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CHARLES LAMB, THE APOSTATE: 1796-1798

Jane Aaron

The creative fires of Charles Lamb were first set alight, according to his own testimony, by the example and influence of his friend and former school-mate, S T Coleridge. During the winter evenings of 1794-5, the two met frequently at a London tavern, the 'Salutation and Cat'. There Lamb enjoyed 'those old suppers at our old \*\*\*\*\* Inn, - when life was fresh, and topics exhaustless, - and you first kindled in me, if not the power, yet the love of poetry' (L W, v, 2). Coleridge, in his youth at least, must have had an extraordinary capacity for inspiring and awakening latent creativity. In 1798, the twenty year old Hazlitt was 'stunned, startled...as from deep sleep' by his first encounter with the inflammatory conversationalist and preacher, and thereafter considered Coleridge's influence to have been the means whereby his understanding 'did not remain dumb and brutish', but 'found a language to express itself'.<sup>1</sup> For Wordsworth too, Coleridge's acquaintance in the late 1790s proved a vital source of inspiration, as so much of his poetry and prose gratefully acknowledges. That Lamb, with much sensitivity and a natural tendency towards hero-worship, should have been strongly impressed, is therefore hardly surprising.

Although the potency of Coleridge's influence upon him has not since been doubted, certain of Lamb's critics and biographers, and even his close acquaintance, have questioned, however, whether its effect was wholly beneficial. In 1796, John Lamb, for one, attributed to the pernicious after-effects of those heady nights at 'the little smoky room at the Salutation and Cat' his younger brother's mental collapse the subsequent winter. Lamb informed Coleridge of his brother's attitude:

much as he dwelt upon your conversation while you were among us, and delighted to be with you, it has been his fashion ever since to depreciate and cry you down, - you were the cause of my madness - you and your damned foolish sensibility and melancholy - and he lamented with a true brotherly feeling that we ever met (L L, i, 78).

Charles and his brother did not always concur in their judgements; nevertheless, for all that Lamb obviously reports the damning pronouncement with tongue in cheek, his own account of the onset of his illness does not wholly clear Coleridge of the incrimination. In 1794, both young men had been suffering from recent disappointments in love; Coleridge, not surprisingly, was best able to give satisfactory expression to their mutual loss. Such was Lamb's appreciation of his friend's eloquence that his own grief appears to have been sympathetically absorbed into it, without finding fit and necessary exposition of its own. 'In your conversation you had blended so many pleasant fancies, that they cheated me of my grief', he recalled later. As a result, when Coleridge left London,

in your absence, the tide of melancholy rush'd in again, & did its worst mischief by overwhelming my Reason (L L, i, 18).

Lamb recovered quickly from that collapse and never had to enter an asylum on his own account again. Yet, if we are to take his word for it, his tendency to rely on Coleridge to provide authoritative endorsements for his own half-thoughts and impressions persisted throughout his life. A few months after Coleridge's death on July 25th 1834, and one month before his own, Lamb recorded in a private album what must be accepted as his sincere assessment, in his bereavement, of the life-long relation between them. He hardly presents it as one of reciprocity and intellectual equality:

His great and dear spirit haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men or books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touchstone of all my cogitations. He was a Grecian (or in the first form) at Christ's Hospital, where I was a deputy Grecian; and the same subordination and deference to him, I have preserved through a life-long acquaintance (L W, i, 351).

Many of his biographers have taken seriously to heart Lamb's avowal here, and have seen in the promptness with which Lamb's death followed upon his friend's proof of his inability to continue without that support: Lucas, for example, in the standard life, insists that Lamb 'began to die on July 25th' (ii, 269). Thus blame for the two disintegrations of Lamb's life, one mental, and the second the final physical deterioration, has been laid at Coleridge's door; his personality is understood to have supported the deputy Grecian to such an extent that Lamb could barely tolerate his absence, and collapsed utterly on the permanent withdrawal. And certainly, it must be admitted that throughout his life, whenever Lamb referred to Coleridge, he employed the concepts of dominion or possession to describe his friend's influence over him. Coleridge's poetry affected him powerfully; first his 'Joan or Arc', then the 'Ancient Mariner' Lamb describes as having 'made me feel possess'd' and 'dragged me along'. Of the latter he adds: 'I was totally possessed with it for many days' (L L, i, pp 15 and 266). In the flesh, he judged Coleridge's power 'of exciting interest, of leading all hearts captive' too 'forcible' to make him a suitable host for Mary after her illness (L L, i, 127), and even as late as April 1816 wrote similarly to Wordsworth of Coleridge's effect upon Mary and himself:

'Tis enough to be within the whiff and wind of his genius, for us not to possess our souls in quiet.<sup>2</sup>

These same references also serve, however, to show how Lamb sought to defend himself from any excessive dependency on Coleridge. They reveal his acute awareness of Coleridge's influence over him, and the last two show him wisely maintaining his equilibrium by denying himself the pleasure of his friend's company when it might dangerously affect his self-possession, or Mary's. In fact during the last half of their lives, Lamb and Coleridge met rarely in person, although Coleridge was then residing permanently in London. What is more, those critics who have examined the relation in detail, and from a perspective necessarily more detached than Lamb's own, conclude generally that it was one of far greater reciprocity than Lamb's grateful humility would allow. Edith C Johnson's paper on 'Lamb and Coleridge' illustrates the 'strong and mutual respect' both entertained for each other's minds, and John Beer, writing very recently in the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, though he stresses Lamb's discipleship to Coleridge, goes on to suggest that in his adherence to one central Coleridgean concept, that of the 'philosophy of the heart's imagination', the pupil showed a greater consistency and wholeheartedness than his master. Basil Willey, in an earlier *Bulletin*, also emphasizes the reciprocal relation between what he

presents as two different, but complementary minds.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the textual evidence for these critical presentations is taken from the early series of letters sent by Lamb to Coleridge during the years 1796-1798, when his dependency might have been expected to be at its completest. What the one detailed study of these letters aims to show, however, is the extent of Lamb's influence over Coleridge, and not *vice versa*. George Whalley has even entitled his essay 'Coleridge's debt to Lamb'; his argument is that after the maturing experience of his mother's death and Mary's illness, Lamb rid himself of his earlier 'painful vulnerability' and dependency upon Coleridge, and began to assert his own critical judgement. He did so to such effect that he refined Coleridge's taste and forced him to renounce that easy rhetorical sentimentality to which, according to Lamb's brother at least, the young Coleridge was indeed inclined. Whalley even proposes that Lamb's compelling suggestions, along with what he rather loosely terms 'other hints and visions', finally brought about the composition of the 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan'. George Barnett in his latest volume on Lamb accepts Whalley's suggestions, and concedes that Lamb's criticisms 'may have been influential' in directing the creations of Coleridge's 'annus mirabilis'.<sup>4</sup>

Here is a reversal of roles indeed; but although the effect of these arguments is to make one rightly wary of swallowing wholesale Lamb's assessment of the relation, insufficient evidence prevents Whalley's suggestions from developing beyond the sphere of conjecture. For Coleridge's replies to Lamb's letters have been lost; only Lamb's own development in relation to his friend during this period, as he himself records it, can be traced with anything approaching certainty. Although Whalley grants so much to Lamb's influence, the focus of his essay is Coleridge's literary career; its scope does not allow him to explore with equal diligence Lamb's evolution. Yet, from the 'day of horrors' onward, this correspondence illustrates a slow process whereby Lamb gradually frees himself, not so much from his admiration for Coleridge, as from the influence over him of certain systems of thought which Coleridge then advocated, and he had at first enthusiastically adopted. As such, the letters detail the first self-affirmatory and, indeed, self-discovering steps towards the formulation of that familiar Elian personality whose characteristics included the abhorrence of all system-making as arbitrary and exclusive, and who 'learned to shrink from writing down anything that was not as it were *part of himself*'.<sup>5</sup> But in order to appreciate fully Lamb's developing independence during this period we must first summarize briefly the nature of those systems to which Coleridge sought his adherence.

i) *The Disciple*: 'I was a very patient hearer and docile scholar in our winter evenings at Mr. May's; was I not, Col.? (L L, i, 113).

In 1795, Coleridge adhered to two very singular systems of thought, one in the field of aesthetics, the other theological. His literary enthusiasms were still engrossed by the slow twilight of the era of sensibility or sentimentality. A fervent youthful admiration for the popular sonneteer, Bowles, had not yet waned, and led him to make proselytes for his cause with what he later acknowledged in the *Biographia* to be 'undisciplined eagerness and impetuous zeal' (1907 ed., i, 9). His enthusiasm stemmed from the conviction that reading Bowles had first 'Wak'd in me Fancy, Love and Sympathy'. The sonnet to Bowles in which he so maintains continues:

And when the *darker* day of life began,  
And I did roam a thought-bewilder'd man!

Thy kindred Lays an healing solace lent,  
 Each lonely pang with dreamy joys combin'd,  
 And stole from vain REGRET her scorpion stings (C P, i, 84).

These lines suggest that direct and unabashed escapism constituted the main charm of Bowles's work for the young Coleridge, an escapism of self-indulgent sensation and of evocation of the muses as a soothing drug to distance or obliterate painful realities. To produce such effects was indeed Bowles's intention; in the introduction to his 1789 *Sonnets*, he presents his poems as 'composed in solitary hours when I sought forgetfulness of the first disappointment in early love'. Later, the twentieth sonnet of the volume stresses the seductive capacities of harmonious melliflence to dissolve the anguish of true grief. When Coleridge and Lamb, both 'sore gall'd with disappointed hope', met in the 'Salutation and Cat', it was probably with these sonnets, or with his imitations of them, that Coleridge enchanted and bemused Lamb, with "many an holy lay, that mourning, soothed the mourner on his way" (L L, i, 18). Lamb was indeed captivated, and proceeded to produce his own Bowlesian sonnets, which Swinburne was later to dismiss as a 'few imitative sentimentalities of his earliest versifying days'.<sup>6</sup>

In theology, Coleridge embraced the then fashionable creed of necessarianism. Consistently enough, the goal of this system of thought was also the disintegration of human anguish in the face of evil or pain. The necessarian optimist taught that suffering and evil were a necessary part of Providence's design, and needs must culminate in good. Coleridge endorsed his commitment to extreme necessarianism when he announced in his 'Lectures on Revealed Religion' of 1795:

Reasoning strictly and with logical Accuracy I should deny the existence of any Evil, inasmuch as the end determines the nature of the means and I have been able to discover nothing of which the end is not good.

Human pain and suffering are but 'a stimulus to Man in order that he may remove moral Evil'.<sup>7</sup> Such must have been Coleridge's eloquence in presenting this creed to his disciple that Lamb was enthusiastically ready to adopt the system too, as his letters reveal:

I rejoyce in being, speculatively, a necessarian. - Would to God, I were habitually a practical one. Confirm me in the faith of that great & glorious doctrine, & keep me steady in the contemplation of it (L L, i, 89).

That the long term repercussions of the manner of his mother's death had a detrimental effect upon Lamb's loyalty towards a doctrine so dismissive of human suffering is hardly surprising. As for his allegiance to the sentimental ethos, a closer study than Swinburne's of the imitative poetry he produced does, in fact, reveal that even before September 1796, elements of individuality did manifest themselves in Lamb's work. Traces of an authentic anguish and intensity alien to Bowles's characteristic tone, and at odds with his concept of art as the disperser of cares, tend to find their way into Lamb's earliest verse. He appears occasionally to be attempting to find some poetic expression for a sense of irredeemable loss and personal nullity which haunted him at this time, and culminated in the six weeks in 'a madhouse at Hoxton'. But Coleridge, exercising his privilege as mentor over Lamb's work, appears to have found even these very tentative approaches towards an individual voice unacceptable.

In 1794, for example, Lamb supplied the concluding lines for a sonnet of Coleridge's which lamented the passing of 'pleasant days of Hope'. Lamb's lines read originally, at least in Coleridge's transcription of them in a letter to Southey,

Availeth not Persuasion's sweetest Tone  
To lure the fleet-wing'd Travellers back again -  
On on they haste to everlasting Night,  
Nor can a Giant's arm arrest them in their Flight (C L, i, 136).

Lamb here wishes to stress a despair at the total and unequivocal loss of the past which Coleridge appeared to have considered inappropriate to the general melliflence of the poem. He retained Lamb's first two lines but altered the concluding couplet to read:

Yet fair, though faint, their images shall gleam  
Like the bright Rainbow on a willowy stream (C P, i, 48).

Similarly, Coleridge seems to have been disturbed by the last lines of one of Lamb's own sonnets. Lamb portrays himself as aboard ship in a state of wild despair which the elements aggravate

Even till it seemed a pleasant thing to die, -  
To be resolv'd into th'elemental wave,  
Or take my portion with the winds that rave (L W, v, 4).

The mere suggestion of such drastic and irrevocable self-destruction was sufficiently contrary to the diffused and vapory melancholia of a Bowlesian mood for Coleridge to reject the lines and insert in their place a more palliative conclusion:

How Reason Reel'd! What gloomy transports rose!  
Till the rude dashings rock'd them to repose (L W, v, 280).

But such radical alteration of his meaning did goad the docile disciple. In refusing to grant these lines his approbation Lamb exclaims with some heat:

"How reason reel'd" &c. -, are good lines, but must spoil the whole *with me*, who know it is only a fiction of yours & that the rude dashings did in fact *not rock me to repose* (L L, i, 20).

His indignation reveals the sonnets' authenticity, and he stresses that he saw them as representing a sincere anguish:

I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times...I charge you, Col., *spare my ewe lambs*.

As they stand, Lamb's juvenilia suggest that he could not fit himself quite as completely to Coleridge's ideology as his affections led him to believe he could, and should. He was not yet sufficiently in control of his craft, however, to realize that the Bowlesian sonnet genre was in fact distorting his emotion, and hindering its true expression. But the shock of his mother's death, and its consequence, greatly accelerated Lamb's development towards self-awareness and creative independence, and had an immediate effect upon his career as a poet.

ii) *The Apostate of Sensibility*: 'with me the former things are passed away, and I have something more to do that (*sic*) to feel -'  
(L L, i, 44).

At the close of that letter by which Coleridge was first informed of the events of September 22nd, 1796, Lamb announced his decision to abandon

poetry. In the light of the fearful responsibilities then thrust upon him 'the idle trade of versifying' seemed a petty distraction. The banality of the verse which he had hitherto been encouraged to write probably accentuated his tendency to regard with suspicion any lingering poetical frame of mind, as if he feared the spuriousness of the emotions it might provoke. In December, he reiterates his decision to have done with verse-making on his own account, though he assures Coleridge that he does not therefore 'relish other people's poetry less' (L L, i, 72). But now that a grim reality had taught him to doubt the artificiality of his own past output, Lamb could not but look a little more critically at his friend's. He had occasionally criticised Coleridge's earlier poetry for lack of strenuousness; now his comments became more assiduous and compelling in their insistence upon the iniquity of spurious poetic feeling, and the virtue of simplicity in style and sincerity in content. Convinced of the need to 'Cultivate simplicity, Coleridge, ... banish elaborateness, for simplicity springs spontaneous from the heart', he dismissed certain Coleridgean passages with curt assurance: 'I hate made-dishes at the muses' banquet' (L L, i, 102).

Nor were Lamb's expostulations wasted on one who held bad writing to be the result of bad feeling. In December 1796 Coleridge confessed to John Thelwall that his poetry 'frequently both in thought & language deviates from "nature and simplicity"' (C L, i, 278). A month later, in two consecutive letters to his publisher, Joseph Cottle, he acknowledges Lamb's influence directly, and even announces that he thought Lamb's '*taste & judgement*... more correct & philosophical than my own' (C L, i, 297 and 309). In later years Coleridge became one of the most influential critics to analyse and denounce the excessive egotism and bad faith to which the epoch of sensibility was liable. No doubt his former allegiance to the creed added the harshness of personal shame to his recoil from it. At any rate, in *Aids to Reflection* he denounces the whole school as positively anti-Christian:

All the evil achieved by Hobbes... will appear inconsiderable, if it be compared with the mischief effected and occasioned by the sentimental Philosophy of STERNE, and his numerous imitators... Can anything *manly*, I say, proceed from those, who for Law and Light would substitute shapeless feelings, sentiments, impulses, which as far as they differ from the vital workings in the brute animals, owe the difference to their former connexion with the proper Virtues of Humanity (pp 24-5, 1884 ed.).

In 1798, however, Lamb himself, with the composition of his sentimental novel *Rosamund Gray*, became one of Sterne's numerous imitators. For Lamb's apostasy of sensibility was not in any sense absolute in 1796. If anything, his grief, loss and confusion made him for a period more in need of emotional release than ever, and although that same sharp grief showed him the ultimate uselessness of such ploys, the themes explored through the writing of *Rosamund* do apparently constitute an attempt at exorcism of his anguish through the morbid medium of the sentimental novel. But though the telling of the tale hopefully brought Lamb a measure of release, it did not serve to halt his growing distaste for the genre. For towards its close, marked signs of dissent levelled against the conventionalities of the sentimental, and even attacks upon its most favoured emotional citadels, are apparent within the novel itself. After the catastrophic close of Allan Clare's courtship of Rosamund, three of the novel's remaining characters dedicate themselves to lives of selfless service. Both the elder sister,

Elinor Clare, and the narrator of the tale affirm that they can only tolerate their continuing existence if it is to be of some worth to others, and Allan Clare has found in tending the inmates of hospitals and 'lazar houses' '*privileges*, for which he was content to live'. The widened experience of human life gained by Clare in the performance of these duties enables him to express judgement upon his previous existence, and indeed upon the ethos of the sentimental novel in general:

Between two persons of liberal education, like opinions, and common feelings, oftentimes subsists a Vanity of Sentiment, which disposes each to look upon the other as the only being in the universe worthy of friendship, or capable or understanding it - ...when the odds are, that under every green hill, and in every crowded street, people of equal worth are to be found, who do more good in their generation, and make less noise in the doing of it (L W, i, 29).

Possibly, there was some connection in Lamb's mind between this dismissal of sentimental friendships and a 1798 quarrel with Coleridge over the latter's treatment of his former protégé and Lamb's new friend, Charles Lloyd. At any rate, in the October of that year Lamb was writing similarly to Lloyd's brother, Robert, of the selfishness and narcissism inherent in specific friendships. He adds:

Our duties are to do good expecting nothing again, to bear with contrary dispositions, ...not to crave and long after a communication of sentiment and feeling, but rather to avoid dwelling upon those feelings, however good, because they are our own - a man may be intemperate & selfish, who indulges in *good feelings*, for the mere pleasure they give him (L L, i, 135).

His excessive dependence on Coleridge had passed and left behind it a residue of distaste toward such emotionally intense relationships; he tells Robert, 'You must depend upon yourself'. His enthusiasm for the sentimental ethos and for the cultivation of feeling for feeling's sake had slowly withered in the face of a most real and grievous cause for actual anguish. Fears of personal nullity, 'the painfulness of vacuity, all its achings & inexpressible longings', were to be eased not by the desperate effort to establish sentimental friendships and emotional communication, but rather, Lamb now thought, by the mundane domestic ties of duty and responsibility. These he presented to Lloyd as the only reliable 'object' of existence, and advised him to discipline his mind 'to wait with patience for duties that may be your lot in life' (L L, i, 134).

The few blank verse fragments Lamb did compose after 1796 cannot be considered as exceptions to his veto on sentimental poetry; concerned largely with his domestic trials they were intended 'to keep present to my mind a view of things which I ought to indulge', an aim which, as Lamb himself acknowledged, was hardly likely to heighten their purely aesthetic appeal (L L, i, 87). Taken in conjunction with his advice to Lloyd, Lamb's writing during this period is evidence of '*stamina* of seriousness' (see L L, ii, 11) so unalloyed by frivolity that the ironies and sustaining humour of the Elia essays seem far distant. Yet the context of Lamb's final epistolary reference to Bowles serves to redress the balance. Robert Lloyd, who seemed, in 1798, to turn to Lamb with an emotional need equivalent to that which had led Lamb earlier to rely heavily upon his 1796 correspondence with Coleridge, has again written to bemoan the fact that the world to him 'seemed drain'd of all its sweets'. After the mischievous suggestion that 'At first I hoped you only meant to insinuate the high price of Sugar', a

comment obviously intended to persuade the young man not to take his dependency too seriously, Lamb replies:

You may extract honey from everything; do not go a gathering after gall - . the bees are wiser in their generation than the race of sonnet writers & complainers, Bowles & Charlotte Smiths, & all that tribe, who can see no joys but what are past and fill people's heads with notions of the unsatisfying nature of Earthly comforts - . I assure you I find this world a very pretty place (L L, i, 144).

In view of Lamb's self-acknowledged temptation throughout a much troubled life to see 'no joys but what are past', that he should be able to present such advice at this stage illustrates the extent of mature and balanced perception already achieved. The note thus struck is markedly reminiscent of the gently solacing closes of many of the milder Elian essays, with their effect of leaving the reader 'more at home in the human condition'. Sentimental melancholia and self-willed and indulgent alienation might remain potential temptations, but for Lamb there was no longer anything honourable or aesthetically commendable in their practice.

iii) *The Apostate of Necessarianism and Supernaturalism*: 'I detest the vanity of a man thinking he speaks by the spirit' (L L, i, 103).

If Lamb's apostasy of sentimentalism had wavered, his development away from Coleridge's theological doctrines traced a yet more winding path. The situation was complicated by Coleridge's own response to the 'day of horrors'. In accordance with his necessarian convictions of the usefulness of pain, Coleridge bestowed upon the stricken Lamb the sanctity of a man of sorrows, a chosen scapegoat son:

I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God! (C L, i, 239).

Not even the young Coleridge, however, could for long welcome as disguised grace the tragedy that struck the Lamb family, or so at least Katherine Coburn gathered from her attempts to date his notebook entries. A typically necessarian pronouncement reads:

Real Pain can alone cure us of imaginary ills! We feel a thousand miseries till we are lucky enough to feel Misery (C N, i, 28).

Kathleen Coburn remarks:

It seems doubtful whether this entry could have been written after Coleridge knew about Lamb's domestic tragedy.

And when a little later Coleridge abruptly records seeing

Our quaint metaphysical opinions in an hour of anguish like playthings by the bedside of a child deadly sick (C N, i, 182),

his editor assigns the entry to late September or early October, 1796, an assumption obviously based upon the probability that Coleridge's volte-face was the consequence of Lamb's tragedy. Coleridge is understood to indicate that his vicarious experience through Lamb of acute but innocent suffering, had indeed shaken the basis of his necessarian confidence. It did not prevent him from exhorting Lamb at the time to consider the tragedy as an opportunity for moral rearmament, but did afford him a glimpse of the horror and reality of pain, undreamt of in his philosophy. Not much later, in 1801, Coleridge renounced completely the doctrine of necessarianism.



As for Lamb himself, he admitted in replying to Coleridge that his own reaction to the tragedy had not been primarily religious. He phrases his account with care:

is it folly or sin in me to say that it was a religious principle that *most* supported me? I allow much to other favourable circumstance. I felt that I had something else to do than to regret (L L, i, 47).

In other words, he was not immediately struck down by the horror and desolation of his situation, but found in his immediate responsibilities a solace to his confusion, and a release from that spiritual isolation with which Coleridge had envisaged him burdened. And when Mary began to recover, Lamb's relief was such that with the returning hope for their eventual happy life together, he felt positively joyous. But Coleridge's letter had the effect of returning him forcibly to the profundities of his situation:

I was in danger of making myself too happy; your letter brought me back to a view of things I had entertained from the beginning...I must be serious, circumspect, & deeply religious thro' lif/e;/ & by such means may *both* of us escape madness in the future if it pleases the Almighty (L L, i, 51).

During the next few months the tone of Lamb's letters is characterized by repeated pleas for Coleridge's spiritual support; the intensity of his need appears to be the consequence of an uncertainty in adopting the saintly role. As far as Coleridge was concerned, sacrifice and sainthood were apparent in Lamb's care of his sister, but Lamb himself, as his letters reveal, saw his loyalty to Mary as based purely upon a natural, abiding affection. He refused to regard her as in any way changed, or removed from him, by her temporary attack. The most assured happiness of his previous existence had been her company, and his attempt to regain it was quite untinged by any sense of the virtue of his behaviour. Coleridge's letter had the effect not of rendering his sainthood tangible to him but of convincing Lamb that supernatural powers had laid a particular burden upon him; as he assured Coleridge he accepted at the time the necessity this appeared to lay upon him to maintain strictly religious habits of mind, without regression into despondency or carelessness. But to aid him in that endeavour, Lamb found himself yearning more for the comfort of human assistance than for divine support. He complained to Coleridge of the dearth in his circumstances of "a choice of company, as tends to keep up the right bent, & firmness of mind", and admits in 1797 that

a careless and a dissolute spirit has advanced upon *me* with large strides...I want more religion - . I am jealous of human helps & leaning places (L L, i, pp. 126-7).

His natural inclination is to turn toward human support to weather through his despondency.

Lamb's stress upon the benefits of human companionship is consonant with another aspect of his growing inability to accept Coleridge unquestioningly as a religious guide during this period. In his consolatory letter, Coleridge had offended both Charles and his sister by his easy assumption of human participation in the divine. Lamb answers:

You seem to me to have been straining your comparing faculties to the utmost to bring together things infinitely distant and unlike; the feeble narrow-sphered operations of the human intellect and the everywhere diffused mind of Deity.

Man, Lamb insists, is a 'weak and ignorant being', with eyes sometimes open to discern the right path, but a head generally too dizzy to pursue it' (L L, i, 54 and 56). The human stands in relation to its God as a child to its parents, and can never himself partake of divinity. One consequence of Lamb's commitment to this view may have been his religious uncertainty in later life. Developing independence and maturity of mind could not but endanger so determinedly child-like a faith. If no human capability, not even the most spiritually exalted, could be regarded as a means by which to approximate to the divine, then, as the 'child' matured, his divine parent, in so far as he could hardly like the human parent come to be seen by the developing individual as human like himself, became a more and more shadowy concept. His existence was not refuted, but simply lost all practical meaning.

But whatever the future effects of Lamb's belief, its consequence at this period was to make him recoil with much suspicion from any believer who sought to set himself above his fellows by claiming for himself divine powers, or particular spiritual approbation. Lamb could no more approve of the saintly pretensions of others than he could tolerate the concept of himself as a saint. An excellent example of this developing characteristic is his account of the disillusionment he suffered in attempting to embrace the Quaker faith. His dislike of any preaching had awakened his sympathy for Quakerism, but, at one meeting he attended,

Unluckily...I saw a man under all the agitations and workings of a fanatic, who believed himself under the influence of some 'inevitable presence'. This cured me of Quakerism; I love it in the books of Penn and Woolman, but I detest the vanity of a man thinking he speaks by the spirit (L L, i, 103).

Lamb's abhorrence of all separatism through pride, and especially of religious separatism, was pronounced throughout his life. It found poetic expression at this early period in the closing lines of 'Composed at Midnight', one of the last of his blank verse confessional pieces. Here Lamb castigates those poets or 'prose declaimers' who have fabricated for themselves a beatific vision of the after-life, but have 'o'er stocked hell with devils' for their less worthy fellows. The poet complacently pictures himself elevated into a 'heaven of gold',

...far removed  
 From damned spirits and the torturing cries  
 Of men his brethren, fashioned of the earth,  
 As he was, nourish'd with the self-same bread,  
 Belike his kindred or companions once -  
 Through everlasting ages now divorced, ...  
 Their groans unheard  
 In heaven, the saint nor pity feels, nor care,  
 For those thus sentenced - pity might disturb  
 The delicate sense and most divine repose  
 Of spirits angelical (L W, v, pp. 24-5).

The satire of these last lines is encoed in the 'Theological Propositions' which brought to a close the sequence of Lamb's early correspondence with Coleridge, and marked their quarrel over Coleridge's supposed negligence of Lloyd. Lamb, responding to Coleridge's invitation, 'poor Lamb, if he wants any *knowledge* he may apply to me' (L L, i, 130), requests information regarding the angelic attributes, as opposed to those of their merely human

counterparts. The 'angels', Coleridge's presumed ideals, he envisages as heavenly analogies to those arrogant and separatist metaphysicians and poets attacked in 'Composed at Midnight'. Lamb asks whether they only 'manifest their virtues by the way of vision & theory', practice being a 'sub-celestial & merely human virtue'. He wonders whether they do not sometimes sneer, and whether they have the capacity to love. The letter is signed, with some irony now,

Your friend and docile Pupil to instruct  
Charles Lamb (L L, i, pp.128-9).

The rift, such as it was, was not of long duration, thanks largely to Coleridge's wise and affectionate recognition of its cause. He wrote openly to Lamb giving his assessment of the situation:

Both you & Lloyd became acquainted with me at a season when your minds were far from being in a composed or natural state, & you clothed my image with a suit of notions & feelings which could belong to nothing human. *You* are restored to comparative saneness, & are merely wondering what is become of the Coleridge with whom you were so passionately in love (C L, i, 405).

But however more moderate Lamb's opinion of his friend had become by 1798, Coleridge still retained the ability to inspire his creative potential. Barnett suggests that *Rosamund Gray* and Lamb's play, *John Woodvil*, were the products of renewed enthusiasm inspired by visiting Coleridge in 1797.<sup>8</sup> And certainly Lamb himself recorded in a letter to Thomas Manning that it was Coleridge who encouraged him in 1800 to compose the pastiche of Burton, his first published prose (L L, i, pp.189-90). For all his failings, Coleridge retained through life for Lamb an aura of that charismatic near-divinity they had both recognized and criticised in 1798; he remained 'an Archangel a little damaged', his face with its 'ancient glory'.<sup>9</sup>

But the close dependency had passed; Lamb had found an individual voice through the development of a faith of his own, consistent though never systematized, in the primary need for compassionate and inclusive bonds with one's kind, and in art as a means of extending and enriching the possibility of such relation. Unlike Coleridge, who sought for but never discovered an unity of the heart and the head, Lamb found in this endeavour work which harmonized and expressed every aspect of his being. Coleridge's final commendation of his friend best captures this characteristic of his personality:

Charles Lamb has more totality and individuality of character than any other man I know, or have ever known in all my life. In most men we distinguish between the different powers of their intellect as one being predominant over the other...But in Charles Lamb it is altogether one; his genius is his talent, and his talent is his genius, and his heart is as whole and one as his head.<sup>10</sup>

For all his developed independence of thought and expression, this was the one perception which Lamb could hardly have formulated and presented on his own account. But his work and life together testify to the validity of Coleridge's opinion of his character, a character shaped by tragedy but strengthened and illuminated by the courage and selflessness of its response.

#### Abbreviations:

L W *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E V Lucas (1903-5), 7 vols.

- L L *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W Marrs, Jr (1975-).
- C N *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (1957-).
- C L *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E L Griggs (1956-1971), 6 vols.
- C P *Coleridge's Poems*, ed. E H Coleridge (1912), 2 vols.

## Notes:

1. *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P P Howe (1933), xvii, 107.
2. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E V Lucas (1935), ii, 191.
3. Edith C Johnson, *The American Scholar*, vi (Phi Beta Kappa, New York: Spring 1937), pp.153-170; John Beer, 'Coleridge and Lamb: The Central Themes', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, xiv (April 1976), pp.109-123; Basil Willey, 'Charles Lamb and S T Coleridge', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, i (January 1973), pp.1-9.
4. George Whalley, *Essays and Studies*, ii (1958), pp.74-81; George L Barnett, *Charles Lamb* (Twayne's English Authors Series, Boston: 1976), p.131.
5. Percy Fitzgerald, *Charles Lamb; his Friends, his Haunts, and his Books* (1866), p.3.
6. *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, ed. E Gosse and T J Wise (1926), iv, 247.
7. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, i, ed. L Patton and P Man (Princeton: 1971), p.106.
8. *Charles Lamb*, p.47.
9. *Letters*, ed. Lucas, ii, 190.
10. Quoted as 'the following few but valuable sentences, imputed from the lips of the late S.T. Coleridge' in *Monthly Repository*, ix (1835), p.627.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

John Unsworth

Apropos some lines addressed to Elia in the *London Magazine* for August 1821 protesting at Elia's dubious attitude to the survival of bodily death in his essay on 'New Year's Eve', published January 1821, Lamb wrote to J Taylor on the 30th July and returned the copy of the lines sent him. He writes, 'Poor Elia, (call him Ellia) does not pretend to so very clear a revelation of a future state...' Later in the same letter he writes, 'Poor Elia, the real (for I am but a counterfeit) is dead. The fact is, a person of that name, an Italian, was a fellow clerk of mine at the South Sea House'. He was doubtful, he says, as to how his description of the place might be received when he wrote the first Essay of Elia in 1820, 'Recollections of the South Sea House', and so 'clapt the name of Elia to it, which passed off pretty well, for Elia himself added the function of an author to that of a scrivener, like myself...He died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it. So the name has fairly devolved to me, I think, and 'tis all he has left me'. Lamb's explanation as to how he came

to choose the name Elia as a pen-name may, or may not be true, but it does not answer the intriguing question which remains: why did he insist so strongly, 'call him Ellia'? Lamb it will be remembered was heterodox, a Unitarian, and it is no surprise that he 'did not pretend to so clear a revelation of future states, (but) stumbles about dark mountains - he knows at least how to be thankful for this life... He is too apt to express himself lightly...his *animus* at least hath always been cum Christianis'.

The chronology is interesting. 'The South Sea House' was written and published in 1820: in November the same year the essay, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' was published. The latter essay begins as though written by Coleridge, but towards the end it changes style and Elia is writing *about* Coleridge: 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge - Logician, Metaphysician, Bard! How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold...the mysteries of Jamblichus or Plotinus...while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the inspired charity boy'. There is no reason to doubt that Coleridge did indeed 'spout' metaphysical speculations and 'conjured over Boehme', and the names of Iamblichus and Plotinus are only two of many that Lamb would have heard and remembered. One can be quite sure that Giordano Bruno was among the names spoken. The name Mirandula, the prototype of Coleridge himself, 'the young Mirandula', applied to Coleridge by Lamb, is no less than Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), who was indeed 'A Logician, a metaphysician and a bard'. Pico, like Coleridge, can well be dubbed 'An Inquiring Spirit' and he was a Neo-Platonist, learning much from the works of Ficino, Porphyry and Plotinus himself: works which we later find Coleridge studying. Pico was eager to know all the secrets of Nature - he became acquainted with the Cabala, the school of Hebrew mysticism - and is said to have gone to Rome with some nine hundred theses for debate.

We have Lamb's word for Coleridge's speculations at an early age; we also have Coleridge's own testimony in the autobiographical letters to Tom Poole, and the essay in which Lamb identifies him with Pico was written in 1820, with hindsight, and when Coleridge was already pretty well established as the Sage of Highgate. It could be said of Pico, as of Coleridge, that from an early age he 'was habituated to the vast', gifted with great ability to acquire and assimilate knowledge and information of very varied kinds. Both men were eager to search out 'the secrets of Nature', and both sought to devise a system which would reconcile the Many and the One. Both sought to effect a reconciliation between Philosophy and Christianity, and Coleridge's assertion that 'Christianity is the only true philosophy' applied no less to Pico. When Coleridge heads Chapter XIII of the *Biographia*, 'On the Imagination or Esemplastic Power' he echoes the convictions of Pico particularly when in that chapter Coleridge explains, 'The primary imagination I hold to be the *living power* and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'. The words of Coleridge and the sentiments of Mirandula.

Placed side by side the similarity between Pico and Coleridge is startling today - how much more so to Lamb. From his childhood Pico was noted as a future scholar; after two years study at Bologna from the age of 14 years, he devotes himself to speculative learning and is chiefly noted for his indefatigable spirit of inquiry, as witness his nine hundred theses! His personal orthodoxy was in question, especially with respect to the person

of Christ and his defence of Origen. All the above can be paralleled in Coleridge, even to the soft spot for Origen. (See McFarland 317 and 360.) Pico's most startling thesis was that no science gave surer conviction of the divinity of Christ than 'magia', and he sought proof of the Christian mysteries in the Cabala. He was deeply interested in, inherited and taught from Ficino, the use of a 'natural magic' which involved the cultivation of the will and mind and the use of poetry and song. In this compare Coleridge's profound conviction that 'words are not *things* - they are spirits and living Agents' (Letter 1302, Griggs): and compare also Aids to Reflection - 'For if words are not THINGS they are LIVING POWERS'. Note also Coleridge's frequent insistence on the derivation of the word poetry from the Greek ποιέω - to create, to make, poem. By these methods advocated by Pico, involving an attitude of mind and the use of words, man is 'married to Nature'.

The work of Ficino and Pico was carried on in the 16th century by Giordano Bruno who sought to construct a philosophy of Nature on the Copernican basis, and it is very possible that he influenced the great Pantheist Spinoza who had such a decisive effect on Coleridge. Coleridge was also very much aware of the writing of Hermes Trismegistus - once said to be of ancient Egyptian origin but more probably written during the 2nd century AD. In his note book (879 21. 89) Coleridge quotes from the Greek of Sennertus - 'he who seeks to be pious pursues philosophy. Without philosophy it is impossible to be truly pious: but he who has learnt what things are, and how they are ordered, and by whom and to what end, thanks the Maker...' Instances of Coleridge's continuing interest in the wilder realms of metaphysics and the mystics is well known and established and Lamb must have been the recipient of many a 'sermon' from his friend on these mysteries. Even in Coleridge's poetry we find strong echoes of the 15th and 16th century metaphysicians; in 'Dejection' for example we find:-

O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does nature live.

Compare here an extract from the Hermes: 'We go beyond the Cabala - we perfect the doctrine of a microcosm and a macrocosm and declare that there is no such thing as high or low... All is in all. Everywhere analogy infers the same laws'. (See Yates - Giordano Bruno.)

Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud

The marriage of man to nature whereby man finds his true self.

From the soul itself must issue forth  
A light a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the earth.

.....

Joy Lady! is the spirit and the power  
Which *wedding Nature* gives to us in dower,  
A new Earth and a new Heaven.

All of which, and more examples might be quoted, could have come directly from the mouth of Pico himself and the followers of the Hermetic Tradition (see Frances Yates - 'Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition', 1964). In the notebooks (374 3½.9) he notes some details about Pico with a memorandum to procure and read 'Mirandula de Ente et Uno', using the identical spelling of the name which Lamb used. One might hazard a paraphrase in mystic terms

of the above lines from 'Dejection'. The life of men *is* the life of nature and man wedded to Nature finds a power which is Joy - a 'glory' (and we are all of us aware of the aura that surrounds that word 'glory' for Coleridge). And the end of all is the goal sought by every metaphysician, the union of the many in the one - joy and power - a new transcendent view of both Earth and Heaven. There is then, it is submitted, a well-documented association between Lamb, and Coleridge and Pico della Mirandola - but the question still remains, "Why did Lamb so unequivocally, and so soon after publication, insist, 'Call him Elia'". The answer lies in those metaphysical speculations. Pico had friends, some of whose names are on record and he would need a particular friend and adviser to gain him admittance to the secrets of the Cabala - that particular friend was *Elia* del Medigo. It was he who introduced Pico to the Cabala and it is known that the Cabalists often compounded their names with the name of God - El as in Elohim or/and Ia as in Yahweh. Pico's friend and adviser, a Cabalist, was El-ia, and under no circumstances could his name be pronounced other than as Lamb insisted. There is reason to believe that Lamb was well aware of the unusual features which Coleridge had in common with Pico.

Pico, a poet, who used words deliberately and with care, was without doubt at one point heretical: he made his peace with the church and his writings were repressed by an edict of Pope Alexander VI. Pico was some time 'in the wilderness': he burnt his poems of his own free will, and spent all his remaining years preaching to convert the heathens and to establish the truth and validity of Christianity and the Church. Coleridge had long ceased to write serious poetry and although not preaching exactly he was very busy in the throes of talking out his 'magnum opus', his theory of life, his defence of the National Church as a broadstanding source of stability and authority. As to del Medigo - El-ia, Lamb saw himself in precisely that role, Friend and adviser to the great man, an heretic himself, 'a one goddite' (Letter to Moxon, Oct. 24, 1831), even as was El-ia to Pico.

It might be objected that better evidence would be found if Lamb could be linked directly with Pico and del Medigo: such evidence is available. In the essay, 'The Two Races of Men', Lamb/Elia tells of the people who borrow from his library. Towards the end of the essay directing his words towards Kenney, the dramatist, and his wife who was French, he says, 'Thy wife too, that part French, better-part Englishwoman, that she should fix upon no other treatise to bear away...than the works of Fulke Greville'. We know from Hazlitt of Lamb's interest in Greville. Lamb goes on to make reference to Coleridge and the books he borrowed, and which he returned richly inscribed with marginalia, notably, 'In no very clerkly hand - legible in my Daniel; in old Burton; in Sir Thomas Browne; and those *abstruser cogitations of the Greville* now alas wandering in Pagan lands. I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S.T.C.'

Greville was of course Sir Fulke Greville, first Baron Brooke, granted Warwick Castle by James 1st: his dates are 1554-1628. The greater part of his literary works were not published until after his death and among them were poems of a religious and philosophical cast. And Greville was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge where the errant student Coleridge could not fail to have become aware of the career of the brilliant student who became a favourite at the court of the great Elizabeth and a dear friend of Sir Philip Sidney. That Lamb not merely possessed, but read the works of Fulke Greville is clear from Hazlitt's remarks and also from the pronouncement

he made on Greville's two dramas, that they were more 'political treatises, not plays'. Incidentally those two plays have a distinct flavour of Coleridge's *Remorse* and *Zapolya*. When Bruno came to England he visited Dr John Dee and was accompanied by Fulke Greville and Philip Sidney to the home of Greville where took place The Ash Wednesday Supper (14 Feb. 1584) - as related in Bruno's work 'La Cena de la Ceneri': although it has to be said that when he was in the hands of the Inquisition Bruno said that the supper took place at the French Embassy. Visiting Oxford Bruno debated on lines already explored by Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, and made much of 'The Arts of Memory' - a phrase which significantly ends the seventh chapter in Coleridge's *Biographia*. There is therefore clearly established a philosophical link and association between Lamb and Coleridge, and Bruno, and Pico and Elia del Medigo, and Ficino. It seems clear that this interpretation of what has hitherto been considered a quirk of Lamb's, is in fact a key which will open the door to a more complete understanding of Coleridge's poems and speculations as Lamb saw them.

We come to Hazlitt, who in an essay, 'Of Persons One would wish to have seen' first published in the *New Monthly Magazine* January 1826, describes an evening at the Lambs when the conversation turned upon the writers one would wish to meet. Lamb stated that if he had his choice of the whole range of English Literature, he would choose 'Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney.' He justified his choice: 'The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old, who deal in dark hints and doubtful oracles; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal man but themselves can fathom. As to Fulke Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own "Prologues spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus," a truly formidable and inviting personage: his style is *apocalyptic*, *cabalistical*, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie'.

The letters of Lamb are not without evidence to his interest in serious matters: the flippant punster and easy-going Elia overlies a mind no less curious than was that of Coleridge. Sometime before 1799 he had visited Cambridge and met Manning there for on December 28th 1799 he writes to Thomas Manning 'Do all things continue in the state I left them in Cambridge?'. Who was Thomas Manning? Lamb himself considered him to be, at 27 years of age, 'a man of great power - an enchanter almost. Only he is lazy': and again the element of magic creeps in. Thomas Manning born in 1772 was a close student of mathematics and the classics, studied intensely at Caius College, Cambridge, was much taken with Plato and published a work on Algebra but, refusing to subscribe, was refused his degree although he had very successfully completed the examinations. That in itself puts him within range of some fellow feeling on Lamb's part who as a Unitarian would heartily endorse a refusal to subscribe to the required articles of religion. He determined to visit China and Tibet, learnt the language and in 1811 was the first Englishman to reach Lhasa, stayed there for about five months and then returned to India. He never published anything about his journey but in 1876 Clement Markham did publish an account of Manning's adventures, with a memoir. He returned to England in 1829, led a very eccentric life in a barely furnished cottage near Dartford and possessed a large library of Chinese books - he wore a milky white beard down to his waist (see Clement Markham). He and Lamb corresponded a great deal and Lamb's farewell letter to Manning when he was outward bound for India and China is well known: but little account seems to have been taken of the



nature of Manning's eccentricities and the attachment Lamb felt for him.

In letters during 1800 Lamb suggests that Manning is an atheist: then there occurs a significant phrase in a letter dated August 1800. Lamb writes... 'have you a copy of your Algebra to give away? I do not ask it for myself; I have too much reverence for the Black Arts ever to approach thy circle, illustrious *Trismegist*! But that worthy man...George Dyer visited me to borrow one'. The inference is that Lamb knew Trismegistus' writings and knew his friend Manning sufficiently well to affectionately name him after the Magus. In a letter closely following, Lamb writes, 'George Dyer is an Archimedes, and an Archimagus and a Tycho Brahé, and a Copernicus'. Coleridge is frequently mentioned in the letters that passed between Manning and Lamb, and Lamb on one occasion in a letter to Manning dated 1800 says 'I wish to bring you together'. On the 5th October 1800 to Manning, Lamb thanks him for some medical advice and then goes on...'I have hit off a few lines in the name of Burton, being a "Conceit of Diabolic Possession"'. The correspondence must have been frequent for on the 3rd November 1800 Lamb writes to complain, 'What is Euclid doing? What hath happened to the learned Trismegist - did he take it in ill part that his humble friend did not comply with his courteous invitation?' Again he calls Manning, 'the learned Trismegist' and on December 13th 1800 he writes again 'To your epistle I will just reply, that I will certainly come to Cambridge before January is out; I'll *come when I can*'. In February or March 1801 he addresses Manning, 'You masters of logic ought to know...that all words are no more to be taken in a literal sense than a promise given to a tailor'. One could go on extracting from the letters to Manning more than sufficient evidence to show that Lamb was able to hold his own with men of considerable learning, but one more must be added. After Manning had left England, Lamb wrote, February 1803, 'Not a sentence, not a syllable of Trismegistus shall be lost through my neglect. I am his word-banker, his storekeeper of puns and syllogisms'. In summary then, Lamb knew of Elia del Medigo, he knew of Hermes Trismegistus, he knew of Pico della Mirandola: beneath the flippant and jolly character Elia there was a serious-minded man who was able to converse and become intimate with the best minds of the day. He may appear a jester, but the jester often tells the wisest tale and it appears quite conclusive that when Lamb insisted of Elia, 'call him Ellia' he was making one of his rare pronouncements of deeper interests and identifying his role with that of Elia del Medigo. The evidence is in his essays, in his letters and on his bookshelf - in this particular choice of a name, there is a great deal more than appears on the surface and scholars could fruitfully occupy their time unveiling the real man and mind behind the mask that was Elia.

#### AN ELIAN DISCOVERY

Alexander Mackenzie Davidson

As revealed in the *Bulletin* both Coleridge and Hawthorne were plagiarists - the latter's adventures being utterly risible in his paraphrases of Elia.

All right. But recently I suffered a minor shock when browsing over Mitchell & Leys *History of London Life* and came upon the following passage:

Not many citizens could trace back their connexion with London for more than one or two generations: few could claim, as did Thomas Usk, to be a Londoner born and bred - 'forth grownen in London, *the place of his kindly engendure*'.

I had always loved the phrase as a stroke of Lamb's genius but it appears

that his old folios served him well.

By the way, the said Thomas Usk was executed for treason in 1381 at Tyburn.

*Mr Davidson's discovery raises again the puzzling question, when is a plagiarism not a plagiarism? Some words of T S Eliot's seem particularly apt here.*

One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.

From Eliot's essay on Philip Massinger *Selected Essays* (New Impression 1972) page 206.

*By Eliot's criteria, Lamb is surely to be recognized as a "good poet".*

M W

#### OBITUARY

##### DR ELSIE SMITH

During a visit to Dorset in the summer, I was taken to Salisbury. To older members of the Charles Lamb Society this city will always be associated with Dr Elsie Smith. She was for many years an Honorary Librarian of the Cathedral Library, and many scholars owe her a debt of gratitude. In 1953, due to her efforts, the Library had its first overhaul for 200 years, and the book cases were rearranged so that research workers could work undisturbed in bays. During the war she guarded the contents of the Library, and there was much excitement at one time over the safety of the Magna Carta housed there.

Dr Elsie was a modest person, but she was ready at all times to contribute to the well-being of the Society. When we think of her, we remember two delightful summer visits she arranged for us - the first in 1951 and the second in 1961. On both occasions she gave us tea in her lovely house in the Close, and included in her programmes visits to George Herbert's church at Bemerton, and Longford Castle.

She also gave us lectures on "Charles Lamb in the West Country", "The Furniture of Charles and Mary Lamb", "Izaak Walton and His Influence on Charles Lamb", and she was the Guest of Honour at the Birthday Celebration in 1967.

As I had not heard from her for some time I asked one of the Cathedral staff for news of her, to be told that she had died earlier in the year. I took my friends to Bemerton, and in that tiny church I looked back over 33 years of friendship with gratitude for all the delights she had given me and so many other members of the Society. For members who took part in the visits mentioned above accounts can be found in *Bulletins* 103 and 162, and the lectures in Nos 99, 112, 156 and 194. They make interesting reading for the spirit of Elsie Smith shines through them all. She was a true Christian and a good Elian, and I shall always remember her with deep affection.

Florence Reeves

We also deeply regret to announce the death of Miss A Park. A full obituary will be published in the next Bulletin.

#### NEWS

The Ernest Crowsley Memorial lecture was given on 1 October 1977, to an appreciative "full house", by Dr J E Stevens of Magdalene College, Cambridge. Owing to the burden of work resulting from Dr Stevens' recent appointment as Chairman of the Faculty Board of English at Cambridge, there has not been time to prepare the text of his lecture for this month's deadline at the end of October, but he is kindly going to let us have it for a future Bulletin.



#### THE BLUE-COAT BOY.

THIS Month, the Thirteenth Day, a matchless Treasure  
Will open, to afford you Wealth and Pleasure!  
Then will the Blue-coat Boy, at Fortune's call,  
This New Year's Lottery, strive to please you all:  
The wicket opes, soon as the wheel's turn'd round,  
And gives the First-drawn TWENTY THOUSAND POUND!  
And may gain FIFTY THOUSAND! should it rise  
Attended with a Thirty Thousand Prize;  
For Thousands crowd the wheel as thick as hail,—  
Tens, Twenties, Thirties, now may be on sale:  
Then quickly purchase at an easy rate,  
Or you may yet repent it, when too late.

*Lottery begins Drawing Next Tuesday, 13th Jan. 1807.*

Evans and Ruffy, Printers, 29, Budge Row, London.

Members are reminded that there will be no meeting of the Society in January this year.

#### SHIPS AFLOAT IN THE CITY

Readers will remember our Council member Mr Frank Ledwith's book, *Ships That Go Bump in the Night*, based on a lifetime in the management of mutual insurance associations for ship-owners, centred in the City of London. A reviewer said of that book that it was "As richly mixed as a Christmas pudding, yet so readable that there is no danger of indigestion". Now it has a successor, *Ships Afloat in the City*, published at £4.50 by Robert Hale, who say, "The roar of the sea, the drama of the law-courts, the quirks and comedy of human nature, are the main elements in this colourful pageant".

Mr Ledwith gave a fascinating talk to the Society in November on "Christ's Hospital in Lamb's Time and My Own", which we hope to include in a future Bulletin.

#### THE ANNUAL BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

The Birthday Luncheon will take place this year on Saturday 11 February. It will be at Simpson's-in-the-Strand at 12 o'clock for 1 o'clock. Tickets will cost £7 and can be obtained from Miss Reeves, Flat 3, 24 Elsworthy Road, London NW3 3DL. If it is convenient, members ordering tickets may include in their cheque sent to Miss Reeves the amount of their annual subscription, but *not* unless they are ordering tickets please. Otherwise subscriptions should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer.

#### ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1978

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 1978 fall due on 1 January. The rates of subscription for individual members for 1978 remain as they were last year, namely:

London Members	£2.50 (doubles £3)
Provincial Members	£1.50 (doubles £2)
Overseas Members	8 5

However, members will appreciate that inflation has hit the Society, as it has everyone else, and that our financial position is consequently not entirely happy. So may we ask any members, who feel they can, generously to add some small donation to their normal subscription this year?

Subscriptions not sent to Miss Reeves with ticket-money should go, please, to: The Hon Treasurer, The Charles Lamb Society, 28 Park Drive, Rustington, Sussex BN16 3DY.

#### NEW MEMBERS

Professor D V Erdman, 58 Crane Neck Road, Setanket, N Y 11733, U S A.

Mr G M von Maanen, van Halewijnplein 40, Voorburg, Netherlands.

Professor Yasuhiko Ozawa, 1-7-13 Ando, Shizuoka-Shi, Shizuoku-Ken, Japan 422.

Serials Record - Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa. 16802, U S A.

Mr J Sanderson, Box 343, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, LOS LJO.

Dr A R Taylor, 12 Culloden Road, Enfield EN2 8QE

Rev J Unsworth, 8 Elmgrove Road, Hucclecote, Gloucester GL3 3RR.

Mrs A Unsworth, 8 Elmgrove Road, Hucclecote, Gloucester GL3 3RR.