

## John Scott's Death and Lamb's 'Imperfect Sympathies'<sup>1</sup>

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I KNOW I ALREADY HAVE AN OCCASION FOR MY LECTURE – it's Charles Lamb's birthday – but I wonder whether I might offer this lecture as a small memorial to some of the fine Elians whom I've met through this learned society over the years: Basil Savage, Bill Ruddick, Audrey Moore, Reggie Watters and Tim Wilson.

Though characterised by Coleridge as 'gentle-hearted', Charles Lamb was right to insist he was nothing of the kind. One has only to read his 1801 epigram on the apostate Godwinian James Mackintosh to see that his pen was as readily filled with bile as with ink.

Though thou'rt like Judas – an apostate black,  
 In the resemblance one thing thou dost lack;  
 When he had gotten his ill-purchased pelf,  
 He went away and wisely hanged himself.  
 This thou may do at last – yet much I doubt,  
 If thou hast any bowels to gush out!<sup>2</sup>

This indignant little squib is reminiscent of the attacks on the failed radicalism of Coleridge and Southey delivered by Lamb's old friend Hazlitt – readings from which would fill many a happy hour, had we but world enough and time. But it isn't the Elian voice we know and love; it comes from a different side to his character. Elia's voice is usually lyrical and elegiac; it recalls old actors, lost childhood, bookworms in the Bodleian, and the antics of Bridget Elia, Mrs Battle and George Dyer. And yet tones of anger are sometimes heard to emanate from *Elia* in commentary as passionate and intense as the epigram on Mackintosh.

Perhaps the greatest of the essays, 'Imperfect Sympathies' is compelling partly because it is so untypical of Lamb's other work. Roy Park who remains the most incisive of his advocates has pointed out that the distinction Lamb there makes between the Caledonian and anti-Caledonian intellects, between those who reach irritably after fact and reason and those content to co-exist with the 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts' of existence, provides an opposition which is a 'central issue in the Romantic critical tradition'.<sup>3</sup> Persuasive as Park is, there are other ways of looking at the essay; some recent commentators suggest that it is racist:

<sup>1</sup> This lecture was given on the occasion of Charles Lamb's birthday luncheon, 17 February 2001, at the Royal College of General Practitioners, London. In the course of writing it, I benefitted from the advice of Joseph Riehl, Robert Morrison, Mary Wedd and Constance Parrish.

<sup>2</sup> From Lamb's letter to Manning of 22 August 1801; text from my *Romanticism: An Anthology* (second edition) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 580.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Park, *Lamb as Critic* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 11.

Blatant and unquestioned anti-semitism and racism were common enough phenomena in early nineteenth-century London life: both are confessed to by Elia with blithe and unembarrassed confidentiality in the essay 'Imperfect Sympathies'.<sup>4</sup>

Before going any further, I must emphasize that this lecture is not meant as a criticism of Dr Aaron, who is to be honoured for her work on the Lambs. My concern lies with a widespread tendency – rather pronounced among academics – of imposing political judgements on the past. In recent years it has become fashionable to attack great writers for contravening any number of present-day taboos. Was he a wife-beater? Was someone else a child abuser, and does this account for his or her political incorrectness? A recent article in the *Times Literary Supplement* falsely alleged that Hazlitt was a paedophile.<sup>5</sup> Not that wife-beating or child abuse are the less heinous for having occurred two hundred years ago; the point is that the terminology used to describe these misdemeanours, and the way in which it shapes our perception, necessarily pre-empts a disinterested understanding of them. It cannot be said to lessen the seriousness of the act, but does compromise our ability to perceive essential truths about the world inhabited by those authors whose work we seek to understand.

Even as I say this, I know how hopelessly naive such comments must sound; pitifully few modern critics have any genuine wish to comprehend past writers and their worlds. In fact, the correct definition of a literary critic these days is someone who positively detests literature, preferring the allure of philosophy or, more probably, politics. Futile as it may seem, I would argue, on a theoretical level, that our primary responsibility to works of literature and to those who create them is to discern, as fully as we may, the context out of which they came – to see past lives and events as those involved may have understood them. It is not to excuse whatever sins, intellectual or otherwise, they may have committed, but it is to ask for more than the glib censoriousness that demands that writers either conform to modern standards of political correctness or suffer exile from the canon – a fate that some have wished upon Hazlitt.<sup>6</sup>

'Imperfect Sympathies' made its first public appearance in the *London Magazine* for August 1821, where it was entitled 'Jews, Quakers, Scotchmen, and other Imperfect Sympathies'. The original title is usually relegated to scholarly annotation, partly because it highlights the controversial nature of the essay, but it is significant and should not be concealed. It foregrounds the various groups with which Lamb apparently finds himself incompatible – whole races (represented by Jews), religious sects (Quakers) and national peoples (Scotchmen). The outrageousness of such blanket condemnation is calculated, and that element of design is something to which we should remain alert. When the essay begins proper, Lamb focusses first on Scotchmen: 'I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair. They cannot like me – and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it.'<sup>7</sup> In today's terms this kind of thing may be termed racist, in a manner not exonerated by what follows.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Aaron, *A Double Singleness: Gender and the Writings of Charles and Mary Lamb* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.199.

<sup>5</sup> Alethea Hayter, 'He loved to hate', *Times Literary Supplement* (12 January 2001) 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance the critics refuted in my 'Hazlitt's "Sexual Harassment"', *Essays in Criticism* 50 (July 2000) 199-214.

<sup>7</sup> From the text published in *London Magazine* 4 (August 1821) 152-6, p. 152.

You never catch his mind in an undress. He never hints or suggests any thing, but unloads his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness. He has no falterings of self-suspicion. Surmises, guesses, suppositions, half-intuitions, demi-consciousnesses, misgivings, partial illuminations, 'dim instincts', embryo conceptions, and every stage that stops short of absolute certainty and conviction – his intellectual faculty seems a stranger to.<sup>8</sup>

As Lamb proceeds it is clear that his prose is impelled by an animus barely held in check that drives it unstoppably along its path. This is more than mere dislike. There is something like anger in his voice, as if he felt profound resentment against those he attacks. That unmistakable feeling undermines any attempt to suggest that 'Imperfect Sympathies' is a game. There may be postures embedded within it, but for much of the time, at least while talking about Scotchmen, Lamb is in earnest. In each of these respects – its earnestness, its contempt, and its anger – 'Imperfect Sympathies' is untypical. It would be wrong merely to note this and then resort to the expected judgements about this essay. If to some the anger in Lamb's voice is vital fuel for the argument that he was racist, to me it is an important clue to its exceptional nature and the circumstances that inspired it, which have not hitherto been unravelled.

An important hint of what they may have been is to be found among Lamb's correspondence. When he returned proofs of the *London Magazine* text of 'Imperfect Sympathies' to his publisher John Taylor, 21 July 1821, he commented: 'This last paper will be a choke-pear I fear to some people, but, as you do not object to it, I can be under little apprehension of your exerting your Censor-ship too rigidly'.<sup>9</sup> It would be hard to overemphasize the importance of this remark, and yet I have not seen it discussed in relation to 'Imperfect Sympathies' before. We have few insights into Lamb's practical dealings with his publisher, and this one, though brief, is informative. It reveals that Lamb knew the essay would be hard for some readers to swallow – it would be 'a choke-pear I fear to some people', as it remains today. The awareness that his essay would be a choke-pear tends to support the suspicion that its disposal of races, religions, and classes was designed to provoke and offend. This is significant because any defence of Lamb on the grounds that he was a racist by default, parroting prejudices embedded in the culture, condemns him because inadvertent racism – the unthinking variety – is culpable when exposed in someone who prides himself on his sensitivity. That cannot be the case here. The original title of the essay, and the letter to Taylor, signals that Lamb understood its inflammatory nature – which either makes his position less defensible, or signals other possibilities.

The letter to Taylor also contains a hint of the context in which the essay was written. Lamb comments: 'as you do not object to it, I can be under little apprehension of your exerting your Censor-ship too rigidly'. That word 'apprehension' seems to contain a note of relief: not only was Lamb aware of its controversial nature, but was anxious that Taylor might object to it, to the extent of exercising his right of censorship. So why should Taylor have objected? If racist and anti-Semitic feeling was commonplace, as is claimed, what would have been the point? There were no monitors of racial discrimination in 1821, as there are today. There were no laws against the incitement of racial hatred, and no pressure groups liable to object. The answer is that so far as Lamb and his publisher were concerned, racism had nothing to do with it. There were other reasons why 'Imperfect Sympathies' was likely to cause trouble with some of Lamb's readers.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* ed. E. V. Lucas (3 vols., London, 1935) (hereafter Lucas), ii 306.

E. V. Lucas once described 1821 as Lamb's 'golden year', for it saw the composition of much of his best work. Besides 'Imperfect Sympathies' he composed 'Mrs Battle's Opinions on Whist', 'All Fools' Day', 'My Relations', 'Mackery End in Hertfordshire', 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple', 'Witches and Other Night Fears', and 'My First Play'. Events in Lamb's circle also made it a black year. In October John Lamb died and Mary became ill. On top of that, 1821 saw the eruption of a *cause celebre* in London, in a feud that burst out of the printing-house and resulted in the death of a gifted journalist in his prime.

John Scott, Lamb's first editor at the *London Magazine*, was an Aberdonian by birth. He started his career on several radical London papers including the *Statesman*, owned by the Hunt brothers. As editor of *Drakard's Paper*, later renamed *The Champion*, from 1813 onwards, he was responsible for publishing Lamb and Hazlitt; but he was not doctrinaire – his political convictions did not stop him from publishing an enthusiastic review of Walter Scott's *Waverley*. In January 1820 John became the first editor of the *London Magazine*, where he wrote an enthusiastic article on the *Waverley* novels, and where Lamb made his debut as Elia in August. By then, however, John's days as editor were numbered. But I'm racing ahead of myself.

Nearly three years before, in October 1817, John Gibson Lockhart had launched his notorious attack in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* on what he christened the 'Cockney School of Poetry'. A Cockney was – and still is – the name given to anyone born within the sound of Bow bells in the City of London, but Lockhart redefined the term. His principal targets being Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt; Lockhart argued that Cockney writers were ignorant of classical literature, intellectually pretentious, sexual adventurers, and guilty of 'extremely vulgar modes of thinking and manners in all respects'. It was a political distinction, as much as anything, by which Scottish Tories portrayed their liberal counterparts in London as ill-bred social climbers. Lockhart, William Maginn, and John Wilson published these attacks under the pen-name 'Z'. As might be expected, the Cockneys were not slow to respond. Leigh Hunt called 'Z' a liar and a coward, and challenged him to declare his identity and meet him in open combat, but with little appetite for such antics, Lockhart, Maginn, and Wilson refused and merely increased the venom of their onslaughts, turning their fire on Keats and Hazlitt.

One of Lockhart's jests was to describe Hazlitt, in scurrilous verse, as 'pimpled'. By this time John Scott was editor of the *London Magazine*, and in a lengthy counter-attack entitled 'The Mohock Magazine', which he published in December 1820, John argued that 'It is a hoax . . . to tell a man that he has pimples on his face when it happens to be clear, as Blackwood's men have done to Mr. Hazlitt: this is a hoax, and surely nothing can be more easy of execution'.<sup>10</sup> One of the major obstacles to holding Lockhart and Wilson to account had been their determination to remain anonymous, and in his article John flushed them out from cover. He named names, including that of Sir Walter Scott, Lockhart's father-in-law:<sup>11</sup>

This eminent individual is *known* to have written some things for the Magazine in question; he is *suspected* to have written others: it is certain that several offensive articles have been composed under his roof; and the nuisance has now become too deadly to allow of any delicacy towards its aiders or abettors.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John Scott, 'The Mohock Magazine', *The London Magazine* 2 (December 1820) 666-85, p. 667.

<sup>11</sup> Lockhart married Sophia Scott in April 1820.

<sup>12</sup> John Scott, 'The Mohock Magazine', *The London Magazine* 2 (December 1820) 666-85, p. 670.

John Scott was sailing dangerously close to the wind. It was not just that he had correctly identified Lockhart as one of the culprits responsible for the Cockney school attacks, but that he had managed to drag Sir Walter and his daughter Sophia (Lockhart's wife) into the fray. John also named John Wilson and James Hogg as chief contributors to *Blackwood's*, and described their attacks on Keats as 'a spontaneous emanation from a naturally coarse and profligate mind'.<sup>13</sup> He accused the Mohocks of being guilty of 'the most unfounded and monstrous falsehoods', and concluded with a contemptuous swipe at Sir Walter's protestations of innocence:

This disavowal will probably be publicly made, – *and we shall be happy to pay it more attention than the public, in general, and ourselves, in particular, have paid to his well-known* DISAVOWAL OF BEING THE AUTHOR OF THE SCOTCH NOVELS. . . . Articles have lately issued from under the roof of Abbotsford that do no credit to the place; and the scraps that fall from the Baronet's table, become sadly changed in odour, when they have passed, through 'certain strainers', into that common *cloaca* Blackwood's Magazine. – Let us hope that we shall never again have occasion to introduce so respectable a name as Sir Walter Scott's into the discussion of so offensive a subject.<sup>14</sup>

This was a witty means of emphasizing the identification of Sir Walter with the Mohocks, and equating what they published with raw sewage. It was entirely justified by the venomous material that *Blackwood's* had published, and by the pusillanimous manner in which Lockhart and his friends had evaded responsibility for it.

Initially, there was no response from Blackwood and his writers, and John assumed that they had learnt their lesson, as he remarked in his editorial for January 1821: 'We now, then, take, we hope, a final leave of the *Mohocks*, having read them a lesson which, we trust, they will remember, and be the better for'.<sup>15</sup> He went on to taunt Lockhart, ridiculing his attempts to deny editorship of *Blackwood's*:

. . . all the professions of a merry, careless temper, by which it has been attempted to characterize the publication he conducts, have evidently been intended to cover an organized plan of fraud, calumny, and cupidity. The cowardice which denies a perpetrated wrong, is the natural associate of such qualities.<sup>16</sup>

This was too much. Lockhart took immediate exception, confiding to his London friend Jonathan Christie that the article had 'distressed' him 'very much, not on account of myself, but of [Sir Walter] Scott, of whose hitherto unprofaned name such base use was made in it – although, if any insult could move a man's rage, without doubt the allusions to my marriage, wife, etc, were well entitled to do so'.<sup>17</sup> Lockhart then sought the counsel of his distinguished father-in-law, who is

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 683.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 685.

<sup>15</sup> 'The Lion's Head', *London Magazine* 3 (January 1821) 3.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Mohocks', *London Magazine* 3 (January 1821) 76-7, p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick O' Leary, *Regency Editor: Life of John Scott* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983) (hereafter

reported to have said, 'I am sorry for it, John, but you cannot do otherwise, you must fight him'.<sup>18</sup> For our purposes it is significant that the famous novelist was not merely embroiled in the affairs of the *Blackwood's* writers, but intimately involved in the evolving altercation.

With Sir Walter's approval, Lockhart travelled to London where on 18 January he demanded a written apology from John Scott. A long and intricate series of negotiations followed over a two-day period, culminating in Lockhart's written declaration that he considered him 'a liar and a scoundrel'.<sup>19</sup> John continued to argue that Lockhart was the editor of *Blackwood's* and Lockhart continued to deny it. (Lockhart in fact shared editorial control with John Wilson and James Hogg, power of veto remaining with William Blackwood.) By the end of January it appeared that this exchange had concluded with no more than hurt feelings on both sides, and Lockhart returned to Scotland. However, Sir Walter stirred matters up again when in February he arrived in London on business, and thanks to his interventions turned the spat into something more serious. It culminated in a duel between John Scott and Jonathan Christie, Friday 16 February. Alarmed on his friend's behalf, Lamb sent a jesting letter to John, probably to cheer him up. In it he proposed that he might be about to confront an impostor – a typically Elian conceit which plays wittily on the fact that the *Blackwood's* men were slippery, evasive, and profoundly reluctant to admit responsibility for anything they did.<sup>20</sup> The duel was fought, John was wounded, and died a painful and drawn-out death, eleven days later, Tuesday 27 February. In a letter to Lockhart, Sir Walter commented: 'It would be great hypocrisy in me to say I am sorry for John Scott. He has got exactly what he was long fishing for.'<sup>21</sup>

This was not everyone's opinion. On 3 March Henry Crabb Robinson visited the Lambs for a game of cards. He later recorded in his diary: 'Lamb seems to have felt acutely poor Scott's death'.<sup>22</sup> Lamb had left Robinson in no doubt as to his feelings of grief, and there was good reason to have felt it. John solicited some of Lamb's finest work, first as editor of *The Champion* and later for the *London Magazine*. They had become fast friends, and John had been a regular visitor, with Hazlitt, at the Lambs' evening soirees.

Scott was not yet buried when a strange encounter took place over breakfast at Benjamin Robert Haydon's. Haydon's diary for 7 March 1821 records:

Sir Walter breakfasted with me with Lamb, Procter, & Wilkie, and a delightful morning we had. I never saw any man have such an effect on company as he; he operated on us like champagne & whisky mixed. He alluded to Waverley and there was a dead silence.<sup>23</sup>

O'Leary), p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> Reported by G. R. Gleig, as quoted O' Leary, p. 149.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Lucas ii 292.

<sup>21</sup> *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* ed. H. J. C. Grierson (12 vols., London: Constable, 1932-79) (hereafter Grierson), vi 374.

<sup>22</sup> *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* ed. Edith J. Morley (3 vols., London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), i. 262.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon* ed. Willard Bissell Pope (5 vols., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-1) (hereafter Pope), ii. 311.

This intriguing diary entry has thus far attracted little attention from Elians, but it deserves close scrutiny. Why was the meeting arranged? After all, Haydon was himself pilloried as a 'Cockney Raphael' by *Blackwood's*. The answer is that he met Sir Walter in Edinburgh when he went there to exhibit 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem' in November 1820, and over dinner had been 'delighted with the friendly unaffectedness of his reception'.<sup>24</sup> The novelist was by then an important figure of the day whose acquaintance, under normal circumstances, the Cockneys would have wished to make. Indeed, Lucas reports a story (which may be apocryphal) of Lamb having Sir Walter pointed out to him in the street some years before by a fellow pedestrian, and of him offering 'his hearty thanks to his truly humane informer'.<sup>25</sup>

Matters had changed by early March 1821, and one would expect there to have been feelings of tension at Haydon's that morning. Haydon was eager to meet Sir Walter as he wanted to get to know him better. But Lamb and Procter would have approached the Baronet with suspicion. Sir Walter's involvement in the Cockney school wars and the John Scott affair was widely known, as was his closeness to Lockhart and Christie. He had, indeed, been Christie's advisor in the weeks prior to the duel; at this moment Christie was wanted for Scott's 'wilful murder' and had fled to Boulogne. On the morning Sir Walter encountered Lamb, Procter and Wilkie, he must have been regarded by them as complicit in, if not partly responsible for, the death of their friend.

Haydon had probably arranged the breakfast partly to boast of an acquaintanceship he had recently acquired and partly, no doubt, as a conciliatory gesture. The dreadful Lockhart had, after all, attempted to ask forgiveness from Haydon when they had met in Edinburgh four months previously, when he 'came up to me evidently affected, & welcomed me by taking both my hands'.<sup>26</sup> It was in that spirit of reconciliation that Haydon seems to have brought the novelist together with the Cockney writers. Sir Walter seems to have acquitted himself well, except for having committed some kind of *faux pas* by mentioning *Waverley*, perhaps bragging of its success in a manner the Cockneys thought self-important.

What impression of him did Lamb take away that morning? Some evidence is provided by the fact that over a year later, October 1822, he wrote to Sir Walter when raising funds to help the recently bankrupted Godwin.

The fact that Lamb did so is in itself remarkable. Godwin, after all, had been notorious as the scourge of the Tory administrations of the 1790s. It was he whose pamphleteering had led to exoneration of the accused in the notorious treason trials of 1794, and who had provided the rallying cry for radicals in the light of Louis XVI's execution with *Political Justice*, published in February 1793. An anarchist, a subversive, the grandfather of nineteenth-century socialism, Godwin's cause was hardly one to which a Tory royalist, the dining partner of the Prince Regent, would have wished to subscribe. In this light one would expect Lamb to have approached Sir Walter with extreme delicacy; on the contrary – when writing to him, he closed his letter with a seal bearing Cromwell's coat of arms, which he knew his correspondent would recognise. We know this because he boasted of it to several correspondents, the first time to Bernard Barton:

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 294.

<sup>25</sup> Lucas ii 344-5.

<sup>26</sup> Pope ii 297.

I never had a seal too of my own. Writing to a great man lately, who is moreover very Heraldic, I borrowed a seal of a friend, who by the female side quarters the Protectorial Arms of Cromwell. How they must have puzzled my correspondent!<sup>27</sup>

This was audacious, even insolent. Not only was Lamb appealing for the needs of a declared radical, for whom Sir Walter could hardly be expected to profess heartfelt sympathy, but in doing so he could not refrain from exhibiting an emblem of seventeenth-century republicanism. Well might Sir Walter have felt puzzled – to put it mildly. Lamb was not merely begging money, he was presenting the Baronet with a trap. If word got around that Scott *had* contributed, people would think him a hypocrite; if he refused, they might accuse him of tight-fistedness. It was a calculated piece of cheek from someone who significantly had never owned a seal and had none of the accompanying pretensions. Its point, indeed, was to ridicule those pretensions. More importantly, Lamb's temporary appropriation of the Cromwellian coat of arms might not improbably be construed as a means of indicating his opinion of Sir Walter's loyalties – of indicating to Sir Walter that if he was a royalist, Lamb was pleased to announce himself a Cromwellian. Lamb was not alone in his rejection of Sir Walter's love of status and Tory principle. While expressing respect for his literary achievement, Hazlitt deplored the manner in which he 'administers charms and philtres to our love of Legitimacy, makes us conceive a horror of all reform, civil, political, or religious, and would fain put down the *Spirit of the Age*'.<sup>28</sup>

Sir Walter did contribute to the Godwin appeal, but pointedly declined to send his donation to Lamb; instead, he wrote to Haydon, of whose good opinion he was assured. And when referring to Lamb's letter, he revealed something interesting about the breakfast meeting of March 1821:

I beg my respects to Mr. Lamb, whom I should be happy to see in Scotland, though I have not forgotten his metropolitan preference of houses to rocks, and citizens to wild rustics and highland men.<sup>29</sup>

This reveals that at the breakfast meeting of March 1821 the tension between Sir Walter and the Cockneys had expressed itself in Lamb's negative comments on Scotland, which the novelist had not forgotten. And it can be no coincidence that in criticising Caledonia, Lamb had singled out 'wild rustics and highland men' – Scottish people – precisely the same target as in 'Imperfect Sympathies'. In the light of all this, it was the height of generosity for Sir Walter to have donated £10 to the appeal for Godwin, although he stipulated a condition to the gift, requesting anonymity 'because I dissent from Mr Godwin's theory of politics and morality as sincerely as I admire his genius'.<sup>30</sup> He realised, no doubt, that his enemies might have fun with the news if ever it saw the light of day. Unfortunately, Haydon was not so discreet as he hoped. Godwin did see Sir Walter's accompanying letter, which made him so furious that he was tempted (but *only* tempted) to return his £10.

<sup>27</sup> Lucas, ii. 374.

<sup>28</sup> *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt* ed. Duncan Wu (9 vols., London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998) (hereafter Wu), vii 132.

<sup>29</sup> Grierson vii 253.

<sup>30</sup> Grierson vii 252.



The Godwin appeal is worth reviewing because, although it took place over a year after the publication of 'Imperfect Sympathies', it reflects (however indirectly) on the meeting at Haydon's that March morning in 1821. Haydon's diary entry would give us to suppose that all those present were as charmed and delighted by the Scottish novelist as he was, but the particulars of the appeal suggest otherwise. It seems likely that Sir Walter left Lamb and his friends in little doubt of the high esteem in which he held himself. Lamb seems to have made some anti-Caledonian comments that stuck in Sir Walter's throat, and his suspicions of Sir Walter's part in the death of John Scott would not, I suggest, have been allayed. Indeed, they were justified; Sir Walter's most recent biographer, John Sutherland, confirms that John's death 'could have been prevented by [Sir Walter] Scott'.<sup>31</sup>

There can be little doubt that on that morning of 7 March John was much on everyone's mind because two days later his body was laid to rest. A hearse and four carried it from his lodgings in York Street to St-Martin-in-the-Fields. The hearse was followed by sixteen coaches filled with mourners, and seven private carriages. Haydon was among the mourners; as he recorded in his diary, 'I literally hid my face in my cloak and cried like an infant!'<sup>32</sup> Was Charles Lamb there too? It seems likely – no doubt with Hazlitt, who had succeeded to the post of editor of the *London Magazine*. Sir Walter was not apparently in attendance, although his letters to Lockhart of 4 and 14 March refer to the event.

Hazlitt was as pained as Lamb at John's tragic end. His inheritance of his editorial duties gave him no pleasure, and he did not retain the job for long. As in the case of Lamb, John had the good taste to recognize Hazlitt's genius from an early stage; when the *London Magazine* started, he told its proprietors that Hazlitt's 'talent is undoubted, and his wish to serve us, I believe, at present very sincere'.<sup>33</sup> The evidence indicates that this regard was mutual. In a letter of April 1820, Hazlitt advised him over the *Blackwood's* affair: 'Don't hold out your hand to the Blackwoods yet, after having knocked those blackguards down.'<sup>34</sup> Testimonials to his concern include Hazlitt's nostalgic memories of John's presence at the Lamb's evenings at home in 'On the Pleasures of Hating'.<sup>35</sup> The evidence suggests that Hazlitt and Lamb shared similar feelings of shock at John's fate.<sup>36</sup>

By the time Scott was buried, *Blackwood's* had published their issue for March 1821. It featured William Maginn's 'Letter to Pierce Egan, Esq.', a vicious attack on a series of Cockney writers, not least Hazlitt, of whom he comments: 'I flatter myself I have slaughtered the Cockney with ease and affluence. I have kicked the turnspit out of the ring, and he will not be able to shew his face there for six months at least.'<sup>37</sup> Though not intended as a dig at John, this was a heartless thing to say, particularly in the wake of his death. Lamb would almost certainly have seen it.

As Crabb Robinson pointed out, Lamb's grief at John's death was genuine, and did not quickly fade. On his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday some four years later, Lamb lamented to Bernard Barton, 'Why did poor

<sup>31</sup> John Sutherland, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 247.

<sup>32</sup> Pope ii 313.

<sup>33</sup> W. C. Hazlitt, *Four Generations of a Literary Family* (2 vols., London and New York, 1897), i. 136.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, i 140. This letter is omitted from the standard edition of Hazlitt's correspondence edited by Sikes (see next note).

<sup>35</sup> See Wu, viii 122. See also *The Letters of William Hazlitt* ed. Herschel Moreland Sikes assisted by Willard Hallam Bonner and Gerald Lahey (New York: New York University Press, 1978), p. 201.

<sup>36</sup> This is corroborated by A. C. Grayling in his recent biography, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), p. 266.

<sup>37</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 8 (March 1821) 676.

Scott die!’<sup>38</sup> The first issue of the *London Magazine* to be published in the wake of John’s funeral carried an editorial which addressed Lamb directly: ‘We respect, and sympathize in, the feelings of C.L. on the melancholy subject he has chosen for his Muse; but he must be aware, that circumstances of a very delicate nature must restrain us at present.’<sup>39</sup> This statement reveals that in the wake of John’s death, Lamb had written something connected with it which Hazlitt felt unable at that moment to publish, due to ‘circumstances of a very delicate nature’. Whatever it was, Hazlitt had decided to hold it over until a more opportune time. Could it by any chance have been ‘Imperfect Sympathies’, which begins with a famous declaration that its author has been trying all his life to like Scotchmen, but has given up the experiment in despair – a sentiment justified by the death of one of his best friends at the hands of the Edinburgh journalists in whose affairs the eminent novelist Sir Walter Scott was entangled? Realising how inflammatory such a declaration would have been, Hazlitt might have decided not to proceed with its publication and instead to retain it until frayed tempers had been pacified. This was not unreasonable: he had witnessed how an article in the same magazine had led directly to his predecessor’s death and quite reasonably may have feared that ‘Imperfect Sympathies’ might have got either himself or Lamb into similar trouble. That Lamb anticipated the censorship of his publisher, John Taylor, of the essay, tends to support this conjecture. If indeed the editorial of April 1821 refers to ‘Imperfect Sympathies’, that would place its composition in mid-March, with a *terminus ad quem* of the third week of that month, in time for Hazlitt to read it, make the decision not to publish, and refer to the decision in his editorial.

This is of course conjecture, but even if thought improbable or, in due course, disproved, I would contend that it holds a kernel of truth: that ‘Imperfect Sympathies’ is not an unqualified statement of animosity towards Scotchmen or indeed any other group. It can be fully understood only in the context of the Cockney school attacks mounted by journalists north of the border – Caledonians, in other words.<sup>40</sup> It would suggest that Lamb believed that the dispute that led John Scott to his death was a prime example of Caledonian thinking. That had been an absurd dispute over who was the editor of *Blackwood’s* – which, as Lamb would have understood, was a technicality. Whoever was the editor, he had endorsed the attacks on the Cockneys by publishing them and to that extent was implicated in them. The matter of whether Lockhart was responsible in that sense was an example of the ‘irritable reaching after fact’ that ‘Imperfect Sympathies’ set out to criticise. Perhaps Lamb thought it foolish, and typically Caledonian, of John Scott, an Aberdonian, to have been dragged into such a dispute.

It may therefore be that Lamb’s famous essay was written hot on the heels of John’s death and the meeting with Sir Walter in early March. But there is another possibility. In the issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* for May 1821 William Maginn published an article entitled ‘Letter from Dr Petre’. Despite its unrevealing title, it is a sustained and powerful attack on Lamb. It begins by singling out his contributions to the *London Magazine*, identifying him as Elia, and

<sup>38</sup> Lucas ii 460.

<sup>39</sup> *London Magazine* 3 (April 1820) 360. It was Patrick O’Leary who first pointed out that Lamb is the addressee of this remark.

<sup>40</sup> Only after completing work on this lecture did I realise that Robert Morrison, in his excellent edition of Richard Woodhouse’s cause book, had preceded me in making the connection between Lamb’s famous essay and Scott’s death; see ‘Richard Woodhouse’s *Cause Book*: The Opium-Eater, the Magazine Wars, and the London Literary Scene in 1821’, *Harvard Library Bulletin* 9 (Fall 1998), p. xvii. De Quincey relates some interesting gossip about Lockhart and Scott; see Morrison, pp. 7-8.

declaring that he should be ashamed of 'his ribald treatment of G. D. (one of the most inoffensive men on the face of the earth)'.<sup>41</sup> This was typical of *Blackwood's*; Maginn did not know George Dyer except by reputation, and had no particular interest in his welfare. He was merely reiterating the usual accusation that the Cockneys expressed their social inferiority by attacking their betters.

Turning to 'All Fools' Day', which Hazlitt had included in the April number of the *London Magazine*, Maginn went on to describe it as 'columns of mere inanity and very cockneyism . . . in imitation of the style of Rabelais'.<sup>42</sup> This was in keeping with earlier attacks on the Cockneys, which claimed that Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt's literary tastes reflected the looseness of their personal morals. There was nothing Rabelaisian about 'All Fools' Day', but then Maginn's preoccupations were not strictly aesthetic. His point was that Lamb fitted the profile of the depraved Cockney scribbler, in modelling himself on louche and depraved continental writers. He continued by arguing that association with Hazlitt and 'others of that deplorable set of men' had 'contaminated' Lamb's politics. Maginn mentions Wordsworth and Coleridge approvingly, on account of the fact that they were apostate radicals who had proved their Tory credentials.

Is it possible that Mr Lamb still remains? Is it possible that he can still hold communion with men, who, after the unutterable horrors of the French revolution, after witnessing the succession of one set of blood-boulted villains after another, chaunting the praises of freedom, and enforcing its cause by the knife or the guillotine, until it ended in the sullen military despotism of a heartless and bloody usurper, can still hold up that revolution as the struggle of liberty, and these monsters, and their iron-souled successor, as its champions? Who can stigmatize those who overthrew that savage chief as tyrants, and can mourn over his slavish satellites, whose only merit was a blind and sanguinary obedience to his mandates, as martyrs to their attachment to the interests of mankind? That would be degradation indeed: and, even in a literary point of view, what a different figure would the name of Mr Lamb make, were we parodying Mr Canning's line, to rank him with his present friends, and class together

Hazlitt and Janus, Webb and Lamb and Co.

Oh! what a falling off is there, from Southey, Coleridge, Lloyd, to such as these!

I am not so weak as to imagine that what I have said will have the effect on Mr Lamb, which I desire; but, I trust, a sense of his own dignity will sooner or later dissolve his partnership with the Cockney brotherhood, and that I shall see him emerge from the Slough of Despond, in which he is now overwhelmed . . .<sup>43</sup>

Maginn's attack was aimed not so much at Lamb as writer as at his presumed political affiliations. It was a remarkable line to take, given that Lamb could hardly be said to have espoused any political stance (at least overtly); but it was sufficient for Maginn that his work was published in a journal edited by Hazlitt.<sup>44</sup> Maginn's tactic was to suggest that mere association with the recreant Hazlitt

<sup>41</sup> William Maginn, 'Letter from Dr Petre', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 9 (May 1821) 140-2, p. 141.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Parker has argued persuasively for the political context of Elia as he appeared in the *London* under Scott. It may

indicated Lamb's own sympathies. His *Political Essays* of 1819 had confirmed Hazlitt as a target of choice for the Tory reviewers; their attacks were frequent and vitriolic. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* for one had declared that *Political Essays* had been written by a 'cockney', an 'infidel caviller', who had produced a 'collection of trash', and demanded that it be censored by the government.<sup>45</sup> It is not clear how Maginn knew that Hazlitt was now editing the *London Magazine* though Sir Walter may have heard about it during his London visit in March and reported it back to his son-in-law. In any case, Lamb's friendship with Hazlitt was widely known; whenever Henry Crabb Robinson visited Charles and Mary, Hazlitt was in attendance.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever Maginn's sources, there can be little doubt that Lamb, who followed *Blackwood's* attacks on his friends and allies, would have heard about his article, and probably read it – although it should be borne in mind that neither Hazlitt nor Lamb would have known its author's identity, much less the fact that Maginn was not Scottish, but Irish. It can hardly have made them better disposed towards the *Blackwood's* journalists. During the preceding four months, Lamb had witnessed the fruitless death of a close friend thanks to their attacks; he had encountered Sir Walter, who helped bring it about; and been dragged into the pages of *Blackwood's*, by name, for the same abusive treatment that led John to his grave. If Lamb did not compose 'Imperfect Sympathies' in March, as I have suggested, Maginn's 'Letter to Dr Petre' would have given him ample motivation for the following declaration in June:

be that this context was perceptible to the *Blackwood's* journalists. See 'Ideology and Editing: The Political Context of the Elia Essays', *Studies in Romanticism* 30 (1991) 473-94.

<sup>45</sup> See Wu iv p.xvii.

<sup>46</sup> See for instance his diary entries for 16 May and 21 July 1821.

I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair. They cannot like me – and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the correct chronology – and in the absence of further evidence only conjecture is possible – the events I have narrated provide the context within which we are obliged to place 'Imperfect Sympathies'. Like anyone of us, Lamb was capable of sentiments that when read in isolation appear intemperate and morally reprehensible. But to judge him by our own standards without reference to the events that led 'Imperfect Sympathies' to be written is as unjust as it is misleading. Lamb's 'Imperfect Sympathies' is designed to affront our sensibilities, motivated by an exasperation deriving from the repeated affronts delivered to Lamb during the spring and summer of 1821. It is not, therefore, correctly understood as a racist diatribe against the Scots, the Jews, or the Quakers; it is an attack on a way of thinking and feeling that Lamb associates with those who destroyed John Scott. Whether composed in March or June 1821, I propose that Lamb could have written 'Imperfect Sympathies' only in the light of the events I have described, as part of the Cockney school debate. That most poisonous of literary quarrels brought forth an untypically piqued Elia, and has brought him – unfairly – the reputation of a racist, thanks to the preference among critics for judgement over scholarship. Reassessment is long overdue.

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<sup>47</sup> *Elia*, p. 135.

## Lamb and Visuality

By LUISA CALÈ

*Artists again err in the confounding of poetic with pictorial subjects. In the latter, the exterior accidents are nearly everything, the unseen qualities as nothing. Othello's colour — the infirmities and corpulence of a Sir John Falstaff — do they haunt us perpetually in the reading? . . . But in a picture Othello is always a Blackamoor; and the other only Plump Jack. Deeply corporealised, and enchained hopelessly in the grovelling fetters of externality . . . --Charles Lamb*

THIS ESSAY EXAMINES Charles Lamb's theories of reading and seeing in the light of his encounters with visual spectacles. It focuses on his view of the theatrical representations of Shakespeare's plays in the context of visual experiences, ranging from panoramas to illustrations and literary galleries. Lamb's writing locates Shakespearean performances at the centre of the opposition between the visual and the verbal. Visuality traps the reader in the sensual immediacy of perception, deprives him of his freedom of interpretation, and fixes him in a passive role. By contrast, verbal texts distance him from the immediacy of perception through the elevating agency of abstraction. Yet, no sooner does Lamb try and define the workings of abstraction than he resorts to visual analogues. This essay aims at unravelling the hidden agency of visual spectacles pervading and troubling Lamb's anti-visual arguments.

Lamb's 1811 essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakspeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation' reflects on the difference between reading and seeing Macbeth about to murder Duncan:

when we no longer read it in a book, when we have given up that vantage-ground of abstraction which reading possesses over seeing, and come to see a man in his bodily shape before our eyes actually preparing to commit a murder [. . .] the painful anxiety about the act, the natural longing to prevent it while it yet seems unperpetrated, the too close pressing semblance of reality, give a pain and uneasiness which totally destroy all the delight which the words in the book convey, where the deed doing never presses upon us with the painful sense of presence: it rather seems to belong to history, — to something past and inevitable.<sup>1</sup>

The 'vantage-ground' provided by the written text distances the plot from its 'painful sense of presence'. Pressure, pain and anxiety highlight the corporeal involvement of the viewer in the performance of the action. The verbal emancipates him from the physiology of the aesthetic experience, frees him from the urgency of the plot, and allows for the distance necessary for reflection and abstraction.

<sup>1</sup> 'On the tragedies of Shakspeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation', *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by Edward V. Lucas, 7 vols (London: Methuen, 1903-5), I (1903), p. 106, subsequent references in text (*Lamb* Vol. #, p. #).

While Lamb argues for the pre-eminence of reading in terms of a ‘vantage-ground of abstraction’, reading is figured through the technology of vision.<sup>2</sup> The vantage-ground defines the station allowing the picture to be focused from its perspectival point. This viewpoint is the unifying visual stance underlying the language of the picturesque as it developed from locodescriptive poetry to tourist guides and panoramas. Thomas West’s 1778 *Guide to the Lakes* presents to the reader ‘all the select stations and points of view’.<sup>3</sup> A year before Lamb’s remarks about the ‘vantage-ground of abstraction’, William Wordsworth wrote an introduction to Joseph Wilkinson’s *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, the first version of what was to become his *Guide to the Lakes*. His writing aims at gaining the representational agency of a panorama:

At Lucerne in Switzerland there existed some years ago, and perhaps does still exist, a model of a large proportion of the Alpine country encompassing the lake of the four Cantons. The spectator ascended a little platform and saw Mountains, Lakes, Glaciers [. . .] lying at his feet; all things being represented in their exact proportions and appropriate colours. [. . .] Something of this kind (as far as can be performed by words, which must needs be most inadequate) will be attempted in the following introductory pages.<sup>4</sup>

The verbal preface supplements Wilkinson’s sketches with ‘accurate portraits’. To enact the right description, the reader must find a ‘vantage-ground’:

I know not how I can give the reader a more distinct image of this than by requesting him to place himself in imagination upon some given point; let it be the top of either of the mountains of Great Gavel or Scawfell.<sup>5</sup>

Much as the verbal text has to emulate the agency of a panorama, the readers of *Select Views* are invited to conform their reading practices to the visual training of panorama goers. Lamb is among the panoramas’ vicarious travellers.<sup>6</sup> Dependent on a ‘vantage-ground of abstraction’, the location of the reader is similar to the ‘circle of observation’ of panoramas.<sup>7</sup>

An invention dating back to 1787, but enjoying a continuous success until the 1850s, the Panorama located the spectator at the centre of a 360-degree view, a landscape painted on a cylindrical surface. In the patent registering his invention, Robert Barker defines *La nature à coup d’oeil* as a device producing a reality-effect which aims ‘by drawing and painting, and a

<sup>2</sup> On the technologies of vision as an interface between aesthetics and technological innovation, cfr Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas West, *A Guide to the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmoreland and Lancashire*, sixth edition (London: Richardson, 1796), pp. 2-3, quoted in Nancy Goslee, *Uriel’s Eye: Miltonic Stationing and Statuary in Blake, Keats, and Shelley* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985), p. 9; See also Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Wilkinson, *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire* (London: Ackermann, 1810), p. i.  
<sup>5</sup> *Select views*, i-ii.

<sup>6</sup> ‘The Old and the New Schoolmaster’, II, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Panorama, Leicester Square, *The Circle of Observation in the lower room, Panorama, Leicester Square, representing a View of Windsor. A Beautiful View of Brighton . . .* (London, 1798).

proper disposition of the whole, to perfect an entire view of any country or situation, as it appears to an observer turning quite round’.

The choice of a vantage-ground was essential to the artist who needed to fix his station and then gradually to turn around so as to take in the spectacle in a continuous field of vision. To ensure the panorama’s reproductive power, the point of view of the spectator also had to be carefully constructed:

There must be an enclosure with the said circular building or framing, which shall prevent an observer going too near the drawing or painting, so as it may, from all parts it can be viewed, have its proper effect. This enclosure may represent a room, or platform, or any other situation.<sup>8</sup>

To emulate a real landscape, the panorama required a fixed distance between the viewer and the view. Only by being stationed in the right position does a picture produce its ‘reality-effect’:

The drawings being made on flat surfaces, when placed together in a circle the horizontal lines appeared curved instead of straight, unless on the exact level of the eye; and to meet this difficulty Mr Barker had to invent a system of curved lines peculiarly adapted to the concave surface of his picture, which should appear straight when viewed from a platform at a certain level in the centre.<sup>9</sup>

Painting takes into account the physiological distortions inherent in the act of viewing: for a line to be seen as straight from a certain distance, it has to be painted oblique. An abstracting device had always regulated the representation of landscape, be it Alberti’s window or the contracting agency of Claude Lorrain’s convex mirror. The construction of distance in the visual machinery of the panorama provides the viewer with a highly selective visual experience.

If the ‘vantage-ground of abstraction’ suggests the commanding position of the academic critic, distance is the ideal agent for the painter to reduce ‘the variety of nature to the abstract idea’.<sup>10</sup> It may prove helpful to turn to Hazlitt’s reflections on the pleasure gained by distant objects:

Distant objects please, because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. [. . .] Our feelings carried out of themselves lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to ‘ethereal mould, sky-tinctured’. We drink the air before us and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Repository of Arts and Manufactures* 4 (1796), pp. 165-7, quoted from Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), pp. 358-9.

<sup>9</sup> George Richard Corner, *The Panorama: with Memoirs of its Inventor, Robert Barker, and his Son, the late Henry Aston Barker* (London: Robins, 1857), pp. 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, III, ed. by Robert Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Why Distant Objects please’, *Works*, ed. by P. P. Howe (London: Dent, 1930-4), VIII: *Table-Talk, or Original Essays*, 1931, pp. 255-6.



At the heart of the liberating indeterminacy of distant objects is the fact that they don't 'obtrude too close upon the eye'.<sup>12</sup> Distance is the crucial agent constructing the 'vantage-ground of abstraction' produced by the view from the top of Helvellyn in book eight of Wordsworth's *Prelude* as opposed to Bartholomew Fair, a spectacle Lamb took Wordsworth to see in 1802. Here the poet needs the Muse's intercession: 'for once the Muse's help we implore, / and she shall lodge us – wafted on her wings / above the press and danger of the crowd - / upon some showman's platform'.<sup>13</sup> Distance protects the Wordsworthian self from humanity, defusing the threat of fusion with the bodily excess of Wordsworth's Malthusian town experience, and allows for the negotiation of the self's *Lebensraum*. The grossness of the oppressive materiality of the crowd can be distanced and defused through the workings of abstraction, which coincide here with the power of perspective to organize the multiplicity of experience into a legible picture.<sup>14</sup>

The liberation seems to set in 'the instant the pressure of unwelcome circumstances is removed'. The construction of distance in the visual machinery of the Panorama allows the panorama viewer to dominate the indistinctness of the perceptive mass, commanding it and organizing it into a visual experience. The panorama provides a technological critique of the tradition of the picturesque. By opposing a ready-made aerial perspective, the panorama highlights the artificiality at the heart of *la nature à coup d'oeil*. This happens through the mechanics of a highly selective visual practice at the expense of the 'press and danger of the crowd':

The effect, on stepping out of a crowded, noisy, and smoky street, into the exhibition room, with nothing around you but a scene of calm waters, on which float numerous picturesque vessels . . . the effect, we say, is almost magical; the spirits are cheered; we seem to inhale a purer atmosphere.<sup>15</sup>

Selection also implies the elimination of the undesirable components of experience. Panoramas purge pollution and other atmospheric elements from the field of vision. In battle scenes, danger is perceived as a removed object of reflection rather than a pressing menace to the viewer.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the panorama's ready-made aerial perspective provides a technological critique of the tradition of the picturesque.

In that they questioned the naturalness of picturesque viewing, panoramas may be seen as having been central to the debate between Lamb and Wordsworth. Wordsworth constructs an

<sup>12</sup> Distance as a sublime enhancer is also dealt with by Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 1958), II.vii-viii, 72-4.

<sup>13</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark Reed, 2 vols., (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) Book VII, ll. 666-99.

<sup>14</sup> On Wordsworth's townphobia and Malthus, see Frances Ferguson, 'Malthus, Godwin, Wordsworth, and the Spirit of Solitude', *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 114-28.

<sup>15</sup> *The Examiner*, no 1125, Sunday, 23 August 1829, p. 532.

<sup>16</sup> The dialectic between danger and reflection is central to Burke's phenomenology of the beautiful and the sublime, which can be subsumed under the categories of self-preservation and society: 'the passions therefore which are conversant about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on *pain* and *danger*, and they are the most powerful of all the passions.' *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 1958), p. 38; 'the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation' (p. 86).

opposition between the natural and the urban, with artifice and the multifarious attack of crowding perception inhabiting the pole of the urban. By contrast, for Lamb the metropolis is an enhancer rather than an inhibitor of creativity. He dislocates Wordsworth's urban-pastoral dichotomy by turning the natural world into an artificial place — be it a panorama or a cabinet of curiosities:

Your sun & moon and skys and hills & lakes affect me no more [. . .] than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects. — I consider the clouds above me but as a roof beautifully painted, but unable to satisfy the mind, and at last, like the pictures of the apartment of a Connoisseur, unable to afford him any longer a pleasure. So fading upon me from disuse, have been the Beauties of Nature.<sup>17</sup>

The illusion of Wordsworth's Lake District is ironically dissected and transformed into an artificial collection of visual objects.<sup>18</sup> For those disjointed objects to become a unified all-encompassing vision, the observer must be disciplined into the right practices.

Compare the technology of vision which Jeremy Bentham started developing when the panoramas were first invented. Bentham's panopticon is a circular building — be it a prison or a school — with a place of inspection at the centre 'that affords a perfect view and the same view, of an indefinite number of apartments of the same dimensions'.<sup>19</sup> The panopticon offers an all-encompassing field of vision like the panorama's aerial perspective. From the vantage-ground the panorama viewer can give order and focus to the indistinct mass of perception; such a mass is submitted to the same policing agency commanding the view on the inmates of Bentham's prison — exhibits exposed to the God-like gaze of their invisible inspectors. These exhibits are open to view and assume an orderly behaviour and posture only insofar as there is a viewer located in the right station, since they can only be put into focus from the inspector's gallery.<sup>20</sup> Like Lamb's reader of drama, Bentham's inspector sees the workings of the inmates' minds thanks to the panorama-like architecture of the panopticon. Yet, while the viewer orders the field of vision, such a vision restricts the viewer to one point of view.

In its emphasis upon a comprehensive surveillance, the panopticon can be related to the panorama's 'circle of observation' and Lamb's 'vantage-ground of abstraction'. Abstracting processes govern the technique constructing the field of vision as much as the abstraction characteristic of reading.

Abstraction is a key category in Reynolds's theory of art. According to Reynolds, the artist should 'get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind', so

<sup>17</sup> To William Wordsworth, 30 January 1801, in *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by Edwin W. Marris, Jr, 3 vols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975-8), I (1975), pp. 267-8, hereafter *MLL*, Vol. #, page # in text.

<sup>18</sup> On the Wordsworth-Lamb country vs city debate, cfr Lucy Newlyn, "'In City Pent": Echo and Allusion in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb, 1797-1801', *Review of English Studies*, n. s., XXXII 128 (1981), pp. 408-28.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*, ed. by Miran Bozovic (London: Verso, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> *Etablissement proposé pour garder des prisonniers avec plus de sûreté et plus d'économie et pour operer en meme temps leur réformation morale* (1791): the principle of constant surveillance convinces the inmates 'qu'ils vivent et qu'ils agissent incessamment sous l'inspection parfaite d'un homme interessé à toute leur conduite'. University College London, Bentham Papers, 117a.

as to make out ‘an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original’.<sup>21</sup> On this ground Rubens’s landscapes are condemned, since they are ‘a representation of an individual spot’, rather than the generalising abstraction and composition of scenes from different prospects which characterize Claude Lorrain’s large oil paintings.<sup>22</sup> The painter, ‘like the philosopher, will consider nature in the abstract, and represent in every one of his figures the character of its species’.<sup>23</sup> The comparison with the philosopher is symptomatic, since Reynolds is here trying to raise the status of painting by dwelling on the intellectual activity necessary to transcend sensual vision. Thus philosophers and painters can be assimilated as agents of that higher kind of vision which is abstraction.<sup>24</sup> Both can be read as enacting a process of vision as insight, whereby the philosopher abstracts ideas from visual percepts (εἶδος, εἰδολον).<sup>25</sup>

Yet, the reader’s vantage-ground of abstraction sometimes comes paradoxically close to a form of embodiment:

On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear, — we are in his mind. (*Lamb I*, p. 107)

However, the reader’s embodiment is a spiritual communion, a partaking of the workings of the mind and of the motives of action. Theatrical performance, on the other hand, offers a sensual incarnation of action. Lacking abstraction, the viewer cannot escape from the impending danger of action and dwell on its motives or the feelings of its agents. The spectator is deprived of the freedom of interaction of an individual reading with respect to the temporality of the plot. The temporality of reading and abstracting is curtailed, chained to the rhythm of the performance. With respect to the temporality of the aesthetic experience, theatre occupies an intermediate position between the verbal and the visual. Painting occupies the opposite pole by compressing the plot in a single, climactic moment.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, even when reading is articulated in contrast to visuality, abstraction is described through a visual comparison:

Of the texture of Othello’s mind [. . .] they see no more than the spectators at a cheaper rate, who pay their pennies a-piece to look through the man’s telescope in Leicester-fields, see into the inward plot and topography of the moon. (*Lamb I*, 102)

<sup>21</sup> Reynolds, *Discourses*, p. 44. See also 47, where Reynolds’ ideal is ‘one common idea and central form, which is the abstract of the various individual forms belonging to that class’. For the 1820s debate see *infra*.

<sup>22</sup> *Discourses*, IV, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> *Discourses*, III, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> See *Discourses*, IX, 169-70 on the progress of the mind, and Elizabeth A. Bohls, ‘Disinterestedness and Denial of the Particular: Locke, Adam Smith, and the Subject of Aesthetics’, *Eighteenth Century and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. by Brian Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 21. On philosophy as abstract vision, cfr Martin Jay, ‘The Noblest of the Senses: Vision from Plato to Descartes’, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp.21-82.

<sup>25</sup> On the painter acquiring the ‘vantage-ground of abstraction’ of the philosopher, see Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, III, ed. by Robert R. Wark (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1959), p. 50 and also 44, 47.

<sup>26</sup> For the distinction between different levels of fictional temporalities (historical time and narrative time), cfr Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit*, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1983), I, pp. 17-129. The time of reception is what differentiates, according to Lamb, the consumption of a theatrical performance from the temporal freedom of individual reading.

Placing the movement of Othello's mind vis à vis the view enjoyed at a peep show highlights their paradoxical incompatibility. Yet Coleridge also used the metaphor of the telescope to define intellectual vision or insight when at Charles Lamb's home on 16 October 1811:

He would require a telescope of more than Herschellian power to enable him, with his contracted intellectual vision, to see half a quarter as far: the end of his nose is the utmost extent of the man's ordinary sight, and even then he can not comprehend what he sees.<sup>27</sup>

The difference between seeing and reading is that between a more and less powerful kind of vision: seeing as a view of the action incarnated in its chief actor, reading as a divine telescope capable of perceiving 'the internal workings and movements of a great mind, of an Othello or a Hamlet'.

'There is something in the nature of acting which levels all distinctions', Lamb comments, 'this shewing of every thing, levels all things' (*Lamb I*, pp. 104, 111). Sensual multiplicity disintegrates the central focus of the picture or stage setting and distracts the attention captured by centrifugal lures.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, as a vantage-ground of abstraction, reading is a perspectival device showing the reader what to place in the foreground and what in the background of his attention so that he may not be captured or divided by the alluring visual multiplicity of stage elements. Visual objects should not stand in the place of the minds of the agents. The refusal to focus on stage-props paradoxically obeys the logic of a higher perspectival preoccupation: the focus is on the interior of the agent's mind, a close-up rather than a wide angle, panoramic view comprehending the whole stage and focussing on scenery, dress and properties. It is God's telescoping view into the man's interiority, a gaze which can pierce through the flesh in order to read the tables of the heart.<sup>29</sup> This is emulated by the view enjoyed from the centre of Bentham's panopticon as opposed to a panoramic view of externalia.

The language Lamb uses to define the verbal as against the mere externality of the visual resonates visual practices and debates on art and visuality. This alone places visual spectacles at the centre of Lamb's aesthetics. By looking at Lamb's attitude towards the translation from the visual to the verbal, it will be possible to articulate the contradictions at the heart of his relationship with visuality. He looked down on panoramas and peep shows, but was a keen theatre-goer. Ambivalent towards the translation from the verbal to the visual, he approved of a creative impulse in the opposite direction. Not only was he proud of the poems his sister composed after looking at pictures (*MLL*, II, pp. 170-171), but he decorated his study in a way that suggests the nature of his aids to reflection, as the following account reveals:

My brother and I almost covered the walls with prints, for which purpose he cut out every print from every book in his old library, coming in every now and then to ask my leave to strip a fresh poor author [. . .]. There was such pasting — such consultation

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. by Thomas M. Raysor, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1930), II, p. 38, hereafter *STC*, Vol. #, page # in text.

<sup>28</sup> On the law of gravity in the focussing of pictures, see Rudolf Arnheim, *The Power of the Center: a Study of Composition in the Visual Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>29</sup> For interiority vs exteriority in terms of spirituality vs visual, idolatric exteriority of the mosaic tables, cfr 2 Cor. 3:3 and Heb. 4:12-13; 8:10.

where their portraits and where [th]e series of pictures from Ovid, Milton & Shakespear would show to most advantage and in what obscure corner authors of humbler note might be allowed to tell their stories. All the books gave up their stores but one, a translation from Ariosto, a delicious set of four & twenty prints, & for which I had marked out a conspicuous place, when lo! We found, at the moment the scissars were going to work, that a part of the poem was printed at the back of every picture. What a cruel disappointment! (MLL, III, pp. 117-118)

Paradoxically contradicting the aura of the book and of reading he so often expresses, in this destructive drive towards decoration, Lamb pays tribute to the mastery of the visual. The decoration of his study gives an insight into the practices of consumption and reproduction of reading centering around illustrated editions. The illustrations can be detached at the expense of the integrity of the book. Once hung they stand alone as autonomous metonymies of the texts they originally decorated.

On the basis of articles on old actors, which Lamb had contributed to *The London Magazine* and *The Examiner*, in 1827 he was asked to write a descriptive catalogue for Charles Mathews's collection of theatrical portraits, which was opened in May 1833 at the Queen's Bazaar. In 'The Old Actors', published after seeing the collection in 1822, Lamb describes how the portraits bring into focus the visual impressions the actors had made on his memory:

I do not know a more mortifying thing than to be conscious of a foregone delight, with a total oblivion of the person and manner which conveyed it. In dreams I often stretch and strain after the countenance of Edwin, whom I once saw in Peeping Tom. I cannot catch a feature of him [. . .] Parsons, and still more Dodd, were near being lost to me, till I was refreshed with their portraits (fine treat) the other day at Mr Mathews's gallery at Highgate. (*Lamb II*, p. 294)

Yet, judging by Lamb's statements on the effects of Shakespearean acting in the 1811 Shakespeare essay, one would expect a negative reaction. Lamb did in fact refuse:

I am no hand at describing costumes, a great requisite in an account of mannered pictures. I have not the slightest acquaintance with pictorial language even [. . .] I could as soon resolve Euclid. I have no eye for forms and fashions. I substitute analysis, and get rid of the phenomenon by slurring in for its impression. [. . .] Else the delight would be incalculable in doing such a thing for Mathews [. . .] What a feast 'twould be sitting at the pictures painting 'em into words; but I could almost as soon make words into pictures.<sup>30</sup>

His refusal is motivated by a personal limit rather than one inherent to the medium. Similarly, in the 1822 essay on Mathews's Collection, after having dreamt the actor Munden becoming 500

<sup>30</sup> To Barron Fields, 4 October 1827, *The Letters of Charles Lamb: to which are added those of his Sister*, ed. by Edward V. Lucas, 3 vols (London: Dent, 1935), III, pp. 136-137, hereafter *LLL* Vol. #, page # in text. Yet the catalogue of the Queen's Bazaar exhibition reprinted the 1822 essay as a preface, cfr Geoffrey Ashton, *Pictures in the Garrick Club: a Catalogue of the Paintings, Drawings, Watercolours, and Sculpture*, ed. by Kalman A. Burnim and Andrew Wilton (London: Garrick Club, 1997), p. XLIII.

Mundens, Lamb regrets ‘o for the power of the pencil to have fixed them when we awoke!’ (*Lamb* II, p. 297). Acting is seen as a visual art, an embodiment of the action in the features of actors and stage props. The transferral from the visual to the verbal is thus represented as a desirable if impossible goal.

In 1833 Lamb exploded against the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery in a letter to Samuel Rogers. Falling in the same year as the public exhibition of the Mathews Collection, it offers a useful term of comparison to highlight the utter contradiction:

What injury (short of the theatres) did not Boydell’s ‘Shakespeare Gallery’ do me with Shakespeare? — To have Opie’s Shakespeare, Northcote’s Shakespeare, light-headed Fuseli’s Shakespeare, heavy-headed Romney’s Shakespeare, wooden-headed West’s Shakespeare (though he did the best in ‘Lear’), deaf-headed Reynold’s Shakespeare, instead of my, and everybody’s Shakespeare. To be tied down to an authentic face of Juliet! To have Imogen’s portrait! To confine the illimitable! (*LLL*, III, p. 394)

Lamb’s statement on the Shakespeare Gallery conforms to his treatment of the theatrical embodiment represented by acting. The sheer act of seeing leads the spectator to focus on externality. The external, imposed visuality of a theatrical performance would tie down the spectator to ‘an authentic face of Juliet’. This implies a fall into the anecdotal character of portrayal, the ‘pictorial’ usurping the ‘poetical’,<sup>31</sup> since the theatrical performance

seemed to embody and realize conceptions which had hitherto assumed no distinct shape. But dearly do we pay all our life after for this juvenile pleasure, this sense of distinctness. When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that, instead of realizing an idea, we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go of a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance. How cruelly this operates upon the mind, to have its free conceptions thus cramped and pressed down to the measure of a strait-lacing actuality. (*Lamb* I, pp. 98-99)

Viewing the play is like the process whereby a scene is brought into focus: things acquire contours and become distinct at the expense of the aura of the verbal. Lamb’s rhetoric relies again on the trope of incorporation. The theatrical performance is equated to a form of idolatry, the depiction of a forbidden image.<sup>32</sup> ‘Bringing down a vision to the standard of flesh and blood’ equates Shakespearean performances to a mortal sin, though not a *felix culpa*.<sup>33</sup>

This descent into materiality is figured through the compression and artificial distortion of the female form. For Reynolds ‘the straight lacing of English ladies’ was an example of deformity to be avoided in visual representation.<sup>34</sup> Incarnating Shakespeare’s characters entails fixing their natural contours in a permanent visual form. The text’s incarnation in acting is

<sup>31</sup> *Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art*, Lucas, II, p. 233.

<sup>32</sup> For anti-theatrical discourses, see Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>33</sup> Roy Park reads the fall in a specular context: the loss of immediacy caused by the advent of abstraction: *Lamb as Critic*, ed. by Roy Park (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 7-9, 33. Here, on the contrary, abstraction is lost to the lure of visuality.

<sup>34</sup> *Discourses on Art*, p. 137; cfr p. 48.

figured through the supplementing agency of dress as that which hides the body, which hides the soul: the opaquest form of enactment.

Why then was Lamb a passionate theatre-goer? Why did he visit Mathews's theatrical gallery? The trope of incarnation is central to this incongruity. The 1811 Shakespeare essay starts on the note of Lamb's indignation at the idol-worship of Garrick. Like the straight-lacing of a female body, acting risks to dispossess or appropriate the spirit of the verbal text. Excerpts anthologized from famous monologues for elocutionary purposes were already on Lamb's mind in an 1801 letter to Charles Lloyd:

Who can disentangle and unthread the rich texture of Nature & Poetry sewn so thick into a stout coat of theology, without spoiling both *lace & coat*? How beggarly and how bald do even Shakespeare's Princely Pieces look, when thus violently divorced from *connexion & circumstance*! When we meet with To be or not to be [. . .] in an Enfield speaker, or in Elegant Extracts . . . (*MLL*, II, p. 35)

Like such excerpts the portraits of actors in their key interpretations would incarnate the verbal soul into the actor's corpus. Lamb's forgetfulness of the actors' features is a refusal of their corporeal appropriation of theatrical characters. The actors' bodily features should be self-consuming artifacts, mere vessels of the word. So why did Lamb not look down on Mathews's Gallery, which was, among other things, a collection of Garrick memorabilia? Let us turn to George Patmore's inclusion of Mathews's Gallery among his *British Galleries of Art*:

In the present state of society, the theatre is the place where the spirits of most of us have first breathed the uncontaminated breath of their nature, and have first looked abroad into that world in which their (for the present) lost heritage lies — where they first escaped from the trammels of early custom, and the prison-house of a superinduced selfishness [. . .] The same circumstances which caused us thus, in the first ardour of youth, to project our spirits beyond their walls of flesh, and led them to expatiate in a wider and more genial field of thought, feeling, and imagination, than that which they saw immediately about them.<sup>35</sup>

Patmore's theatre claims to liberate the spectators from their corporeality and enact an astral journey which strongly recalls Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. The spectators 'can yet never lose the memory or the relish of the voyage they have made' (P, p. 250). One may wonder whether the spectators, however, are merely exchanging their walls of flesh for those of the actors. By presenting them with the bodily lineaments of actors, how can Mathews's Gallery be in line with such an idealising, abstracting experience?

If Mr Mathews' Gallery, instead of being replete, as it is, with every thing that can increase the interest and attraction of the subject, had contained nothing but the rude effigies of a few of the agents in that 'first play' of all of us, it would still have been worth attending. (P, p. 251)

<sup>35</sup> Peter George Patmore, *British Galleries of Art* (London: Whittaker, 1824), p. 250, hereafter P in text.

‘Rude effigies’ would be enough to recall one’s first play. ‘Rude’ controls the reproductive power of the image, defusing its potential for idolatric worship. This is clarified by the agency of the portrait of the actress O’Neill:

To say that this portrait of Miss O’Neill [. . .] is the best that can be seen, is praising it but little — for there never was one that could give the slightest notion of the original to those who had not seen her, had formed a just idea of her character of mind, as written in her face. (P, p. 260)

Such an image cannot supplant the original, but only works as a mnemonic help: ‘we might possibly be able to trace the feelings and associations connected with our *first play* in every play we see’ (P, p. 255).

This art of memory is a redemptive restoration of one’s first play. So too are the plates of Rowe’s Shakespeare for Lamb (*Lamb II*, 98). We have seen that in 1811 the juvenile pleasures of giving a face to a name would entail a fall into externality to be paid for life. Not so in Lamb’s 1821 essay *My First Play*:

I had left the temple a devotee, and was returned a rationalist. The same things were there materially; but the emblem, the reference, was gone! — the green curtain was no longer a veil, drawn between two worlds, the unfolding of which was to bring back past ages, to present a ‘royal ghost’ [. . .] the actors were men and women painted. (*Lamb II*, 100)

At the age of six or seven the theatre is a tabernacle, the curtain the veil mediating the contact between the terrestrial and the spiritual world, the actors Berkeleian emblems of spirituality. Seen in adulthood the theatre is reduced to a curtain and ‘the standard of flesh and blood’. The fall consists in the incapacity of reading through the fleshly emblem, and thus of entering the spiritual communion with the text provided by the vantage-ground of reading.

Lamb’s formulation of the visual Shakespeare reverses Coleridge’s contemporary definition of the agency of poetry. The theatre ‘confines the illimitable’, embodies what ‘had hitherto assumed no distinct shape’. By contrast, poetry refuses to be disciplined under the orthodoxy of perspective. Visual and verbal art form a sort of chiasmus in that they stand at the poles of the mechanism of perspective. The distinctness of theatrical performance suggests the imperial grasp of the visual field ordered into a legible visibility, a fixed image. Conversely, verbal art is akin to anamorphosis, an image seen in its deconstructing blurring and deforming elongations, a numinous presence which refuses to be fixed in a clear visual representation, a permanent ‘quest for an unattainable substance’ (*Lamb I*, p. 98). Since it does not rest in a definite shape, the anamorphic character of writing requires a continual straining of the mind and will never allow for idolatric fixation:

The grandest efforts of poetry are where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely, the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image. (*STC*, II, p. 138)



Similarly, for Patmore theatrical portraits do not confine the imagination but are there to recall feelings, to stimulate the mind. Thus Patmore's theatre is a self-consuming artifact. Lamb's desire and incapacity to recall actors' features is a pathological enactment of Coleridge's dialectic of the sublime.

Yet the unimaginable Death was reduced to a 'mere image'. The literary galleries flourishing in the 1790s reduced Shakespeare and Milton to the visual consumption of gallery-goers, at most glancing at the verbal quotations anthologised in the exhibition catalogues while gazing at the pictures. Like Lamb's cutting and pasting illustrations to provide visual stories for his study, the literary galleries are a form of spectacularisation whereby the classics are disarticulated, anthologised and rewritten in the visual medium. The galleries promoted literature in a form which sought to accommodate the desire for visual entertainments and acquire the market such ventures enjoyed. By sharing a parallel textual condition they underwent the same kind of hostility as the panoramas and other visual spectacles.

Bearing in mind Lamb's statement on the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, it is surprising to discover that Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* were 'embellished with engravings'.<sup>36</sup> So too were other works published by *The Juvenile Library*. The plates might be seen as the publisher's pedagogic and marketing strategy.<sup>37</sup> None the less, Lamb's objections to the engravings of *Tales from Shakespeare* seem to posit the need for an authorized illustration: the plate for *The Merchant of Venice* betrays 'damn'd beastly vulgarity . . . where no atom of authority was in the tale to justify it' (*MLL*, II, p. 256).

What 'atom of authority' justifies the visual corpus pasted on the walls of Lamb's study to 'tell stories'? The decoration of Lamb's study suggests it is an art of memory, and quite a complex one: not only does each illustration tell a story and thus stand as a metonymy for a plot, but the whole provides a visualised canon whereby authors are located in a hierarchical perspective. Despite the late lexical conjunction of 'illustration' as both 'explanation' and 'illustrative picture', Lamb's study fits into reading practices as old as the invention of printing: plates were agents of the art of memory, mnemonic devices helping the reader to dismount the sequence of the story in its climactic moments and fix these in his memory through the agency of powerful images (*imagines agentes*). The reader would then be able to reproduce the story through the help of the very same images, or even to rearrange its elements into a new story.<sup>38</sup> One is left to wonder if the walls of Lamb's study were mere 'maps', 'modest remembrancers', bookmarkers referring back to the mangled books on the bookshelves, or simply visual aids towards new processes of composition.

<sup>36</sup> *Tales from Shakespear. Designed for the Use of Young Persons* (London: Hodgkins at the Juvenile Library, 1807).

<sup>37</sup> The Juvenile Library also published Lamb's *Mrs Leicester's School* with a frontispiece illustration and *The Adventures of Ulysses* (1808) with two frontispiece illustrations. At the back of the volume an advertisement of 'New Books for Children published at the Juvenile Library' lists *Tales from Shakespear* with 20 copper-plates; Edward Baldwin's *Fables Ancient and Modern adapted for the Use of Children*, in two editions with either 73 or 7 engravings; Baldwin's *The Pantheon: or, Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome*, 'with the engravings of the principal Gods, chiefly taken from the Remains of Ancient Statuary' and Baldwin's *The History of England for the Use of Schools and Young Persons*, 'with 32 Heads of the Kings'. Lamb's *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret* (London: Lee, 1798) is not illustrated.

<sup>38</sup> See Lina Bolzoni, *La stanza della memoria: modelli letterari e iconografici nell'età della stampa* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995).

Lamb's *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading* offer an explanatory context for his ambivalent approach to book illustration:

I do not care for a First Folio of Shakespeare. You cannot make a *pet* book of an author whom every body reads. I rather prefer the common editions of Rowe and Tonson, without notes, and with *plates*, which, being so execrably bad, serve as maps, or modest remembrancers, to the text; and, without pretending to any supposeable emulation with it, are so much better than the Shakespeare gallery *engravings*, which *did*. I have a community of feeling with my countrymen about his Plays, and I like those editions of him best, which have been oftenest tumbled about and handled.<sup>39</sup>

It is an irony that in 1890 his *Tales from Shakespeare* should be reprinted with illustrations taken from the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery.<sup>40</sup>

If viewing the distinct contours of Juliet's face forecloses the hermeneutic space of the reader's imaginary work, how does this effect differ from an illustration seen as a 'map'? Maybe Lamb thinks of a sketchy map, where an 'impression' of the path will be enough to point the way,<sup>41</sup> akin to Patmore's characterisations of theatrical portraits as 'rude effigies' and also to the relationship Hazlitt posits between painting and prints, 'but hints, loose memorandums, outlines in little of what the painter has done.'<sup>42</sup> This agrees with Lamb's differentiation between Poussin's *Plague of Athens* and Hogarth's *Gin Lane*: to realise that 'there is more imagination' in the latter we must 'abstract our minds from the fascinating colours of the picture, and forget the coarse execution (in some respects) of the print' (*Lamb* I, p. 73). Thus colouring figures as a subversive, sensual agent capable of seducing the spectator into absorption, thereby inhibiting the redemptive workings of abstraction. Maybe a similar agency is attributed to the *Boydell Shakespeare Gallery* with its ambition to emulate Shakespeare rather than provide a mere 'hint', or a 'modest remembrancer' which will recall a mental image. An easy visualisation is then a negative aesthetic experience. If the action of the painting can be grasped at one view, if it is immediately decoded and fixed into the right focus, its distinctness allows for immediate cultural consumption. As a consequence, the viewer is blocked and absorbed into the mere image in its fixity, and the temporal workings of intellectual abstraction cannot save him. On the contrary, the obstruction, the visualising friction of a bad print or a rude effigy defuse the immediacy inherent in the visual medium, since they require the temporality of a hermeneutic encounter. Whereas the perfect image dispossesses the reader of the text and relegates him to the passivity of a mere receiver, precisely because it stands in need of the reader's supplement of reading, the bad print is an agent in the communal circulation and enjoyment of the text. Thus the bad print works as a map pointing the way towards abstraction; it is a self-consuming artifact. The viewer transcends its medium and enters communion with the spirit of the text. It is no chance that Lamb refers to the liturgy of the Eucharist in contesting the 'visual frippery' of a *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrated by Martin, 'fifteen forthcoming combinations of show and emptiness', 'not

<sup>39</sup> 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', *The London Magazine* VI: xxxi (July 1822), 34 (Lucas, II, p. 174, omits the second sentence).

<sup>40</sup> *Tales from Shakespeare by Charles and Mary Lamb, with 12 Illustrations in Permanent Photography from the Boydell Gallery* (London: Bickers and Son, 1890).

<sup>41</sup> For Lamb's difficulty in handling maps as well as visual objects, see 'The Old and the New Schoolmaster', II, 49.

<sup>42</sup> 'Mr Angerstein's Collection of Pictures', *London Magazine* VI: xxxvi (December 1822), 489-90.

more nutritious than papistical wafer stuff (to head and heart)' (*LLL*, III, p. 179). Having been a Unitarian and admirer of Joseph Priestley, Lamb cannot allow for a visual incarnation to stand in the place of the spiritual communion with the text.<sup>43</sup>

The author's text and the reader's text — 'my, and everybody's Shakespeare' — risk becoming the actor's and the painter's text. The painter's and the actor's text share a claim for textual authorship.<sup>44</sup> By locating the aesthetic experience in the vantage-ground of abstraction, Lamb, like Reynolds before him, reiterates the tradition which represents intellectual activity as a vision from a high prospect, suggesting the distance and disinterested stance of the subject of aesthetic experience. The location and time invested in intellectual activity, which identified him as a property owner, are now dislocated. As it ceases to indicate a place without and a social marker, the vantage-ground of abstraction is interiorised as a figure of reading. Once the vantage-ground can be identified with the panoramas' circle of observation or with the practice of reading, the public identified by the elevating agency of abstraction is quite different. 'My, and everybody's Shakespeare' is the tattered text distributed by circulating libraries, a textual surface bearing the traces of communal reading: 'how they speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight!'<sup>45</sup> This is the sense of community, the 'community of feeling' Lamb shares with his countrymen: Shakespeare circulates from hand to hand, at the same time 'my, and everybody's Shakespeare'. Such a communal consumption of art both academic painting and great actors are seen to dispossess and foreclose.

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<sup>43</sup> On Lamb's religious ideas, cfr Winifred F. Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 53 and Park, pp. 32-5. For Lamb's dislike of church mediation, cfr 'Unitarian Protests', I, 264-7.

<sup>44</sup> See Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 129.

<sup>45</sup> 'Detached Thoughts', p. 173; cfr to Coleridge, 11 October 1802 and November 4, 1802, *MLL*, II, pp. 78, 84-5.

## Reviews

RICHARD W. CLANCEY, *Wordsworth's Classical Undersong: Education, Rhetoric, and Poetic Truth*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd./New York: St. Martins, 2000, ISBN 0-333-76034-4 (£45/\$65).

Dick Clancey opens this book by telling us how he conceived of it while sitting in the schoolhouse at Hawkshead, and reflecting on the school's influence on the 'lively, talented lad who was to become one of England's greatest poets'. If the present reviewer is correct, in recalling he was present on the same occasion, then this book has been a long time coming, as other evidence suggests it has indeed. It thus qualifies for the common epithet 'long-awaited' — indeed, eagerly awaited — and many of Clancey's friends and colleagues will be delighted to see it has now arrived safely.

It is arranged in three parts. These deal with Wordsworth's academic education; his debt to Horace and ancient ideas of 'poetic truth' more generally; and the fruition of this in the poetry, mainly *The Prelude*. The long autobiographical poem embodies the 'ethos' that Horatian and Aristotelian poetics recommend.

A short review could hardly do justice to the many rich sections of this book. I therefore concentrate here on two central aspects; the Hawkshead experience and the direct influence of ancient poetics rather than (as might have been expected) via Milton, whom Wordsworth once referred to as 'my great rival'. After a chapter on the ambience of the traditional English grammar school more generally, Clancey describes, in detail, what Hawkshead had to offer in Wordsworth's time. In Ben Schneider's words, cited here, Hawkshead was then 'one of the best schools in England'. Simplifying somewhat, it had two main features: the excellent teaching and the advanced curriculum. The curriculum was as strong in classics as any other English school, for example starting on Demosthenes earlier in a pupil's life than did Shrewsbury under Samuel Butler and probably ahead of St. Paul's historically altogether (Clancey, p. 45). Yet Hawkshead was also uniquely strong in mathematics. This second factor was much due to its outstanding teaching staff, inspired a little before Wordsworth's time by its eminent headmaster, James Peake. Clancey brings out the way Peake started at Manchester, its ex-pupils had taken first, third and fifth positions — Wranglers — in the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos. But one of Peake's own Hawkshead pupils later was, of course, Wordsworth's own beloved teacher, William Taylor, himself second Wrangler at Cambridge in 1778. Since Peake, Taylor and other Hawkshead teachers were deeply versed in English poetry too and encouraged their pupils to explore it: the ingredients were in place for the education, which was to be so formative for the young poet. This combination, of high-level classics but also its dilution by other studies, comes out, I think, both in Wordsworth's own career as a poet and, if sometimes indirectly, in what Clancey says about it.

In writing of Horace, Clancey actually goes rather back through the Latin poet to his mentor, Aristotle. Clancey's emphasis is on Aristotle's presentation of the parts of rhetoric as ethical, pathetic and logical; this is to say depending on the poet's personal character, the influence on the audience's attitude, and the proof-content (so to call it) of the poem's actual language, respectively. Clancey is firm, as Aristotle is on the importance of the first, by which the poem achieves credibility, especially but not only 'where exact certainty is impossible' (68). If as Richard Onorato suggested (also cited in

Clancey, pp. 127-28), the Wordsworth of *The Prelude* is 'almost ... a fictional character' – in my own view a necessity of any aesthetic work – then this 'ethical proof' element in rhetoric would, if paradoxically, become supremely important in any autobiographical poem.

Clancey's discussion of *The Prelude* in Part III of his book is detailed and provocative. Again, extended comment is impossible here but, for example, there is a close reading of the boat-stealing passage and its permeation by 'motion' literal and psychological; the poet's visit to William Taylor's grave at the time of Robespierre's death; and such well-known passages as the Alps crossing and the Snowden ascent. Here and elsewhere, the sense of the 'personal character of the speaker' as rhetoric is brought out as to, not an objective 'topic', but the life of the poet, himself, presently writing. The poet seems to address both the reader and himself (is 'overheard', in Mill's term); is profoundly concerned with his own language and says so; 'turns autobiography into argument' (Clancey p. 129), and builds the very life which led up to the writing of the poem about it. Here I found myself returning to the Hawkshead wider curriculum – classical and yet more than that – and John Milton, of whom, at first sight, Clancey says surprisingly little as presumed epic-poet forbear. Yet this is logical. Milton's own education at St. Paul's was almost a hundred percent classical (pp. 39-40). Wordsworth's rejection of typical epic topics in the traditional mould in *The Prelude* Book I – including 'some old/Romantic tale by Milton left unsung' – is renowned. Wordsworth's epic poem is classical, then, not in adherence to formal models but in its 'undersong' of a rhetoric premised on what Wordsworth himself most claimed interested him. This is to say, the 'human heart', or, more specifically, how we do in fact relate to each other, with the poet's more comprehensive soul as self-knowing and suitably humble voice of that condition. As Clancey says in some of the book's most convincing pages (pp. 130-36), Wordsworth was most influenced by Milton's strong epic ambitions, so that he (Wordsworth) aimed less to copy Milton than, from his very admiration, to compete with him.

Not all of this book bears on its central arguments. It doesn't matter. One of its strengths is its open-face quality, leaving the reader to pursue local details and fit them in as and when he/she wishes. Clancey's writing is also approachable. He sounds as though he is speaking. Some might call it earnest at times; certainly there's no idle chat. Nor is he afflicted by the foot-and-mouth disease (sheep are prone to it) which renders some critics unable to find a good quality in the poet himself. It is a valuable addition to the small canon of criticism that bears directly on Wordsworth's education.

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## Society Notes and News From Members

NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

### *Horny Catbabe Fails to Save Straw's Blushes*

Under the above title in *The Daily Telegraph*, very much one of the 'quality' British, Q.C., a top British lawyer, wrote a very serious article, on 19 September 2000, about film censorship and the potential regulation of videos intended for adult audiences. 'Straw', by the way, is the Home Secretary, the splendidly mediaevally-named Jack Straw. One argument ran that children might see such videos and, further, be damaged by them. In the middle of the article appears the sentence 'As Mr. Justice Frankfurter stated in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1957, reversing a conviction under a statute which made it an offence to publish books that had a potentially harmful influence on children, "Surely this is to burn the house to roast the pig".' D. E. Wickham



*Claude Prance*

Claude Prance, a long time Elian who has contributed to the Lamb Society in so many ways, including serving as a Vice-President for nearly 20 years (and a member for more than 60 years), recently sold his superb collection of Eliana to the National Library of Australia. Highlights of Mr. Prance's collection include the second edition of Coleridge's *Poems* (1797) and a first edition of Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (1823), as well as many other notable editions of works by and about Lamb and his circle. Prance, pictured at the left, with several of the more notable volumes from his collection, recalls Lamb, himself, 'whose treasures are rather cased in leather covers than closed in iron coffers'. With the acquisition of the Prance Collection, many scholars can continue to access and enjoy its treasures. R. S. Tomlinson

### In Memoriam

*Professor Jack Morpurgo (26 April 1918 – 2 October 2000)*

Jack Morpurgo joined the Charles Lamb Society in 1946 and was Guest of Honor at the Charles Lamb Birthday celebration in 1976. In recent years he enjoyed the company of past and present Blues at the Birthday Luncheons. His *Charles Lamb and Elia*, published by Carcanet Books, has been presented to Grecians from Christ's Hospital at the Luncheons.

Derek Marriot (a fellow Old Blue) writes:

JEM attended Christ's Hospital 1929-36, becoming a History Grecian and House Captain before proceeding to university in Canada. In due course he became a Donation Governor and shortly thereafter a member of the Council of Almonere on which he served for some twelve years and for part of which time he was Deputy Chairman of the Council. He was also Chairman of the Treasures Committee for fourteen years, 1985-1999. His work for the School, to which over many years he gave more than willingly of his time, knowledge, and experience, afforded him great satisfaction.

He was a Brother, and in his turn President, of the Amicable Society of Blues which, with a history dating back to some years before 1681 and possibly to as early 1629, claims to be the oldest dining club in the country. Charles Lamb was not one of the Amicable Brethren but, invited by them to a dinner in his honour at the London Tavern on 11 February 1817, was bidden to reply to the Toast to the Visitors. Overcome by the awesomeness of his task, he stammered the one word, 'G-G-Gentlemen,' and sat down, thereby adding to the annals of the Society the best, because the shortest, after-dinner speech of all time. (This occasion is probably the one mentioned by CL in his letter to Mrs. William Wordsworth of 18 February 1818).

A sidelight on Jack's link with another CLS member appears in the eulogy on Tim Wilson delivered at the Service on 4 March 2000:

... he (Tim) played a founding part in the Bushey Liberal Association. . . . Together with two notable residents of Bushey's fringes, John Boulting and Professor Jack Morpurgo, they gained sufficient momentum and recruits to start winning seats and eventually Bushey and Hertsmere had Liberal Councils – at least for a time.

We extend our sympathy to his family in their sad loss and treasure the memory of one who did so much to foster the love of literature.

Madeline R. Huxstep

#### The Bulletin Board (announcements and queries of interest to Elians)

The Friends of Coleridge Kilve Course Study Weekend will be held from 7 – 9 September and will take as its theme, 'Coleridge in the City'. Speakers will be Nicholas and Cecelia Powell, Mary Wedd, Nicola Trott, John Beer and Stuart Andrews. Further details from Mrs. Shirley Watters, 11 Castle Street, Nether Stowey, Somerset TA5 1LN, U.K.

Peter Larkin

This month, April, Ashgate is publishing *Tellers and telling in the English novel: In Memoriam of Bill Ruddick*, Ed. Richard Gravil, ISBN: 0-7546-0128-5 (£42). This eagerly-awaited anthology contains work by many individuals well known to us, including Mary Wedd, Frederick Burwick, Jane Stabler, Richard Gravil, Alan Shelston, Nicola Trott, Gerard Barrett, and Michael O'Neill. They have considered, in particular, Sterne, Fielding, Scott, Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, Gaskell, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, and Lawrence. This collection promises to be an excellent read and a wonderful way to remember Bill.

R. S. Tomlinson