

Blake died in 1827; it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that his reputation as a poet started to be established. Charles Lamb, however, was responsible for the reprinting of one of his poems during the years when he was known, if at all, only as an artist. Lamb contributed 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Innocence* to a volume published in 1824 as part of a renewed campaign to get the use of children in chimneys outlawed. It is thought that Lamb heard of Blake's poems from Crabb Robinson.<sup>13</sup> He contributed 'The Chimney Sweeper' to a volume called *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boy's Album* published by James Montgomery in 1824. The volume is an anthology of different sorts of writing about chimney-sweepers; non-fiction and fiction, prose and poetry. More than twenty of the foremost poets of the day had been asked to write for it.<sup>14</sup> Lamb refused to contribute a poem of his own, and drew the editor's attention instead to Blake's.<sup>15</sup> Lamb was not optimistic about the volume, however well-meant:

Montgomery's Book I have not much hopes from. The Society, with the affected name, [The Society for Ameliorating the Condition of Infant Chimney-Sweepers] have been labouring at it for these 20 Years & made few Converts. I think it was injudicious to mix stories avowedly colour'd by fiction with the sad true statements from the parliamentary records, &c. but I wish the little Negroes all the good that can come from it. I batter'd my brains .... for a few verses for them, but I could make nothing of it. .... Blake's are the flower of the set ...<sup>16</sup>

There are some slight alterations to the text of Blake's poem in the version that Montgomery printed.<sup>17</sup> One is that Tom Dacre is renamed Tom Toddy. Is that because someone, not recognising the probable allusion to Lady Dacre's almshouses, thought the surname too aristocratic for a chimney-sweeper?<sup>18</sup>

James Montgomery's book, *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend* contained three engravings by George Cruikshank, in whose work the child chimney-sweeper frequently appears. Cruikshank's frontispiece (Plate 3a) shows the selling of a young child into apprenticeship to a chimney-sweeper. A mother, presumably widowed to judge from her black dress, reluctantly receives money for her young son. An unscrupulous-looking sweep grasps the boy with his left hand. In the right corner lies another young apprentice, with his brush and scraper or shovel. A dog is licking the boy's wounded heel. The child, apparently exhausted, lies on his bag of soot. His posture echoes the words of Blake's chimney-sweeper from *Innocence*, '& in soot I sleep'. The fact that chimney-sweepers often had no more to sleep on than their bags of soot is reiterated by Montgomery.<sup>19</sup> In the background is a scene of smart Georgian life. The desolate child at the bottom right is linked to the carriage of the fashionable lady looking out of the picture, top left, by the mocking finger of what appears to be a black serving-man. Are we to take it that a black man in a comfortable position in English life is pointing out the conditions of slavery imposed on the blackened natives of the country? Behind the black figure of the adult sweep is a large house. The chimney on the right is in shadow, but there is visible in silhouette emerging out of the chimney-pot a child chimney-sweeper waving his brush.

When Lamb's essay 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers' first appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1822 it was subtitled 'A May-Day Effusion'.<sup>20</sup> May Day was, as we have seen, the day of the chimney-sweepers' annual street festival; the word 'Effusion' is a semi-humorous indication of enthusiasm overriding structure. The essay starts 'I like to meet a sweep', and despite its discursiveness a dominant theme is meeting chimney-sweepers in the street. The early episodes in the essay are not particularly associated with May Day, which is probably why the sub-title was dropped. In fact child chimney-sweepers were frequently seen on the streets, either calling for work, or, later in the day when their work was likely to be over, left to their own devices. Lamb is quick to point out that it is the child chimney-sweeper that he enjoys meeting,

one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek - such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the *peep peep* of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aerial ascents not seldom anticipating the sun-rise? (p.124)

Perhaps the reader draws back from an adult's description of the new young sweep, a Tom Dacre. There may also be unease at the nature imagery in that first paragraph. The chimney-sweeper's street cry, rendered by Blake as 'weep', is by Lamb likened to the

'peep' of a young sparrow. The reference to the lark also seems dangerously pastoral. Chimneys were swept at dawn because that was the only time of day when they were not in use and cool enough to enter.

In the next paragraphs Lamb seems to remember his word 'nigritude':

I have a kindly yearning toward these dim specks - poor blots - innocent blacknesses -

I reverence these young Africans of our own growth - these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind.

As we have seen the portrayal of the chimney-sweeper as a black man goes back at least to the sixteenth century. In the early nineteenth century the blackness of the children caused those trying to emancipate them to link their cause with the movement for the abolition of slavery. James Montgomery was explicit:

The poor African negro is kidnapped and sold, but it is by strangers, or by foes. These children are kidnapped and sold, and that by their own countrymen, and by their own parents.<sup>21</sup>

From the African Lamb moves on to another black figure on the streets, the clergyman. It was not uncommon for cartoonists satirising the clergy to liken them to sweeps.<sup>22</sup> Lamb, however, goes from the blackness of the figure to the likeness of the chimney-pot to a pulpit and after an apparently simple association of ideas ends on an unexpectedly serious note. The child chimney-sweeper preaches 'a lesson of patience to mankind'. This is not unlike Blake's song on 'The Chimney-Sweeper' in *Innocence* in its bold statement of a morality, apparently a morality of acceptance, taken from the life of a suffering child.

Lamb swiftly reverts to his own childhood, as if for relief from such thoughts; to the recollection of the child chimney-sweeper 'a chit no bigger than one's self' going up into the chimney. He describes how he followed him in imagination through the 'dark stifling caverns', and finally how he ran outside to see him emerge.<sup>23</sup> Returning to the adult viewpoint Lamb presents himself as a walker in the London streets. He is an experienced and observant walker, who knows exactly where saloop, an infusion of sassafras much enjoyed by chimney-sweepers, is sold. And he claims some superiority in that he can tell what business is done in 'the same savoury mess, at that dead time of the dawn' of which the reader of his essay, being neither a rake reeling home from his midnight cups, nor a hard-handed artisan, is likely to be entirely ignorant.

Lamb presents vignettes of the London streets, with their roguish child chimney-sweepers, very similar to those in the works of Gay and Hogarth. He remembers slipping one winter while walking in Cheapside, and on picking himself up found that he was the source of mirth to a chimney-sweeper, a child just like the one in Hogarth's 'The March to Finchley'. (p.126) The Hogarthian London street scene continues in the work of George Cruikshank. His 'Grievances of London' of 1812 is a picture of urban turmoil in which the only two people smiling are the chimney-sweeper and the road-sweeper. (Plate 3b) The chimney-sweeper has a brass badge on the front of his cap, which would have given the name of his master, as required by the Act of 1788. Cruikshank illustrates the mischief of the child chimney-sweeper in 'Les Savoyards' of 1818. (Plate 4a) While a circle of people listen to street musicians a little black sweep, with a sack of soot over his shoulder, steals fruit from a barrow. Cruikshank's child sweeps have bright eyes; for Lamb it was the whiteness of



their teeth that was striking, and he allows to the sweep what he does not allow to the ladies and gentlemen of his own society, the right to flash fine teeth at him. Lamb seems to celebrate some sort of release from social anxiety in the presence of the chimney-sweeper. He can tolerate being laughed at in the street by the chimney-sweeper, and in his mouth alone can he admire fine teeth without feeling threatened by their ostentatious physical display.

Lamb's essay gathers the oral tales and literary motifs connected with the child chimney-sweeper. The chimney-sweeper's white teeth seem to him like 'some remnant of gentry', and he muses on the possibility that some of these children had been kidnapped from noble homes. He cannot have been thinking of that when he changed the name of Blake's Tom Dacre to Tom Toddy (if it was Lamb who made the change). Lamb tells as true the story of the child chimney-sweeper who got lost in the maze of chimneys in a large house - here Arundel Castle - and emerges in a fine bedroom. The child slips into the comfortable bed and falls asleep, in an act of spontaneous possession which would in the world of romance or fairy-tale have been vindicated. The motif of the chimney-sweep coming down the wrong chimney is best known from its use at the beginning of *The Water-Babies*. Most of the engravings involving sweeps, with the exception of Blake's, are street scenes. An exception is one by Cruikshank dating from 1819 which seems to illustrate Lamb's evocation of the kidnapped child. It is a narrative series of three engravings entitled 'Pretty Bob. Poor Bob. Bandy Bob.' (Plate 4b) The malformation of the chimney-sweeper's legs was caused not only by injury and inadequate food, but by the necessity to support themselves when climbing by pressing their knees and heels against the side of the chimney.

Lamb's essay seems to be in the eighteenth-century tradition of the spectator of the urban scene. It does not appear to be in the protest tradition as Blake's poems are. But Lamb repeatedly slips into his apparently casual paragraphs the 'starving weather', 'kibed heels', 'raw victims', 'his poor red eyes, red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed', 'premature apprenticements' - these phrases build up a series of allusions to the whole miserable life of these children. In addition there is the repeated stress that they are penniless; and the reader when walking in London newly informed of the chimney-sweeper's taste for street beverages should not omit parting with three ha'pennies for a basin of saffras for the sweep. And he may as well add to it by buying bread and butter for one ha'penny. It is not the work of a reformer, but it does not let the reader escape without a clear insight into the sweep's life, observed by the more fortunate child at home and by the adult male walker in the city, and with a specific injunction to charity.

The title of Lamb's essay directs attention to the chimney-sweepers; but when we read the essay we find it curiously egotistical. The first three paragraphs start 'I like to meet a sweep', 'I have a kindly yearning toward these dim specks', 'I reverence these young Africans'. There follow a series of encounters between the speaker and a sweep, curiously Wordsworthian in the inability of the speaker to retain any ascendancy over the child. It is only in the last section of the essay that Lamb, thanks to his friend Jem White, is able to join the chimney-sweepers in the festivity that gave the essay its original sub-title, 'A May-Day Effusion'.<sup>24</sup> James White, an old school friend of Lamb's, gave suppers for child chimney-sweepers at Smithfield during St Bartholomew's Fair. These suppers are described as convivial occasions, far from the penny-ha'penny charity of the streets. They mingled the feast for sweeps given by Mrs Montagu in Portman Square in the previous century with the popular street festivals of May Day. Fat Ursula frying the sausages comes from Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* and the tradition of urban comedy. White overcame his guests, not just with sausages, bread and ale, tables and napery, but with the compliment of testing the food to see whether it was worthy of them, and of offering toasts

which were probably beyond their comprehension. For a single day these children were treated as if they were citizens of this country, and under the magnetic power of White, Lamb and his friend Fenwick were able to take part by each serving at one of the three tables. The outgoing magnanimity of White brings Lamb and the chimney-sweepers together into one festival.

But as the final paragraph reveals Jem White is dead, and the suppers for chimney-sweepers have ceased. Lamb quotes Shakespeare's elegy in tribute:

Golden lads and lasses must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust - (p.130)

Curiously Lamb writes 'James White is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased'. White died in 1820, not so long before, but clearly a great gulf had been created in the minds of the chimney-sweepers and of his friend, whose needs and longings he could orchestrate. Elsewhere Lamb explains his inability to regard a death as recent. In 'Dream-Children' he writes of the death of his older brother, 'when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death'. (p.117) The elegaic note at the end of the essay takes the reader back to the image at the beginning: the child chimney-sweepers climb the dark flues until they appear at the chimney-top 'and from their little pulpits ... in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind'. Jonathan Bate, mentioning that Blake and Lamb both wrote of chimney-sweepers, comments that 'For all their differences, they share a way of holding together the two contrary states of the human soul, innocence and experience'. (p.xxii) Blake does something which Lamb does not attempt when he lets his child chimney-sweepers speak for themselves; Lamb does something which Blake does not attempt when he celebrates Jem White's May Day suppers.

#### NOTES

1. George L Phillips, 'Dickens and the Chimney-Sweepers', *The Dickensian*, (January, 1963), pp.28-44.
2. G M Trevelyan, *English Social History*, (1942), pp.130, 188-189.
3. Genesis, iii, 19: 'for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'.
4. M Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire*, (1967), p.73.
5. Engraved in 1750 from an earlier painting. Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, 2 vols, (1965). Vol. I, catalogue No. 237; Vol. II, plate 277.
6. M Dorothy George, *op.cit.*, pp.72-3. 'May-Day in London' was published in *The Wit's Magazine*, (May, 1784), p.191.
7. George L Phillips, 'Mrs Montagu and the Climbing-Boys', *The Review of English Studies*, XXV, (July, 1949), pp.237-244.
8. The history of attempts to stop the practice of sending children up chimneys is traced in J L Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury*, (1923), chapter XV, 'Climbing Boys'.
9. Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, K.G. 3 Vols, (1886), Vol. III, p.158.
10. Stanley Gardner, *Blake's 'Innocence' and 'Experience' Retraced*, (1986), p.67. Quotations from Blake are taken from *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. W H Stevenson and David V Erdman, (1971).
11. Gardner, p.66; David V Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake*, (1975), p.53.
12. G E Bentley, Jr, *Blake Records*, (1969), pp.251-3.
13. Bentley, p.286.

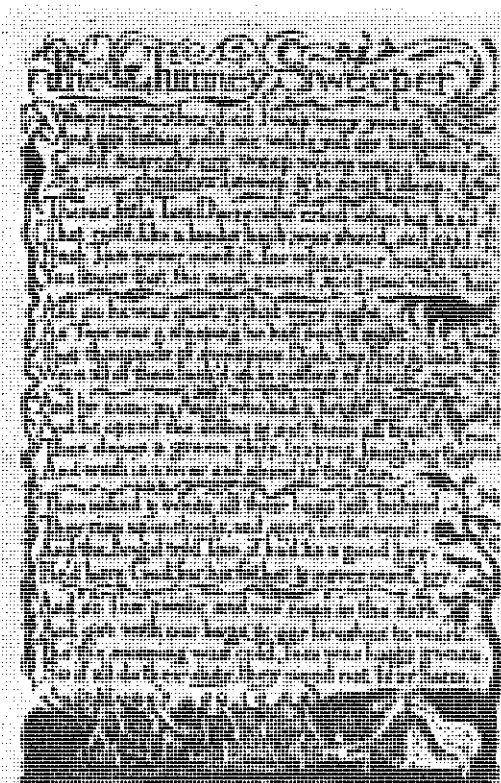
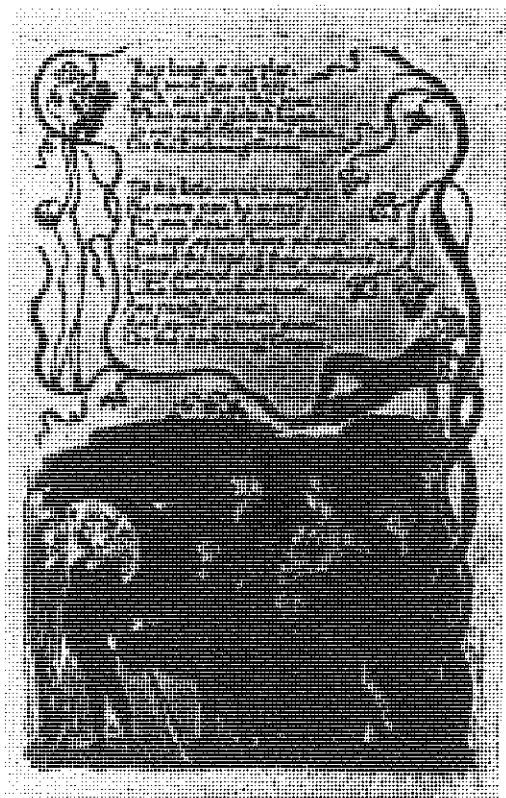
14. James Montgomery, *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boy's Album*, (1824), p.viii.
15. Montgomery, p.343.
16. Bentley, pp.285-6.
17. Montgomery, pp.343-4.
18. Bentley, p.284, n.3.
19. Montgomery, pp.87, 172.
20. Charles Lamb, *Elia and The Last Essays of Elia*, ed. Jonathan Bate, (1987) p.338. Quotations from Lamb are taken from this edition.
21. Montgomery, p.12.
22. M. Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*, British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, Vol. X, (1820-1827), nos. 14378, 14381.
23. Montgomery prints a childhood account by J C Hudson of following the upward journey of the chimney-sweeper with emotions very like Lamb's, pp. 78-9.
24. For James White (1775-1820) see Claude A Prance, *Companion to Charles Lamb*, (1983), pp.344-5.

*A lecture delivered to the Society on 3rd November 1990*

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MAY-DAY IN LONDON.

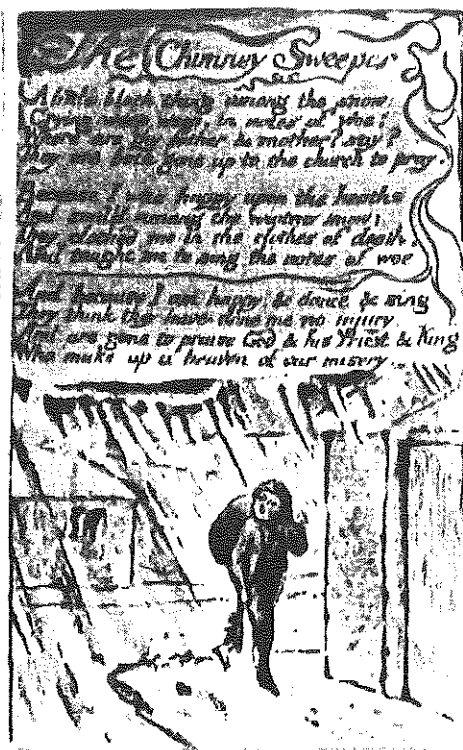


### The Chimney Sweeper

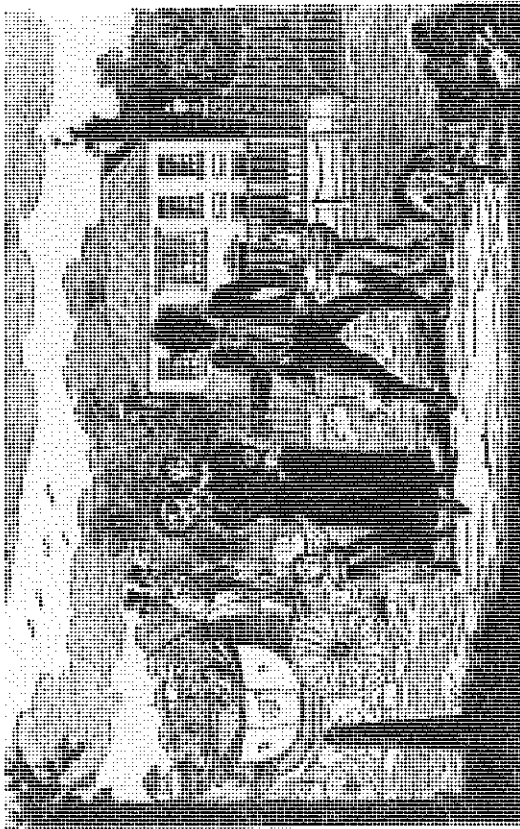
A little black thing among the snow:  
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!  
Where are thy father & mother? say?  
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winters snow:  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy, & dance & sing,  
They think they have done me no injury:  
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.



J. H. 1825



THE  
**CHIMNEY-SWEEPER'S**  
 FRIEND,  
 AND  
**CLIMBING-BOY'S ALBUM.**

DEDICATED,  
 BY THE MOST GRACIOUS PERMISSION, TO  
 His Majesty,



The child of misery baptized with tears.

LAWSON

ARRANGED BY  
**JAMES MONTGOMERY.**

WITH ILLUSTRATIVE DESIGNS BY CRUICKSHANK.

**LONDON:**  
 PRINTED FOR  
 LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, BROWN, AND GREEN,  
 PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1824.

381



**GRIEVANCES OF LONDON.**

*A little Music à la Française*



*Les Savoyards*

*From the same part of the  
 engraving, see the caricature of  
 the Savoyards in the  
 "Illustration" of 21st March 1848.*



*Petty Bob*



*Sam-Bob*



*Sam-Bob*

## LAMB, SHENSTONE AND THE ICON OF PERSONALITY

Richard Terry

*Sunderland Polytechnic*

The cornerstone of Lamb criticism has long been Lamb's personality: his incorrigible whimsy, undemonstrative resolve in the face of gruesome misfortune, selfless fidelity to dependants and friends, and fragile susceptibility to fits of depression. It is not surprising that such a life as Lamb's has often been seen as etched with a wider, exemplary significance. Roy Park observed, for instance, in his collection of Lamb's criticism, that the Victorian establishment adopted him as a 'cultural teddy-bear', discovering in his life a bracing allegory of Christian trial and renunciation.<sup>1</sup> This is, in fact, the pity of Lamb's life as it has been transmitted to posterity; that to cherish it has so often been to whittle it down into a cosy stereotype. Something of it is abroad in Lord David Cecil's recent *A Portrait of Charles Lamb* (1983), where Cecil's lyricism and sentimentality induce the conviction that Lamb's puckish good spirits ultimately win through: 'Lamb's smile remains ... as if half amused by his own darker fancies'.<sup>2</sup> 'Half amused' and 'fancies', here, betray a rhetoric whose cushioning is slovenly. The tintedness of Cecil's *Portrait*, with its predictable rejection of the old crux of Lamb's alcoholism and its soft-focusing on his depressive spells, has recently been overtaken by Thomas McFarland's equally two-dimensional view of Lamb as a romantic suicidal depressive. His 'loneliness and desolation' make him, in McFarland's view, an iconic figure, exemplary of the Romantic 'essence'.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, by concentrating on the more dismal side of Lamb's life-history, McFarland attempts to rescue his subject from the triviality of the figure critics normally cut for him: that of a 'mere' humorist.

A jokey canonization of Lamb's personality can be traced back to his own friends: indeed, he showed touchiness about being typecast by them. He was comically piqued by Coleridge's addressing 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison' to 'My gentle-hearted Charles!' and asked elsewhere to have the sobriquet substituted by 'drunken dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-ey'd, stuttering, or any other epithet which truly and properly belongs to the Gentleman in question'.<sup>4</sup> He recognized, too, that one simplified version of his personality was reinforced by the associations of his name, which he referred to in 'The Family Name' as a 'gentle' and 'meek title'.<sup>5</sup> Matters of personality preoccupied Lamb a good deal. Part and parcel of his notoriously unschematic habits of critical exposition was the tendency to make *ad hominem* judgements on authors, based on appraisal of character. He had, for instance, such a trenchant aversion to Byron as ruled out any regard for his poetry; in his *Elia* essay on 'Imperfect Sympathies', he expressed exception to Burns's poetic bragging and swaggering, and elsewhere praised George Wither for spending his life in 'innocent self-pleasing'.<sup>6</sup> All are judgements made on grounds other than the strictly literary. His sensitivity to how his own personality could be hijacked, even by the affable idealizations of his friends, may have spilled over into his famous essay on the stage representation of Shakespeare's tragedies<sup>7</sup> with its suspicion of the inevitable disservice done to character as wrought in dramatic language by its being rendered through the clumsy gestural notation of performers. Quite how much Lamb's anxieties about the vicarious rendition of character feed into the 'Elia' project, his own beguilingly unreliable rehearsal of himself, is hard to say, but its continuity with some of his perennial concerns is obvious.

One eighteenth-century poet whom Lamb evidently found congenial was 'the dear Author of the Schoolmistress', as Lamb termed him.<sup>8</sup> He commented more dispassionately on *The School-Mistress* in a letter of advice to John Clare, but his criticism again seems enveloped, as is the case with that of Wither, by a sensed affinity of character.<sup>9</sup> Lamb's warmth towards Shenstone stands out for one particular reason, because Shenstone scholarship has seen the same foregrounding of issues of personality common in criticism of Lamb. A



wording hereabouts can speak volumes: Arthur Humphreys' early study of Shenstone (1937) delivered its subject under the title *William Shenstone: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, evincing the belief that Shenstone's life was exemplary of its period. My own essay addresses that life, its transmission to posterity and the reasons for Shenstone's being regarded favourably by Lamb. It would be as well to begin with a brief résumé of Shenstone's personal history. He was born in 1714, the son of Thomas Shenstone, churchwarden of Halesowen, Worcestershire, and Ann, eldest daughter of William Penn of Harborough Hall, Hagley. From Halesowen grammar school he went to Pembroke College, Oxford, which, like his more celebrated contemporary, Samuel Johnson, he left without taking a degree. After Oxford, he lodged with a relative who was tenant of the Leasowes, a property bought by Shenstone's grandfather; and, on the death of his guardian in 1745, he himself came into possession of the estate. The remainder of Shenstone's life, before his death in 1763, was legendarily uneventful, consisting of progressive upgrading of his grounds (his 'ferme ornée' as he dubbed it), the desultory composition of belletristic verses and the cultivation of literary and genteel acquaintances.

It should be added that Shenstone figured prominently in a small literary coterie in the South Midlands, consisting of Richard Graves, Richard Jago and William Somerville, and was also intimate with the major literary publisher of the mid-century, Robert Dodsley. Yet this still conveys little sense of why his lifestyle was to become so enshrouded in controversy. The process by which curiosity about Shenstone's life supplanted that about his poetry can be briefly plotted. It begins with Dodsley's posthumous edition of Shenstone's collected *Works* (1764), to which Dodsley appended a biographical preface. In 1773, Oliver Goldsmith, having re-visited Shenstone's Leasowes, wrote an essay moralizing on its accelerating disrepair. Six years later, the press of James Dodsley produced a prose work, attributed to 'the Editor of the *Spiritual Quixote*' (Richard Graves), entitled *Columella; Or, The Distracted Anchorite, A Colloquial Tale* (1779): a work which initiates could recognize to be a fictionally disguised biography of Shenstone. Until this point, rehearsals of Shenstone's life had mostly been tinged with sympathy, but Johnson's 'Life of Shenstone' (in *Lives* 1779-81) altered the picture by emphasizing his financial shiftlessness and his (supposedly) inveterate social climbing, an attach which induced Shenstone's close friend, Graves, soberly to set down his *Recollection of some Particulars in the Life of the late William Shenstone, Esq.* (1788). More recently, our own century has seen Humphreys' now dated *Portrait*, with its sentimental depiction of a pacific rurality 'where the tide of life flowed in a sequence only varied by the accidentals of mortality and the rhythm of the seasons'.<sup>10</sup> Shenstone becomes a cultural 'wallflower', an epitome of a judicious placidity and obscurity.

This is much ink to have been spilt over a life as unobtrusive as Shenstone's. What accounts for it, though, is the fact that his life came to be prized not so much for its own sake as for its convergence with an ideal of Augustan lifestyle: that of retirement. Probably the seminal evocation of the idea came in John Pomfret's poem 'The Choice' (1700), where the poet imagined how he might compose a situation for himself, granted freedom to 'choose my method how to live'.<sup>11</sup> The poem's hypothetical choices coincide pretty much with what fortune carved out for Shenstone: an embellished estate, agreeable and distinguished male company and, as a well-advised surrogate for matrimony itself, an intimate female friend. Graves's *Columella* teasingly includes a rector called Mr Pomfret, a stand-in for Graves himself, though the book is a concerted assault on the folly of the retirement idea and on Shenstone's supposed submission to it. It sought to condemn the retired lifestyle as an abdication of the responsibility of qualified men to exercise a profession, the upshot of their not doing so being that society itself would suffer and the man who chose retirement would probably doom himself to discontent. *Columella* depicts the constitutional melancholy Shenstone reputedly brought on himself.

Shenstone's proneness to depression is certain, but whether he ever elected to retire, and whether it was retirement which brought about his periodic bouts of melancholy, cannot be exactly determined. He seems to have been himself undecided as to whether he had ever consciously adopted the lifestyle: his 'Essay on Elegy', prefixed to a series of his own elegies, introduces the reader to a poet 'having (whether through choice or necessity is not material) retired betimes to country solitudes'.<sup>12</sup> The idea that Shenstone's retirement was really a ghastly mistake came to enjoy a gossipy currency. Thomas Gray recorded in a letter of 1769 that Shenstone's philosophy 'consisted in living against his will in retirement, & in a place, w<sup>ch</sup> his taste had adorn'd; but w<sup>ch</sup> he only enjoy'd, when People of note came to see & commend it'.<sup>13</sup> While it is true that the Leasowes had fallen to him as family estate, the zeal with which he set about improving its grounds hardly suggests a basic antipathy to country living. Moreover, Shenstone's leucocholy was not obviously the result of any regret about his general predicament. What seems most to have affected his spirits was the transition of the seasons; so much so, indeed, that the editor of his correspondence, Marjorie Williams, offers conjectural datings for some letters mainly on the premise that Shenstone was invariably at his gloomiest during the winter.<sup>14</sup> Evidence for this comes in a letter from Shenstone to Graves (April 19, 1754), where Shenstone specifically associates his own mood-swings with the seasonal cycle:

The succession, the regular succession, of pain and pleasure becomes every day more clear to me. It begins to seem as ordinary as the course of day and night. Thus my last summer was the most amusing I ever saw; my winter the most disagreeable...<sup>15</sup>

That Shenstone's moods were so much a prey to the calendar contributes to an engaging sense of something which at times comes close to dottiness, which was one facet of his personality. It also assimilates that personality to a larger pattern, to a rhythm of nature, making him into a sort of melancholic greenman. Shenstone's life was curiously prone to being factitiously shaped, to being dressed up by others, mostly so as to be exemplary of general human frailty or futility. The habit is manifested by Graves's conflation of Shenstone with the retirement ideal, but it is much more pronounced in a poem written by the same author after Shenstone's death, 'To Mr R. D. [Robert Dodsley] on the Death of Mr. Shenstone':

Yet here we fondly dreamt of lasting joys:  
Here we had hop'd, from noisy throngs retir'd,  
To drink large draughts of friendship's cordial stream;  
In sweet oblivion wrapt, by Damon's verse,  
And social converse, many a summer's day.  
Romantic wish! In vain frail mortals trace  
Th'imperfect sketch of human bliss--whilst yet  
Th'enraptur'd sire his well-plann'd structure views,  
Majestic rising 'midst his infant groves:  
Sees the dark laurel spread its glossy shade,  
Its languid bloom the purple lilac blend,  
Or pale laburnum drop its pensile chain:  
Death spreads the fatal shaft, and bids his heir  
Transplant the cypress round his father's tomb.<sup>16</sup>

The poem is elegiacally mannered, the pastoral conceit casting Shenstone's estate as an Arcadian idyll, not merely a garden but a fastness constructed against the flux of outside. Rather than merely regretting the temporary nature of all human lives, Graves seems bent

on admonishing Shenstone's estate and lifestyle for what he sees as their hubristic feint at immortality. The poem opens by fixing not on Shenstone's life but on his created garden:

'Tis past, my friend, the transient scene is clos'd!  
The fairy pile, th'enchanted vision rais'd  
By Damon's magic skill, is lost in air!

The lines, themselves, make a Shakespearean connection, calling up Prospero's speech renouncing his magic and elaborating on the insubstantiality of the human pageant; and what we know of the Leasowes' deterioration after Shenstone's death gives a sharp, though properly-speaking distracting, underscoring to Graves's pessimistic plangencies. What most obtrudes from the Graves poem is a suspicion about the worth of Shenstone's creation and of his mode of living. For an elegy on a friend's death, the poem comes disquietingly close to crowing over the revealed futility of Shenstone's consuming hobby ('Yet what avails the lifeless landscape now?'), as if his landscaping had been a life-time's vain throw against the grave.

This tone of subdued triumph, as if Shenstone's death somehow made a mockery of his way of life, also appears in Goldsmith's 'The History of a Poet's Garden' which appeared in the first number of the *Westminster Magazine* (1 January 1773). The essay begins by elaborating how poets, gifted with more developed imaginations than other people, can derive as much pleasure from the anticipation as from the fruition of their projects. Goldsmith thinks this ability useful as offsetting the despair into which everyone would fall could they but see the ultimate futility of all their schemes. What has brought Goldsmith to these cheerless reflections is now revealed as his 'lately visiting the beautiful gardens of the late Mr. Shenstone'; and the remainder of the essay consists of a dialogue between Goldsmith and the 'genius' of the garden, who provides him with insight into Shenstone's personal motivation and financial affairs:

Our Poet, instead of sitting down to enjoy life, resolved to prepare for its future enjoyment; and set about converting a place of profit into a scene of pleasure...The Improvement, in this manner, went forward; one beauty attained led him to wish for some other; but he still hoped that very emendation would be the last. It was now, therefore, found, that the Improvement exceeded the subsidy, that the place was grown too large and too fine for the inhabitant. But that pride which was once exhibited, could not retire; the garden was made for the owner, and though it was become unfit for him, he could not willingly resign it to another. Thus the first idea of its beauties contributing to the happiness of his life, was found unfaithful; so that, instead of looking within for satisfaction, he began to think of having recourse to the praises of those who came to visit his Improvement.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the digs at Shenstone, as at his failure to manage his estate economically and at his use of his grounds to court the appreciation of his social betters, I want to address later. These may have been examples of Shenstone's fecklessness, but they do not throw his hapless life into a shape that is crisply ironic. The main irony Goldsmith conjures against Shenstone is the depiction of his life as having been spent zealously, though unavailingly, striving for a happiness envisaged only ever as a figment of futurity, until futurity simply ran out on him: a life, in other words, spent in the continual forestalling of what it desired. But there is another skein of irony wrapping around this image of Shenstone's life: that there could be no end to Shenstone's vigorous improving of his garden until it became something other than what it had been designed to be. The Leasowes' fame and

Shenstone's financial exigencies saw to it that the garden 'went public', and publicity was the beginning of its ruin. The vengeful circularity of such ironies we now know as Kafkaesque. It is the world of Kafka's short story 'The Burrow', where a creature protects itself by excavating an elaborate underground fastness, before obsession about its own safety grows into paranoia about that of its fortress, which it will now risk itself to protect.<sup>18</sup> So Shenstone landscaped for peace of mind even as his obsessive desire for improvement ravaged his equanimity.

Though Shenstone's life may have been blemished by wrong-headedness, its conformity with such austere patterns of irony confers some residual dignity. Some critics, however, rather than seeing Shenstone's as a life ultimately disabused of tragically false apprehensions, depressed his character into a paradigm of pettiness and vanity. Dodsley was the first to acknowledge Shenstone's financial difficulties and Johnson, remarking in Boswell's company that Shenstone 'died of misery', related this sad fact specifically to his failure to gain a pension.<sup>19</sup> The *D.N.B.* records also that the fever which killed Shenstone was contracted on, or shortly after, returning from a visit to Lord Stamford, this journey being integral to his pension manoeuvres. Johnson rubbed salt in the wound of Shenstone's impecuniousness by claiming that his house was tumble-down: a point categorically denied some time later by Bishop Percy.<sup>20</sup> That Shenstone spent beyond his means and was then miserable because of self-inflicted poverty was certainly believed by some of his contemporaries; Gray, for instance, remarked bluntly that he 'was always wishing for money'.<sup>21</sup> But a far worse trait, ascribed to him most unforgivingly by Johnson, was that he both cultivated his social betters and surreptitiously vied with them. Johnson suggested that Shenstone spent his life being put out over the superiority of the nearby Lyttelton estate at Hagley, and firmly believing that the Lytteltons, who often showed guests around his 'ferme ornée', did so in a manner likely to detract from its merits. The general claim about Shenstone's emulousness was dismissed in Graves's *Recollection*, though he could not avoid confessing that Shenstone was frequently irritated by the Lyttelton party's habit, when visiting, of straying from the official circuit.<sup>22</sup> Shenstone, unlike some other non-metropolitan writers, had a reverence for Johnson, to which Johnson reciprocated slightly by speaking warmly of the poet's correspondence.<sup>23</sup> Yet, rather in the vein of his aversion to Gray, Johnson felt Shenstone's seclusive habits had made him prey to infirmities of character. Regarding the supposed rift between Shenstone and the Lytteltons, his judgement was lordly: 'Where there is emulation there will be vanity, and where there is vanity there will be folly'.<sup>24</sup>

The belief that Shenstone solicited the attention of such social superiors as the Lytteltons and Lady Luxborough tended to be given an ironic turn, so that it became seen as a contradiction that Shenstone should opt for a secluded lifestyle and then canvass for public appreciation of the fruits of that seclusion. This rhetorical turn, the logical recoiling of a life out of sorts with itself, ceaselessly invades attempts to discuss his nature. Horace Walpole recorded that 'he wanted to have all the world talk of him for the pretty place he had made, and which he seems to have made only that it might be talked of'; Gray remarked that he lived 'against his will in retirement, & in a place, w<sup>ch</sup> his taste had adorn'd; but which he only enjoy'd when People of note came to see & commend it'; and Hazlitt reduced Shenstone's motivation to terse and paradoxical epigram, saying that he 'affected privacy that he might be sought out by the world'.<sup>25</sup> These examples, as the others that I have given, testify to how Shenstone's life was rendered, made shapely, so that it could be morally serviceable. But another consistent feature to be found in discussions of Shenstone stems not from the writers' rhetorical restructuring of his life but from a tone assumed in describing it: primarily a tone of condescending regret, such as one might extend to a person confounded by his own shortcomings. Take Johnson: 'Poor Shenstone never tasted his pension'; or Walpole: 'Poor man, he wanted to have all the world talk of

him'; or Gray: 'poor Man! he was always wishing for money'.<sup>26</sup> Or even, perhaps, Charles Lamb's regard for the 'dear Author of the *Schoolmistress*'.<sup>27</sup>

Lamb refers to Shenstone in a letter to John Clare (31 August 1822), describing *The School-Mistress* as 'the prettiest of poems' and recommending to Clare its 'true rustic style' and 'Arcadian English'. These qualities are contrasted with Clare's own slangy 'rustick Cockneyism'.<sup>28</sup> A year later, Lamb's *Nugae Criticae ... Defence of the Sonnets of Sir Philip Sydney*, a piece of critical advocacy brought on by Hazlitt's attack on Sidney, also sees Shenstone honourably mentioned as an exponent of natural imagery.<sup>29</sup> One further tiny connection between Shenstone and Lamb probably also deserves mention. This is Lamb's repetition of an outrageous verbal coinage which seems to have stemmed from a letter written by Shenstone to Richard Jago (July 1742) when he praised the dead Somerville for his 'flocci-nauci-nihili-pili-fication of money'.<sup>30</sup> Shenstone coveted the phrase sufficiently to employ it, in the same context, in *Men and Manners*. The *O.E.D.* provides the gloss: 'The action or habit of estimating as worthless'; and this seems to be the intended acceptation when Lamb writes to Coleridge 'Are we not flocci-nauci-what d'ye call-em-ists?'<sup>31</sup> As well as connoting whimsicality, the word is itself a whimsy, but Lamb's lifting it goes beyond verbal opportunism and suggests (what I think existed) a symmetry of temperament between the two writers.

Shenstone's *School-Mistress* went through three published versions: first appearing in twelve stanzas in *Poems on Various Occasions* (1737), then being expanded to thirty-five stanzas through editions of 1742 and 1748. The poem participated in the eighteenth century vogue for Spensarian imitation, the two most celebrated examples of which were Pope's 'The Alley' (1727) and Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* (1748), works which Shenstone expressly set his own poem against, considering it more serious than Pope's poem but less so than Thomson's.<sup>32</sup> There appears to have been complete consensus amongst contemporaries that *The School-Mistress* was Shenstone's best poem, so that even those who expressed jaundiced views about his lifestyle warmed to it. Gray described the poem as 'excellent in its kind, and masterly'; Goldsmith praised it as 'one of those happinesses in which a poet excels himself'; and Johnson found it to be 'the most pleasing of Shenstone's performances'.<sup>33</sup> In spite of the poem's antique phraseology, Shenstone was keen that it should not be understood simply as a diagrammatic mock-heroic, whose effects were limited to the inverted interplay of style and content. His attitude towards Spenser, in any event, was complex. On Christmas eve 1741, he wrote to Jago notifying him of his revised *The School-Mistress* and declaring that Spenser's 'subject is certainly bad, and his action inexpressibly confused'.<sup>34</sup> Yet he added, rather concessively, that 'there are some particulars in him that charm one.' Curiously, Shenstone conflates Spenser's best features with those that make him most susceptible to burlesque, these being his 'simplicity and obsolete phrase'; and this odd doubling-up of Spenser's best and most parodiabale qualities comes across in the 'Advertisement' to the 1748 edition, where Shenstone confessed to have imitated 'his language, his simplicity, his manner of description, and a peculiar tenderness of sentiment remarkable throughout his works'.<sup>35</sup>

Although it would be wrong to imply that what is afoot in *The School-Mistress* has simply to do with style, it is worth giving a sample of that style. Take the first two stanzas of the 1737 edition:

IN evrich mart that stands on British ground,  
In evrich village less y-known to fame,  
Dwells there in cot incouth, afar renowned,  
A matron old, whom we school-mistress name,  
Who wont unruly brats with birch to tame:

They grieven sore in durance vile y-pent  
 Awed by the pow'r of uncontroled dame;  
 And oft-times, on vagaries idly bent,  
 For task unconned or unkempt hair are sore y-shent.

NEAR to this dome is found a patch so green,  
 On which the tribe their gambols do display;  
 Als at the door impris'ning board is seen,  
 Lest weakly wights of smaller size should stray,  
 Eager, perdie, to bask in sunshine day.  
 The noises intermixed, which thence resound,  
 Do learning's little tenement betray,  
 Where sits the dame, disguised in look profound,  
 And eyes her fairy throng, and turns her wheel around.

It is easy to feel that this evinces, and panders to, a taste that is inherently false: *The School-Mistress*, in spite of being a burlesque, belongs alongside Pope's periodically Miltonic translation of Homer, Walpole's pseudo-gothic Strawberry Hill and Macpherson's *Ossian* poems as a work imbued with the cult of picturesque antiquity. The poem's growth, though, saw the burlesque style itself become less important, with more space being given to the schoolmistress's character and to some pathetic sentiments about the lot of obscure people. Its development epitomizes, in fact, how burlesque poems often harbour a serious content and, in Shenstone's case, this ultimately came to predominate over the claims of the parody.

R.P. Bond remarked, in his *English Burlesque Poetry 1700-1750* that to understand *The School-Mistress* one has to understand Shenstone's personality; and it is the sense of the poem's being the product of a particular human sensibility that makes it more than just abstractly burlesque, reliant on a comic mis-match of style and subject.<sup>37</sup> To underline this, some of the expressions Shenstone uses of Spenser, regarding his 'Simplicity' and 'Tenderness of Sentiment', recur in connection with Shenstone's own writing, as in Gray's remark that Shenstone 'trusts to nature and simple sentiment'.<sup>38</sup> *The School-Mistress* was an exercise in poetic 'naivety': in the first place, the naivety of childhood experience, then, with the poem's expansion, that of petty rural life. The problem for a twentieth-century reader is that what the Augustans thought simple or natural often now appears affectedly coy. The design of the poem is to be fresh-faced but, to our eyes, it teeters on the edge of the faux-naïf and the genteel. Eighteenth-century writers themselves recognized that the naive style ran risks, though these were associated with infantilism, of the kind epitomized by Ambrose Philips's notorious namby-pamby verses. Shenstone was anxious not to fall guilty of Philips's weakness for 'mere childishness', contending that 'if a person seriously calls [*The School-Mistress*], or rather, burlesque, a childish or low species of poetry, he says wrong'.<sup>39</sup>

It is in their attitude to childhood experience that Shenstone's and Lamb's personalities converge most sharply. Lamb, too, was to insist on the distinction between poetry whose subject was childhood and that which could be accused of childishness. He elaborated this point in a lengthy review of Wordsworth's 'The Excursion' in the *Quarterly Review*:

[Wordsworth's] verses shall be censured as infantile by critics who confound poetry 'having children for its subject' with poetry that is 'childish,' and who, having themselves perhaps never been *children*, never having possessed the tenderness and docility of that age, know not

what the soul of a child is - how apprehensive! how imaginative! how religious!<sup>40</sup>

It should be said that Lamb's words belong to a different age from Shenstone's yet they are at one in expressing the seriousness of childhood experience and its worthiness to be commemorated. Though Lamb has two fine poems of childhood, 'Childhood' and 'The Grandame', and wrote an *Elia* essay on his and Coleridge's time at Christ's Hospital, it matters less that Shenstone and Lamb tried to recover their childhood experience than that child-likeness becomes for each of them a character-note. In Lamb's case, it was his incorrigible prankishness, his quality of faux-naïf, through which he preserved the child in himself; in Shenstone's, it was the petty nature of his perceived vanities, the sense expressed so often that his shortcomings were curiously excusable, and the general casting of his life into the shape of (what many saw as) a regressive idyll. Shenstone's personality invariably vexed whereas Lamb's captivated, yet the endurance of each owed much to the cult of the child.

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2. Lord David Cecil, *A Portrait of Charles Lamb* (London, 1983), p.8.
3. Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford, 1987), p.27.
4. Cited from Charles Lamb, *Elia & Last Essays of Elia*, edited by Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987), p.ix.
5. *Poems and Essays of Charles Lamb* (London, 1890), pp.6-7.
6. Park (ed.), pp.238, 190, 177.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-101.
8. *Ibid.*, p.171.
9. Letter to John Clare (31 August 1822), in *ibid.*, p.242
10. A.R.Humphreys, *William Shenstone: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait* (Cambridge, 1937, P.2. See also Marjorie Williams's similarly titled *Shenstone: A Chapter in Eighteenth-Century Taste* (Birmingham, 1935).
11. Cited from, and most easily available in, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, edited by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford, 1984), P.1.
12. Cited from *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper*, edited by Alendander Chalmers, twentyone vols (1810), XIII. 265.
13. *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, edited by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, three vols (Oxford, 1971), III. 1067.
14. *The Letters of William Shenstone*, edited by Marjorie Williams (Oxford, 1939), v.
15. *Ibid.*, p.396
16. Cited from Chalmers (ed.) XIII. 334.
17. *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, edited by Arthur Friedman (Oxford, 1966, III. 207).
18. See *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (Penguin, 1966).
19. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, edited by G.B. Hill, revised by L.B. Powell, six vols (Oxford, 1934-50), V.457.
20. 'Life of Shenstone', in Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, edited by G.B. Hill, three vols (Oxford, 1905), III. 352.
21. Letter to Nicholls (24 June 1769), in *Correspondence*, III. 1067.
22. *Lives*, III. 351.
23. *Life of Johnson*, V.268.

24. *Lives*, III. 351.
25. Letter to William Cole, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, edited by W. S. Lewis, 48 vols (New Haven, 1937-83), I.166; Gray, *Correspondence*, III. 1067; Hazlitt, *Table-Talk* (1869), I. 130.
26. *Life of Johnson*, V. 457; Walpole, *Correspondence*, I.166; Gray, *Correspondence*, III. 1067.
27. Park (ed.), p.171.
28. *Ibid.*, p.242.
29. *Ibid.*, pp.170-03
30. *Letters*, p.56. Also p.57<sup>n</sup>.
31. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb, Vol.I, 1796-1801*, edited by Edwin W Marris, Jr. (Cornell, 1975), p.9.
32. *Letters*, p.145
33. *Correspondence*, I.295; Goldsmith, *Collected Works*, V.320; *Lives*, III. 358.
34. *Letters*, pp.36-7.
35. Chalmers (ed.), XIII. 326.
36. Cited from Lonsdale (ed.), *New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, p.305.
37. R.P. Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry 1700-1750* (New York, 1932), p.133.
38. Letter to Wharton (March 8, 1758), in *Correspondence*, II.566.
39. *Letters*, p.9
40. Park (ed.), p.199.

#### 'GENTLE CHARLES' AND RICK-BURNERS

by John I. Ades

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Some years ago in responding to a review of a collection of essays, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (ed. J P D Dunabin, 1974), I undertook to call attention to Lamb's ostensibly severe view of rick-burners, expressed in a letter to George Dyer (20th December 1830). Ordinarily, I ventured, we think of Lamb as liberal-minded and kindly, always a friend to the simple and an advocate for the downtrodden of society; but in this letter Lamb appears to slight the mounting agricultural distress, presenting a reactionary caricature of haystack Vulcans that is as one-sided and impatient against their peace-disturbance as the rick-burners were violently for it.

A recent reading of George Rudé's *The Crowd in History: a Study of Popular Disturbance in France and England, 1730-1848*, brought Lamb's sentiments to mind again, sending me back to reread his letter to Dyer. In the light of Rudé's book, in which he documents with great sympathy the appalling agricultural (as well as urban) distress of the workers during the Industrial Revolution, I still find Lamb's letter puzzling - but perhaps more complex than I had previously understood. As is often the case with Lamb, the tincture of humour that runs through the letter might alert the reader (if not the recipient) to possible irony and artful dodging.

I was given a nudge in this direction by two items: a paragraph in Winifred Courtney's fine recent biography, *Young Charles Lamb*; and by her reply, in a personal letter to me (11 November 1990), in answer to a query I had posed to her on the character of this letter of Lamb's to Dyer.



In 'Political Lamb', Chapter 5 in her biography, she makes the point that Lamb was ordinarily not much interested in day-to-day politics: e.g., '[He] does not mention Waterloo in extant letters' (201). And though in correspondence with Hazlitt he could pretend to be keen on Admiral Nelson at his death in 1805, Mrs Courtney declares that 'we become aware that he is pulling the leg of a Napoleon worshipper. Similarly [she continues], a letter to George Dyer that appears somewhat harsh on rick-burners is aimed at Dyer's sympathy with the poor and oppressed: Lamb is gently teasing his friends' preoccupations. Otherwise he is mostly silent on these matters' (*ibid*).

In her personal letter to me, Winifred Courtney ventured two points: 1) In his letter to Dyer, Lamb 'may have recalled the Gordon Riots of 1780 and been genuinely alarmed' at the current uproar; and 2) 'He almost never discusses such happenings, except in teasing. . . . Surely, "It was never good times in England since the poor began to speculate upon their condition" is entirely ironic: Lamb's whole outlook . . . was sympathy with the outcasts . . . and we know he was not shy of pulling George's leg. . . . I do not believe he had changed: calling poor people boors was not his style. No, on rereading, I still find the letter a vast irony. . . . He was not above sharp teases. . . . More than one emotion may have been involved. At best, I believe he was only half (½?) serious'.

The question, then, is this: Do we conclude that Lamb is chiefly teasing when he writes to Dyer in what appears on the surface to be a *volte face* of his customary outlook? Or might this letter not display a 55-year-old Charles Lamb who has simply lost patience with the constant flames of destructive social unrest, here making a grim point about contemporary society, while at the same time characteristically having some fun with his friend? I would recalculate Mrs Courtney's fractions: 5/6 serious, 1/6 fun.

At this point we need before us the relevant parts of Lamb's letter to Dyer:

Poor Enfield, that has been so peaceable hitherto, has caught the inflammatory fever, the tokens are upon her! and a great fire was blazing last night in the barns and haystacks of a farmer, about a half a mile from us. Where will these things end? There is no doubt of its being the work of some ill disposed rustic; but how is he to be discovered? they go to work in the dark with strange chemical preparations unknown to our forefathers. There is not even a dark lantern to have a chance of detecting these Guy Fauxes. We are past the iron age, and are got into the fiery age, undream'd of by Ovid. You are lucky in Clifford's Inn where, I think, you have few ricks or stacks worth the burning. Pray keep as little corn by you as you can, for fear of the worst.

It was never good times in England since the poor began to speculate upon their condition. Formerly, they jogged along with as little reflection as horses: the whistling ploughman went cheek by jowel with his brother that neighed. Now the biped carries a box of phosphorus in his leather-breeches; and in the dead of night the half-illuminated beast steals his potion into a cleft in a barn, and half a county is grinning with new fires. Farmer Greystock said something to the touchy rustic that he did not relish, and he writes his distaste in flames. What a power to intoxicate his crude brains, just muddingly awake, to perceive that something is wrong in the social system!--what a hellish faculty above gunpowder!

Now the rich and poor are fairly pitted; we shall see who can hang or burn the fastest. It is not always revenge that stimulates these kindlings. There is a love of exerting mischief . . . What a new existence!--what a temptation above Lucifer's! Would clod be any thing but a clod, if he could resist it? Why, here was . . . a Bonfire visible to

London . . . all done by a little vial of phosphor in a Clown's fob! How he must grin, and shake his empty noddle in clouds, the Vulcanian Epicure! . . .

Seven goodly stacks of hay, with corn-barns proportionable, lie smoking ashes and chaff, which man and beast would sputter out and reject like those apples of Ashphaltes and bitumen. The food for the inhabitants of earth will quickly disappear. Hot rolls may say: 'Fuimus panes, fuit quartern loaf, et ingens gloria Apple-pasty-orum.' That the good old munching system may last thy time and mine, good unincendiary George, is the devout prayer of thine,

To the last crust (Lucas, *Letters*, III, 298-99).

Well, that's quite a performance, certainly one among any dozen of Lamb's best letters. The text threads a strand of humour through serious matter, the whole subject bathed in vintage Lambstyle of literary references to (among others) Ovid, Lucifer, the poast-lapsarian attempts at apple munching by Satan's rabble in *Paradise Lost*, Aeneas's report of the fall of Troy in flames in the *Aeneid*, Guy Faux, Vulcan, Epicurus - and maybe, in the last paragraph's humorous hyperbole about the disappearance of food from the earth, a sly reference to 'A Dissertation on Roast Pig', where, after the judge joins Ho-ti and Bo-bo in houseburning, 'there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction' (Lucas, *Works*, II, 123).

Winifred Courtney may be correct in arguing that when Lamb writes 'it was never good times in England since the poor began to speculate upon their condition' it is entirely ironic. If so, it is Swiftian irony, as uncharacteristic of Lamb as it would be if taken at face value. The only sign, so far as I can see, that it *is* ironic lies in our knowing Dyer so absently eccentric as to promote obliquities at his expense. Of course, any man who could walk out of Lamb's Colebrook Cottage, Islington, at noon and march straight in the (then uncovered) New River is fair game for bantering; but why Lamb would go to such lengths as this long letter to tease Dyer, now old and with failed eyesight, remains obscure to me. Lamb's early portrait of him in 'Oxford in the Vacation' is altogether good-natured and loving, even if at times hilarious (Lucas, *Works*, II, 7-12). Looking at the letter as a whole, then, I would take it as far more serious than ironic.

In paragraph one of the letter, 'a great fire was blazing last night in the barns and haystacks of a farmer, about half a mile from us. Where will all these things end?' sounds serious enough to me. Lamb continues in this vein for a few more sentences, then suddenly concludes the paragraph with a jest, advising Dyer, safe in Clifford's Inn, London, where there were no ricks, to 'keep as little corn by you as you can for fear of the worst'. Even in a serious frame of mind, Lamb cannot resist a light touch: it is part of his character and should not mislead us about his underlying convictions. In this, he is like Max Beerbohm, to whom, we are told, the question was posed: 'Uncle Max, can you never be wholly serious?' The answer, of course, was 'No', as it is for Lamb.

Paragraphs two and three seem to me unambiguously earnest, unless Mrs Courtney is right about the opening sentence of paragraph two. On the positive side there is Lamb's lingering, wistful nostalgia for a soft primitivism that would have gladdened the heart of Rousseau: 'Formerly, they jogged on with as little reflection as horses: the whistling ploughman went cheek by jowl with his brother that neighed'. But there is also, it seems to me, dead-serious social criticism as well as psychological astuteness in what Lamb says in paragraph three. 'Now the rich and poor are fairly pitted; we shall see who can hang or burn fastest' seems like genuine alarm at the wrenching of the social order. And when he declares that 'it is not always revenge that stimulates these kindlings. There is a love of

exerting mischief', or 'Would clod be any thing but a clod, if he could resist it? . . . How he must grin, and shake his empty noddle. . . . Can we unlearn the arts that pretend to civilize, and then burn the world?' I can't help feeling that Lamb has sorted out an all too common streak in protestors. Anyone who has seen trashing and looting and other diversions of present-day hooliganism as programs for social amelioration might be tempted to take Lamb's remark at face value.

Speaking of the Gordon Riots of 1780, Mrs Courtney writes:

A dozen years later, as Charles Lamb grew to manhood, the government was supine no longer when the populace ran amok. By then the King and ruling class had seen what a mob could do to their counterparts across the Channel, and had drawn what they considered the appropriate lesson. The debate over what exactly *was* the lesson of the French Revolution consumed the ardours of Lamb's generation: no one could escape it (YCL, p.33).

Including Lamb himself, as I believe the letter to Dyer indicates.

At the end of his letter, I suspect that Lamb may have felt he had touched the subject a little heavily for Dyer, so he concludes with a kind of 'send-up' by lugging in half-joking but also half-serious (because curiously apt) references to *Paradise Lost* (the smoking ashes of corn after rick-burning are like the ashes and bitumen into which the apples turn, as the Fallen Angels, now back in Hell, taste them) and to the *Aeneid*, where Trojans, viewing their city in flames, are metamorphosed into 'hot rolls', and 'Trojans', 'Ilium' and 'the glory of the Teucrians' become, respectively, 'bread', 'quartern-loaf', and 'ingens gloria Apple-pasty-orum' - carefully retaining the genitive case for the last noun! We are told that Dyer was humourless, but a classical scholar could hardly fail to be amused at Lamb's clowning. Moreover, given Dyer's befuddled character, Mrs Courtney's case for irony can certainly be made here - but in the opposite direction. Behind the clowning, Lamb may be suggesting that rick-burning, unchecked, would run to disaster: England's grain supply would be like the ashes of the Fallen Angels' apples, her cities like Aeneas' burning Troy.

The letter concludes with affectionate wit, praying that the 'munching system may last they time and mine, good un-incendiary George', the complimentary close appropriately pursuing the bread metaphor: 'to the last crust'.

I believe Lamb's letter to Dyer is, on balance, a serious critical response to the increasingly violent disorder of rick-burning, however odd it may seem to find Lamb on this side of the issue. The humorous touches that can tempt us to see much of the letter as less than serious ought rather to remind us again of the poise and complexity of Lamb as a writer.

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## WINIFRED F. COURTNEY REPLIES:

Jack Ades first became a friend on my reading his kind review of *Young Charles Lamb in The Wordsworth Circle*, summer of 1983. When I later met him in person with his charming wife, Connie, the friendship prospered, and I'm most happy to do a bit of cheerful sparring with him on this occasion, when he has most generously offered me the chance for rebuttal.

Let me say at once that I'm not doctrinaire in my interpretation nor unwilling to re-think it. Praise to Professor Ades for bringing what I agree is 'one of Lamb's best letters' again to our attention.

Two sentences from my letter quoted above I should like to restore complete: 'I am ready to say that mine is only an interpretation, and perhaps not the only one possible. On thinking over your question it occurred to me that Lamb may have recalled the Gordon Riots of 1780 and been genuinely alarmed. (I can remember kindergarten at five, so he the Gordon Riots? - which can hardly have escaped his notice).'

If *Hamlet* and other subtle works can be variously interpreted, sometimes convincingly, why not Lamb's also very subtle artistry here? (*Strong* alarm, to my way of thinking, might have disposed of some of the artistry?) I still find him not one-sixth ironic but at least half - maybe more. Yet other readers may have other choices.

One's pleasure in irony is so often the guessing and probing as to what is irony and what is serious statement. George Dyer, the radical - and serious - social critic, had written *Complaints of the Poor People of England*, and had, as we know, deep sympathy for them. I continue to believe that 'It was never good times in England since the poor began to speculate upon their condition' has to be wholly a nudge at George, and I do not find it uncharacteristic of Lamb. In December 1824 (*Lucas Letters* II, 447), for example, Lamb writes to Bernard Barton, the Quaker, 'Thousands would go to see a Quaker hanged, that would be indifferent to the fate of a Presbyterian, or an Anabaptist. Think of the effect that it would have on the sale of your poems alone': a tease. Lamb himself had always sympathised with the poor against the rich and George knew it, since many instances, if proof were needed, were already in print. Lamb had written harshly to Robert Southey his own complaint that Southey's Church of England was charging a fee for the sight of the tombs in Westminster Abbey, protesting that the poor could not pay. (This letter, of course, became his essay 'The Tombs in the Abbey'. I have, incidentally, personally encountered a stiff fee in St Paul's Cathedral in 1990 for the same privilege - what would Lamb say?) He defended poor women in 'Modern Gallantry' - and so on; the examples are legion.

Yet another element comes in the picture: I have the very strong feeling that having a good incident to play upon he embroidered on it partly, at least, to see what could be done with it (as in his own 'Guy Faux'). Yes, some alarm, but yes - let's see what can be done with it; incendiaryism, like rescue-from-hanging, being one of his subjects. How he did delight in the Elian twists and surprises of exploring a topic - see the Mary Wedd article described below.

Since John Ades wrote his piece we have both received the latest *Charles Lamb Bulletin* (Januar, 1991, n.s.73), led off by Mary R Wedd's brilliant and erudite analysis of 'Poor Relations' in 'That Dangerous Figure - Irony'. She quotes the source of her title from Lamb's own Preface to *Last Essays*, which bears quoting again:

With the severe religionist he [Elia] would pass for a free-thinker; while the other faction set him down for a bigot, or persuaded themselves that he belied his sentiments. Few understood him; and I am not certain that at all times he quite understood himself. He too much affected that dangerous figure - irony.

'Lamb is still making fools of us', says Mrs Wedd, and here are Professor Ades and I hoist upon his petard. Yes, a rick-burning half a mile away might cause alarm in anyone - but in his letter Lamb never really lets go of his bantering tone. In the end, just how alarmed he was is a matter of fractions and guess. My alarm-fraction is smaller than Jack's but I defend to the death Jack's right to his opinions.

Some years ago I had the pleasure of introducing a distinguished Welsh cousin of mine to a Welsh friend from the U.S. I wasn't at all sure they would hit it off and they began at once cheerfully *arguing* - never stopped. When they finally had to stop they proved delighted with each other. (I've forgotten if Jack has any Welsh blood, as I have).<sup>\*</sup> This exchange - and particularly the chance to review Lamb's fine if mystifying letter has been fun - and has made us think. Had Lamb really changed his views - or was he looking, as he so often did, at another, ironic, side to the question? His teasing, if teasing it was, is unquestionably, unmistakably affectionate, unlikely to affect George adversely even in age and blindness.

'Lamb is still making fools of us', but which of us is the more fooled? Anyone else for the tennis?

<sup>\*</sup>Not a drop - but I'm devoted to leeks. (JIA)

#### REVIEW ARTICLE

ROMANTICISM AND THE SCIENCES, ed. Andrew Cunningham & Nicholas Jardine. Cambridge University Press, 1990, 340 pp. (H/b SBN O 521 35602 4; P/b SBN O 521 35685 7).

Elia, searching the pages of this book for mention of their patron saint, will discover him early on, upon page 3 to be exact, giving the immortal toast, 'Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics', which the editors perceive as symbolizing the antipathy of the Romantics for the mechanical natural philosophy and descriptive natural history inherited from the Enlightenment.

Although the Enlightenment's empirical approach to natural history and natural philosophy typified for Romantics the blighting stance responsible for Man's catastrophic divorce from Nature, such empiricism was usually accepted as a necessary step on his rocky road to redemption. Yet, what could be the next step? What was to supplant the 'philosophy of mechanism which, in everything that is most worthy of the human intellect, strikes Death', as Coleridge wrote with dramatic intensity to Wordsworth? The answer to the question is found in *Romanticism and the sciences*.

The editors of this collection of essays observe that although in the nineteenth century it became fashionable to dismiss Romanticism in the natural sciences as 'an aberration from the path of healthy scientific progress', the past fifteen years or so have seen a 'scholarly interest and a series of reassessments'; resulting in the present volume, the first English-language book on the topic since Gode von Aesch's *Natural Science in German Romanticism* in 1941. The twenty-two 'splendid' essays now offered us (the quoted adjective being that

of the enthusiastic editors themselves, but not misplacedly so - this really is an outstanding collection) cover a time-span of 1778 to the mid 1830's: David Knight, in the first essay of the series, *Romanticism and the sciences* introduces the subject generally with Goethe and Humphry Davy as two leading Romantics discovering that, as he puts it, 'In the Romantic period, natural science could still be fun', while in the final essay, *The shattered whole: Georg Büchner and Naturphilosophie*, John Reddick, listening to Büchner's two disparate voices, serene holistic scientist-philosopher/agonizingly fragmented poet, probes the question of why the fun had turned into frenzy.

Many of the leading figures discussed in *Romanticism and the sciences* were connected through the University of Jena, that 'cauldron of transcendentalism' as Rehbock describes it. Goethe, Reinhold, Fichte, Schiller, Schelling, the Schlegels, Dorothea Veit, Ritter, Hardenberg, the Tiecks, all are names connected with Jena. The salient name missing from the Jena roll-call is Coleridge. This was not due to any lack of wishing to go there on his part; between 1796 to 1798 we find him on record as having a sojourn of study at Jena as his goal; in 1796 we find him learning German to prepare himself for Jena. Yet, in the autumn of 1798, when the Wedgwoods financed Coleridge to study in Germany, he chose not to go to Jena after all, but instead he went to Ratzburg and Göttingen; on the grounds that Jena would be too expensive, though hitherto he had referred to it as 'a cheap German university'. We shall never know why he, at the last moment, decided against it; expense does not seem a convincing excuse (he did not scruple, when the inclination came, to linger in Germany, walking in the Harz mountains). Did he lack the self-confidence to present himself at Jena? Had he gone there and had face-to-face converse with the Jena Romantics his own career must surely have shaped rather differently: instead, he was to improvise a kind of *doppel-gänger* relationship with Schelling, whose constant presence in Coleridge's thinking was construed by the latter as, so to speak, a telepathetic marriage of true minds.

Goethe and Schelling, the founding fathers of German Romanticism (it is, essentially, with German Romanticism that this book is concerned), Alexander von Humboldt and Johann Wilhelm Ritter emerge from these pages as the Olympian figures - though the heights on which they brood are those of Chimborazo rather than the immortal Thessalian peak. The basic tenets of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* are discussed by S R Morgan in Essay 2; a sturdy springboard for the speculative elaborations of Kantian philosophy which come after. But it is Goethe who emerges as the 'towering giant of his age' (to quote Reddick); and tower he does, in essay after essay, whether in his morphological phase, searching for ideal archetypes for the plant and animal kingdoms and thereby establishing himself as the father of transcendental anatomy (claims Philip F Rehbock, writing on that subject in Essay 10), or producing his monumental work on colour, *Zur Farbenlehre*: which Goethe himself considered as his greatest achievement. Certainly it was his most controversial; raising impassioned debate which survives, albeit in 'attenuated form, even to this day', as Dennis L Sepper observes in his introductory paragraphs of Essay 13, *Goethe, colour and the art of seeing*; in which we are reminded not only that Goethe taught his readers how to see and experience colours afresh - how they reveal things about the nature of the substances in which they inhere and how the science of colour is related across a wide range of subjects extending from pathology to the theory of music - but saw himself furthermore providing a guide to future colour researches: above all into 'the "sinnlich-Sittliche Wirkung der Farbe" . . . the psychophysiological, psychological, aesthetic and moral effects of colour' (to quote Sepper).

In 1809, twelve months before *Zur Farbenlehre* appeared, inevitably to wed science to music and painting, Goethe had been equally intent upon linking literature to the sciences and had done so in his astonishingly innovative novel, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*Elective*

*Affinities*); an erotic entanglement of two couples based upon the chemical phenomena of affinities existing between different substances – in this case four human characters. In Essay 18, *Goethe's use of chemical theory in his Elective Affinities*, Jeremy Adler analyses and discusses the sources which inspired Goethe's novel and the various chemical formulae explored and introduced into the development of the story. Goethe's 'theory of modes of understanding' (*Theorie der Vorstellungsarten*) made it impossible for him ever to be concerned solely with any one hypothesis: thus divorce and exchange of partners, the obvious and simple solution to the novel's human tangle, was rejected by the author, through the characters, in favour of a harmonious reunion of all four friends, content to maintain their *status quo*. The key character of Otilie, a combination of free spirit and sense of guilt, may be seen, suggests Adler, in terms of an analogy with cohesion; preventing, as she does, the anticipated reaction.

Interconnectedness, reticulation, not only within a given realm of discourse, but between different realms, was one of the major characteristics of Romantic striving, emphasizes Trevor H Levere in Essay 20, *Coleridge and the Sciences*. Levere demonstrates the importance of the sciences for Coleridge (fundamentally a poet and man of literature) by examining their role in three sets of related concepts with which he was largely concerned during his first years at Highgate, namely: powers and the role or productivity in nature; development, and the distinction between historical sequence and genetic form; and ascent: that is to say, concepts arising from the Romantic abstraction, *Entwicklung*, in pursuit of which Coleridge (in his posthumously published *Hints towards the Formation of a more Comprehensive Theory of Life*) fixed upon the image of an ascending and expanding spiral as symbolic of his theory of powers and sequential classification of living beings: '[Nature] at one and the same time *ascends* as by a climax, and expands as the concentric circles on the lake from the point to which the stone in its fall had given the first impulse'. Levere stresses that Coleridge was not propounding an evolutionary sequence seen historiographically as an ascent in time, but under the aspect of the 'ever present': in short, for Coleridge as for the majority of his fellow *Naturphilosophen*, *Entwicklung* was essentially an abstraction and could not be demonstrated by any material realisation in nature.

In pursuit of this theme Evelleen Richards, in Essay 9, '*Metaphysical mystifications*'; *the Romantic gestation of nature in British biology*, points out that '*Naturphilosophie* had to demonstrate how the universe originated, and to reconstruct its development from the original Idea thought by God to its highest manifestation as man'; a task of reconstruction to be assisted by the essential parallel between man's individual history, or gestation, and the universal history (we find Schelling writing that 'whoever could write the history of his own life from its very ground, would have thereby grasped in a brief conspectus the history of the universe'). The fundamental Romantic tenet, stresses Richards, was that man was the prototype and model of all existence – the microcosm: there was but one developmental tendency, that of producing man, who was, as the embryologist Lorenz Oken put it, 'The summit, the crown of nature's development'. From this it followed that man's individual ontogeny necessarily replicated the development of life on earth: man and nature shared a common *Entwicklungsgeschichte* – history of development. From this arose Oken's celebrated aphorism, 'Animals are only the persistent foetal stages or conditions of man . . . A human foetus is a whole animal kingdom'.

Richards follows the fortunes of this aphorism, with its transmutationist implications, through its varied career of alternating rejection and acceptance (she reminds us that Oken himself was no transmutationist), and brings us thereby to the French transcendental anatomists and the dissemination of their theories through the Edinburgh medical school. Richard Owen wedded transcendental anatomy with Cuvierian functionalist teleology;

Robert Chambers with his widely read *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) made the middle-class British aware of the 'universal gestation of nature'. Hugh Miller, a Scottish stone-mason, conjured miraculous analogies between fossil progress and the individual history of organisms: analogies which, he claimed, pointed 'through the embryos of the present time to the womb of Nature, big with its multitudinous forms of being'. In an era when science might readily be marshalled to serve God, nobody exerted themselves more actively in the recruitment of embryos (and fossils) than Miller (whose Highland cottage is still preserved as a shrine, open to the public). Miller's writings even outsold *Vestiges*, giving as they did a ringing revelatory significance to the theme of nature's progression towards man, Miller buttressing his utterances with (as Richards puts it) 'a succession of special creations consistent with the fossil record' (the mind's eye travels back to those trays of once-so-exciting fossils laid out in the cottage kitchen, mute now, dusty, and utterly forgotten: time was when they spoke prophecies).

So, after investigation of several more personalities and layered developments of rich interest (during which we feel increasingly like Alice glimpsing shelves of untold wonders), with a bump we reach Thomas Huxley, in strident professional opposition to Owen's Oken-inspired 'osteological extravaganzas' (a nice phrase, Huxley's own), raucously denigrating Romantic science and its 'metaphysical mystifications'; a denigration which made enormous and persistent impact. 'It is', says Richards (who at the start of her essay promised to confront Huxley head-on), 'only comparatively recently that [the] Huxleyean historiographic heritage has been challenged, and a rich and multi-layered history of the deployment of Romantic concepts in nineteenth-century biology is now emerging'.

Nelly Tsouyopoulos in Essay 7, *Doctors contra clysters and feudalism: the consequences of a Romantic revolution*, explores the interrelations between philosophy, medicine and politics. Timothy Lenoir's *Morphotypes and the historical-genetic method in Romantic biology* (Essay 8) continues the tale of the development of medicine invigorated by Romanticism: conducting us from Goethe's celebrated work on the intermaxillary bone and its implications of a vertebrate skull morphotype, to a brief but succinct appraisal of Johann Friedrich Meckel's demonstration of the function of the thymus, thyroid and adrenal glands by the use of comparative embryology. Lenoir's essay concludes with an account of the organisation, both architectural and curricular, of the pioneer Anatomical Institute in Königsberg ('Kant's home town' as Lenoir puts it), established in 1817 and destined to become an important influence in the planning and construction of leading medical schools throughout the twentieth century (the Gordon Museum at Guy's Hospital survives to this day: an anatomical museum originally based on the Königsberg prototype, where, amongst materials carefully presented in an ascending range of galleries, the embryo physician, during four years of study, has, to quote Burdach, 'living forms and their necessary inter-connections swim before his soul').

Rehbock details the progression of transcendental anatomy from its German beginnings via France to Britain. In London Joseph Henry Green (well known to Elians as Coleridge's Highgate disciple and amanuensis), fascinated by German idealism and a student of *Naturphilosophie* for a while in Germany, spread the gospel of transcendental anatomy through his lectures at the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal Academy: that he was a Guy's man explains the lay-out of that hospital's anatomical museum, and co-related anatomy department. Meanwhile in Edinburgh Robert Knox (with whom Green would have shuddered to hear himself compared) performed notoriously as an extramural teacher of anatomy. Rehbock describes Knox as purveying to his students the 'philosophy of osseous form . . . a unique blend of transcendentalism, materialism and polemic'. Rehbock suggests that Knox's failure to make impact following his abrupt departure from Edinburgh to London was due to his radical jacobinical views, but the truth was that Knox



had acquired a more troublesome reputation than that of a mere jacobin: he was the Knox of whom a nasty little ditty was being sung in the Edinburgh streets,

Down the wynd and up the stair  
 But and ben wi' Burke and Hare,  
 Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief,  
 Knox the boy who buys the beef.

Furthermore, Knox not only 'bought the beef' but turned a blind, if not a transcendental eye, to the origin of the cadavers, horribly wounded and battered in appearance, which arrived on his dissection table, having been wheeled, sacking-enwrapped, under cover of darkness, to the back-door of the Knox premises, brought there on a hurley by Hare - described by Walter Scott (who knew him as an itinerant fishmonger) as possessing 'the most villainous visage in all Edinburgh'. The dead had been, in many instances, well-known denizens of Edinburgh street life, and the students around the dissecting table readily recognised them, even if Knox didn't; but, this said, even if not knowing who they were, Knox was too good an anatomist not to have discerned that here he had a succession of victims of foul murder. Yet nothing was said. How the truth came out at last and justice was done is another story: suffice to say that it effectively drove Knox from Edinburgh and blighted his career. Niether Richards nor Rehbock refer to this episode in his story, though it far from being without bearing upon the problem of why Büchner developed his alternative voice, or why Kleist (Essay 19, *Kleist's Bedlam: abnormal psychology and psychiatry in the works of Heinrich von Kleist*, by Nigel Reeves) plunged from whole-hearted confidence in the Romantic concept of the all-encompassing World-Soul, into the *Nacht und Nebel* of the dark side of the human psyche; choosing in his writing to descend into a bedlam of violence, brutality, physical degradation and depravity of the most grotesquely revolting degree. German Romanticism with its emphasis on the holistic, the true and beautiful, aimed (as Bernd Fischer has remarked elsewhere) at 'eliminating the unspeakable'. Knox, the transcendental anatomist, perched on the heights of Edinburgh's university quarter, raising his eyes from the unspeakable evidence, displayed on his dissecting table, of the fruits of the poverty and vice abounding in the city's notorious slum tenements of the West Port, gave his *Naturphilosophie* precedence over any twinges of jacobin response to the plight of the Edinburgh homeless (Burke and Hare ran a cheap lodging-house for tramps and vagrants ripe for dispatch in the cause of transcendental science).

But enough of this dark symbolic landscape; let us instead be conveyed by Malcolm Nicolson (Essay 12, *Alexander von Humboldt and the geography of vegetation*), from the shady depths of 'auld Reekie' to the heights of the Andes, and Goethe's 'symbolic landscape' entitled *Heights of the Old and New World, graphically compared* depicting Humboldt, a diminutive yet nonetheless splendidly triumphant figure, perched high on the icy summit slopes of Chimborazo, waving in lordly fashion to a far distant (equally diminutive but clearly admiring) figure perched upon the comparatively insignificant summit of Mont Blanc: the inspiration of this adulatory drawing (happily included as an illustration in this book) being Humboldt's travels in South America where, in 1802, he and Aimé Bonpland, in an ascent of Chimborazo, passed from rainforest to the region of permanent snow via successive altitudinal vegetation zones encapsulating much of the physical and vegetational diversity of the continent. Humboldt's resultant work, the famous *Essai sur la géographie des plantes* (1807), was dedicated to Goethe, who found it inspirational in its claim that plant geography was not only an essential part of *la physique generale*, but also exercised a formative influence on Mankind, both materially and spiritually, mediating between Man and the physical environment.

Nonetheless, as Nicolson points out, Humboldt, though an inspired Romanticist, was thoroughly empirical in his investigational methods; for instance, to facilitate his work he pioneered the isoline technique of cartography. Concludes Nicolson, 'In Humboldt's plant geography we . . . see a vivid example of the Romantic commitment to a form of natural inquiry which . . . [would] . . . produce a vision of nature that was both aesthetically and scientifically satisfactory'.

Humboldt, of course, had had an earlier association with that giant of Romantic physics, Johann Wilhelm Ritter (widely considered as the founder of electrochemistry). Though Ritter shared with Humboldt a Romantic passion for broad horizons (his research into galvanism as a chemical process was simultaneously nothing less than a search for the principle of life in nature) his generalisations never lost touch with empirical evidence, and his empirical findings by themselves were sound and of undeniable importance, as Walter D Wetzels expresses it in *Johann Wilhelm Ritter: Romantic physics in Germany* (Essay 14). Simon Schaffer in Essay 6, *Genius in Romantic natural philosophy* draws parallels between Ritter and Humphry Davy, pointing out that 'Experimentation as an investigation of the self was the key technique of Ritter's strategy', while similarly, in Bristol Davy engaged in experimenting upon himself with nitrous oxide and carefully recording 'the ecstatic results': 'I existed in a world of newly connected and modified ideas . . . Nothing exists but thoughts'. Equally, both men theorised their work in terms of the 'genius' which drove them to investigate, to them sublime, phenomena.

Ritter, a true disciple of Jena and *Naturphilosophie*, like Coleridge thought (as Wetzels puts it) 'in polarities'; he 'found polarities at work wherever he looked'. Above all Ritter became caught up by the polarities of the spectrum; between red and violet, the two poles of light. Herschel had discovered infra-red rays by extending the visible spectrum beyond polar red (an apparent violation of polar symmetry): Ritter, with this example before him, sought for a violet beyond polar violet. Herschel had detected his infra-red rays by temperature; the thermometer had been his magic wand. Ritter, knowing that the various parts of the visible spectrum had differing effects on silver-chloride, used this chemical as Herschel had used the thermometer and, on 22 February 1801, like a mariner guided by the poles, burst into an ultra-violet sea.

Nine years later he was dead, worn out by poverty and abuse of his body by scientific investigations which involved too many experiments upon himself. Wetzels concludes his beautifully-written essay with a moving account of Ritter's last scientific work: an investigation into the responses of *momosa pudica* to electric stimuli, each experiment compared with a contrasting experiment on frogs; truly remarkable work, says Wetzels, executed meticulously. 'Correspondence and parallelism became obvious in this very systematic investigation'. The last we see of Ritter he is summarizing his results by announcing that mimosas are obviously '*animals in the shape of plants*' and frogs '*plants in the shape of animals*'. Holism supreme!

In fact, not quite the last of this genius (who has been called the Mozart of the world of physics); after his death at the age of thirty-four he left an autobiographical notebook containing, among many other things, a series of scientific speculations: perhaps one could collect sound waves, like light rays, in a focal point? Perhaps magnetic and electrical telescopes would one day be possible? Perhaps energy and matter are only two different manifestations of the same phenomena?

The editors ask if our science of today should be seen in substantial measure as a product of Romantic Reflection? Readers of this collection of essays will in all probability be tempted to reply, yes.

Finally, a publisher's note tells us that the book is intended both for students and 'educated general readers'. Students will find the essays balanced and informative. The educated general reader will find them next to impossible to put down, reflecting with Elia, 'I love to lose myself in other men's minds'.

Molly Lefebure

## BOOK REVIEW

Jonathan Bate. *ROMANTIC ECOLOGY: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. London, Routledge, 1991. 131pp. £30 hardback, £8.99 paperback.

It must be a rare event when such a slim volume as this contains so much originality and depth. Its early chapters should be required reading for all those who are besotted – or bewildered – by the see-saw of critical theory or 'ideology'. Professor Bate knows he is doing a brave thing in writing for two audiences, both 'the academy' and 'the common reader', but how badly this needed to be done! He starts by putting into perspective the critical fashions of recent years and shows that now, following McGann, 'everybody is constructing Romanticism ideologically'. Before the swing of the pendulum brings in a new orthodoxy, let us break out of the cycle. As against Hartman, who 'threw out the transcendent imagination to bring us history and society', Professor Bate suggests that we should 'relearn Wordsworth's way of looking at nature'. Alan Liu even maintains that '*There is no nature*': to him it is no more than, as Bate put it, 'an anthropomorphic construct created by Wordsworth and the rest for their own purposes'. Such a statement is 'profoundly unhelpful', Bate says, 'at a time when our most urgent need is to address and redress the consequences of human civilization's insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth . . . . When there have been a few more accidents at nuclear power stations, when there are no more rainforests, and when every wilderness has been ravaged for its mineral resources, then let us say "*There is no nature*".

To the 'common reader', remote from theoretical constructs but feeling a deep affinity with Wordsworth's poetry, this strikes a familiar chord. Such a reader has long been wondering, with grieved heart, how long it will be possible still to participate in 'Wordsworth's way of looking at nature'. Today Rousseau's 'little spot of green' would not be allowed to remain. The greedy eyes of developers would be on it and it would soon be 'sown to concrete', being considered as 'of no use for anything else'. We cry out with Hopkins,

What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wilderness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

But we cry in vain. How much better, Jonathan Bate says, if literary critics saw revolutionary Romantic politics as 'green' and how much truer to Wordsworth's consistent opinion. It would not alter government's policies directly but it would restore awareness of 'the historical continuity of a tradition of environmental consciousness', in which Wordsworth played an important part.

Maybe, even, as the reference to Hopkins suggests, the common reader's view of poetry and nature are not so 'common' in the sense of 'to be despised', after all. Perhaps today's academia could learn from them and the two audiences be brought together; 'a consummation/Devoutly to be wished'. Jonathan Bate asserts that 'For all the theorizing of the last two hundred years and in particular the last twenty, no one has succeeded much

better than Dr Johnson in defining the function of what we now call "literature": "The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it". Thus one might say that for a neo-Marxist reader in the American academy the end of writing is to make political marginalization endurable and to set theoretical cats among establishment pigeons in enjoyable ways. This book is dedicated to the proposition that the way in which William Wordsworth sought to enable his readers better to enjoy or endure life was by teaching them to look at and dwell in the natural world'. This was not, as much recent criticism tends to imply, a form of escapism for the privileged classes who do not have to do the work. Bate instances the farm-labourer, John Clare, who found in nature the ability to bring 'elevated happiness' to 'the simplest hearts' (Clare's words). From tenured affluence it is easy to blame Wordsworth for not attending to the plight of the economically under-privileged. Easy but incorrect: he did.

Against the 'Left-Right' political model whereby, for example, Annabel Patterson asserts that to read 'Michael', in Bate's summary, 'with Wordsworth's own emphasis on the shepherd's bond with nature rather than his bondage to the aristocracy', is to be 'overly generous', it is as well to set the testimony of John Stewart Mill. Bate asks, 'Is it "overly generous" to read a poet in such a way that he pulls you through a nervous breakdown?' In the case of the former, 'the reader tells the poet what he should have done', in the latter 'the reader allows the poet to do something to him'. The cardinal sin of our age, 'hubris', is endemic in much current criticism. As Bate says, 'The critic's superiority to the poet is proclaimed by that "overly generous"'. What is gained by adding the adverbial ending 'ly' to a word which is already an adverb is certainly not any increase in meaning. There is a pleasant little word 'too' but that is, no doubt, too short to add to the critic's consequence. It would be more useful to open oneself to what the poem is really saying, for 'the "socialism" of Wordsworth's republican pastoral is of a highly distinctive kind... The politics of Grasmere Vale are ultimately based on a relationship to the environment, a marriage of humankind and the natural world.. [which] transcends the politics of both Paine and Burke, both the French Revolution and the counter-revolution in England ... The language of *The Prelude* is fleetingly red but ever green'. If human survival and the survival of nature are mutually dependent, then the important thing, as Clare understood, is to be able to think of the earth as permanent. Is it still possible to believe that we can?

Jonathan Bate sketches in the development of the word and the concept of 'ecology' and shows how scientists and poets alike practised 'field observation' as fundamental to their work. Both understood the interdependence of mankind and the natural world, whether in a physical or a spiritual sense. Reference is made to the immensely impressive passages lamenting the effects of industrialization and child labour in factories (have the critics read this?) in Book VIII of that unjustly neglected poem *The Excursion*, which in Wordsworth's lifetime was admired by such figures as Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, Keats and Ruskin. Bate illustrates that both in the *Guide to the Lakes* and in *The Excursion* Wordsworth was the forerunner of the modern conservationist and the founders of the National Trust and National Parks. 'For if "the nonhuman" is to do something for us, we must do something for it - not least give it space, allow it to continue to exist'. If 'Such images of reciprocity are alien to classical Marxist discourse', so are they, too, to the presently pervasive materialism of a capitalist market economy. Not that we should turn our backs on the advantages of industry and technology but the cost should be weighed and a balance kept. Wordsworth writes of 'that brook converting as it runs / Into an instrument of deadly bane'. As Jonathan Bate says, 'Where capitalism had its Three Mile Island, Marxist-Leninism has its Chernobyl'. Ruskin clearly saw that 'THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE'.

Jonathan Bate writes particularly well on Ruskin. While acknowledging that 'There are aspects of late Ruskin which we will want to reject' and that 'the ecologies of Wordsworth, or Ruskin and of Morris, of Ellen Swallow, are by no means identical to our own, are very much of the nineteenth century', yet, he asserts, 'They are the fathers and mothers of our environmental tradition'. On Wordsworth's foundation Ruskin built 'a programme for education into ecological consciousness'.

'History has dominated much recent discussion of literature, but geography also has its claims; we live and die as part of the body politic, but we also live and die in place'. It is our love of place that gives us the sense of self and connects that self to the environment. So the last chapter deals with the individual's tie to his own particular 'Sweet especial rural scene' and is entitled 'The Naming of Places'. Wordsworth's poems grouped under that name, his 'Michael' and 'Home at Grasmere' are compared to his predecessor Drayton's *Polyolbion* (praised by Lamb), to contemporaries Coleridge, Scott and Clare and to successors such as Hardy, Housman and Edward Thomas. The particularity of their love of place is not tied to possession. Quite the contrary. The sense of loss felt by so many of them often stems from others' greed, for example those who enclosed for their own use what had been common-land in Clare's time or who, in our own, plan to make money by destroying a sequestered valley in an area of outstanding natural beauty by filling it in as a rubbish dump. 'O if we but knew what we do ... After-comers cannot guess the beauty been'. Professor Bate sums up most tellingly by referring to 'There was a boy', a boy who hoots to the owls. 'Which are there to answer him'.

Mary Wedd

## SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES FROM MEMBERS

### CONFESSIONS OF AN EDITOR

Albeit not drunk, the Editor must confess to having let rather an ignoble crop of errors slip past him in Mary Wedd's article 'That dangerous figure - irony', printed in the January 1991 *Bulletin*. Perhaps the dark winter days were partly responsible, but he knows he can't wriggle out of it that easily, and he really will try to do better when Mary next trusts him with an article. He thinks she may, some day, as she has trusted him with the following list of corrections, which he has scrutinised with lavish concern in both typescript and proof:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Page 1  | The quotation mark should be after 'dear', not 'it'.  |
| Page 3  | 'Humourously' should be 'humorously'.   |
| Page 4  | 'Inferiour' should be 'inferior', 'guests's' should be 'guest's' and 'dray' should be 'dry'.                      |
| Page 6  | The word 'about' has been omitted between 'Augustus' and 'Haterius'. It should read 'of Augustus about Haterius'. |
| Page 9  | 'parvenue' should read 'parvenu'.   |
| Page 11 | There should be no comma after 'however' which should read 'however much...'                                      |
| Page 12 | In the first note, 'particular' should be 'particularly' in line 3.   |

## WORDSWORTH SUMMER CONFERENCE 1991 (and Winter School and Summer Conference 1992)

The Wordsworth Summer Conference at Grasmere, July 27th to August 10th 1991, was marked by the presence of a sizable number of members of the Charles Lamb Society, who distinguished themselves in the discussion groups and on the fells with equal energy and enthusiasm. The weather was kind, the lectures good, though the Lambs only seemed to get a very occasional look in this year (we must see what we can do about that next time; there is, after all, no shortage of lecturing talent). Some new members were recruited, including Professor Tom McFarland, author of the recent *Romantic Cruxes*, which devotes a chapter to Charles Lamb's life and writings.

Dates for the Wordsworth Winter School have recently been decided. It will run from Sunday 16th to Friday 21st February 1992.

The Wordsworth Summer Conference dates are from 1st to 15th August 1992. Details about either or both can be had from Sylvia Wordsworth, The Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SH.

### MEMBERS AND FRIENDS' PUBLICATIONS

Among new books which come to mind are Jane Aaron's eagerly-awaited *A Double Singleness: Gender and the Writings of Charles and Mary Lamb*, which will be reviewed in the January *Bulletin*, Grevel Lindop's new volume of poems *A Prismatic Toy*, and Molly Lefebure's second Wartime novel, *Thunder in the Sky*, which is set in the period when America entered the European War and the American air force came to England. Molly's earlier novel, *Blitz!* has appeared in paperback, retitled *We'll Meet Again* by her publishers, who seem to have thought that the American reading public were unlikely to have heard of the Battle of Britain, but presumably would all have heard one particular Wartime song by Dame Vera Lynn! Another reissue of Mollie in paperback, this time of a much earlier book describing her experiences (mostly in the morgue) as secretary to the distinguished pathologist Sir Keith Simpson from 1940-1945, has been given the rather splendid new title *Murder on the Home Front*. The Editor can vouch for the fact that this is a book which it is quite impossible to put down, however late the hour and grisly the subject matter!

Nicholas Roe's new book on Wordsworth is in proof, Tom McFarland's is advertised for December, and I think that others are in the pipeline. Details please, so that I may keep all our readers informed.

### MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

Here again, I am sure we are a tirelessly active Society and I should like to pass word around about what interesting things Members have been doing, and the discoveries (often of a literary nature, after all) which they have made as they went along. Please tell me, and then I can let everyone else know. Incidentally, Members in the Oxford area may have already heard Duncan Wu's arts programmes on Radio Oxford. If not, there is a second series. Our congratulations to Duncan Wu, also, on his British Academy Fellowship.

### ROSAMUND GRAY 1798

Mary Wedd writes that 'Elian book-collectors will be interested to know that *Rosamund Gray*, in a facsimile reprint of the 1798 edition, has been added to the 'Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834' series published by Woodstock Books, Spelsbury House,

Spelsbury, Oxford OX7 3JR. It is a most charming volume with a very sensitive and sympathetic Introduction by Jonathan Wordsworth. The price is £22.50 (\$43).

### LAMB, LYND, KITTENS AND BABIES

Some time ago our members Mr M A Parker, of 241 Ladysmith Road, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 3AQ, wrote concerning a Roy Hattersley *Endpiece* from the *Guardian* of August 4th 1990, in which Mr Hattersley, confessing that he wrote 'far from home and books', recollected Robert Lynd as disagreeing with Charles Lamb that the chief pleasures of life consisted in watching 'the innocent amusement of a kitten rising three weeks and a baby rising three years'. Lynd thought a dog rising three months even better!

Mr Parker couldn't recognise the Charles Lamb passage. Neither can I. Help please, all readers; and if you would let me know the answer (if there is one; I suppose even politicians' memories may play them tricks sometimes, and Robert Lynd's surely did once in a while) I will publish it in the *Bulletin*, even if it's so obvious that I should be ashamed of myself for not having known it at once!

### CHAIRMANLY ASSIDUITY

Our new Chairman, David Wickham, helps me out with short notes and space fillers every quarter, and since what appears is simply governed by how much space the typist finds she still has to fill up when she has dealt with the main part of the *Bulletin*, all manner of lively, stimulating and scholarly things get left in my file. At present I have a lot of very good material indeed on hand, so I propose to publish a substantial body of it soon - probably in the January issue.

### COLOUR AND COLOURFULNESS IN TAMPA, FLORIDA

It sounds nice, and I have no doubt it will be! But what the heading actually refers to is the announcement of a forthcoming conference and a call for papers for April 1992.

The Southeastern Nineteenth Century Studies Association of America will be holding an Interdisciplinary Conference on *Colour and Colorfulness in Nineteenth-Century Life and Art* at Tampa, Florida, from April 2-4, 1992. Details about the short paper programme can be obtained from the Program Chair, J M da Costa Nunez, Department of Art, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA 18104-5586, U.S.A. and other arrangements from the Local Arrangements Chair, Regina Hewitt, English Department, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620-6920, U.S.A.

### FOR THE RECORD

D E Wickham

From David Gilmour's *The Last Leopard: A Life of Guiseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa*, 1988 (1990 paperback), page 107:

'Lampedusa was knowledgeable about literary currents but he despised critics. The only four who escaped his scorn were Hazlitt, Lamb, Sainte-Beuve and De Sanctis'.

[The last Principe di Lampedusa (1896-1957) was the Anglophile Sicilian who died childless, impoverished and unknown, leaving behind him a recently completed manuscript about the unification of Italy in the time of his great-grandfather, *The Leopard*, now regarded as one of the finest works of twentieth-century fiction.]

Of course, we all know that Cholmondely and Featherstonhaugh are pronounced 'Chumley' and 'Fanshaw', but Fritz Spiegl pointed out in the *Daily Telegraph* for 24th November 1990 that Hogsflesh, of Elian memory, is correctly 'Hooflay'. Well, I did not know that, even if you did.

## WHITAKER'S ALMANAC

D E Wickham

Completing the annual Whitaker's Almanac return for The Clothworkers' Company, I added my usual enquiry: Please can the Charles Lamb Society be considered for listing among the (Principal British and Irish) Societies and Institutions. Whitaker's never have the good manner to reply, so this time I gave them some details.

Reading the list for literary favourites is great fun and quite inexplicable. One could have a competition. Of the following seven literary societies, which do you think are listed and which are not? - Jane Austen, Byron, Dickens, Elgar, George Eliot, Beatrix Potter, and Trollope?

Put it another way. The following *are* listed: Dickens, Elgar, Gilbert and Sullivan, Kipling and Turner.

The following are *not* listed: Jane Austen, Byron, George Eliot, Charles Lamb, Beatrix Potter, and Trollope. Going on to arguably more minor figures, neither are John Clare, Parson Kilvert, or Parson Woodforde.

A slight taste of sour grapes soon changed to a feeling that the list of *réfusés* is at least as distinguished as that of the elect!

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY remain as follows:

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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.