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ANOTHER ELIA: ESSAYS IN A MINOR KEY

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A lecture given to the Society by Professor James Misenheimer on 7 March 1987

To refer to 'another Elia' will to some seem paradoxical, since those who know him know that there is only one Elia, true and everlasting, and that he is likely to remain unique across the ages yet to be born. Elia's most memorable artistic strengths have been seen by posterity as residing primarily in the realm of the nostalgic and prominently in the mode of the ironic, though neither is all pervasive. Indeed, as recently as 1984, when the sesquicentennial of the death of Charles Lamb was observed, essays appeared in both popular news magazines and scholarly journals alike celebrating the aesthetic universality of Elian nostalgia, alive and well as we approach the end of the twentieth century. To seem to contradict or to deny, therefore, the sacrosanctity of the true Elia would seem unequivocally presumptuous and wrongheaded.

This paper is in no way designed to detract from the Elia whom we know and love but, rather, to explore combinations of techniques and attitudes which seem to harken away from the firmly defined centre of Elian accomplishment. Since in December 1984 it was my privilege to address the Society at some length on the nature of Elian nostalgia, it occurred to me, when invited to another visit with you, that it might be interesting to examine together several of Elia's essays that lie outside what has been identified as his

mainstream and to see how these pieces stand apart, in large measure, from the nostalgic vein which Lamb so richly and unforgettably mined. The irony of these pieces does not stem chiefly from reflection and wistful recollection associated with interpretation of reminiscence, but is an irony which evolves from intellectual examination of the state of man. These 'essays in a minor key' reveal, of course, the same penetrating intellect and rich associative imagination as those on which Elia's contemporary fame rests; yet some are too regularly neglected even by scholars with a close familiarity with all aspects of Elian art. It thus seems timely to consider four of these less celebrated works, to see whether or not they represent a different side of the Elia who is now eternalized in the nostalgic familiar essay. The four pieces to be examined today are 'The Two Races of men', 'Grace before Meat', 'Witches, and Other Night Fears,' and 'The Tombs in the Abbey'.

I

Of these four, probably the best known is 'The Two Races of Men', though even it remains less frequently the subject of scholarly scrutiny than such paramount nostalgic works as 'Old China' and 'Dream Children', despite its appearance in reputable anthologies. In his account of the evolution of Elia, George Barnett reminds us that 'The Two Races of Men' was '.... the outgrowth of [Lamb's] experiences with book borrowers'. (1) It would seem reasonable to assume that another related facet of Lamb's life, namely his love of books and of book collecting, would have partially influenced the content of the essay, as might the intellectual cross-pollination which characterized the relationship of Lamb and William Hazlitt, for example. And indeed, 'The Two Races of Men' shows some similarities to Hazlitt's piece entitled 'On the Conversation of Authors', no longer very well known.

The title of this essay leads the reader to expect something different from what he finds. It suggests an essay of expository classification or definition well enough, of course, but the categories of distinction which Elia chooses are hardly what for most people would come immediately to mind. In his opening sentence, his classification reveals 'the men who borrow' and 'the men who lend'; and though these 'two original diversities' are perhaps, upon reflection, virtually the most basic to which the human species can be reduced, they are not what are expected and thus are tinged with a superb blend of the ironic and the satiric. The qualities of irony and satire, to be sustained throughout the essay, are richly mined forthwith as the opening paragraph continues through Elia's remarking 'the infinite superiority of the former [the men who borrow], which [he chooses] to designate as the *great race*

(2) The 'men who lend' are said, however, to be 'born degraded'. And whereas the former are open and instinctively sovereign, the latter are 'lean and suspicious'.

The world does not think of Elia surely as primarily a writer of exposition, as indeed he is not (though he regularly catalogues and defines); but in 'The Two Races of Men', the same intensity of creative imagination which supplements the drama of life is brought to bear by Elia upon a direct, somewhat nonchalant categorization of the human race fraught with satiric wit. The irony which sometimes heightens the nostalgic essays here is applied to expository analysis, and the combination both surprises and pleases. He shores up the initial two-fold division, in which the borrowers

possess the ascendancy, by mentioning the likes of Alcibiades, Falstaff, Sir Richard Steele, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan as being among the greatest borrowers of all the ages. And in reference to these four diverse figures, Elia concludes the second paragraph of the essay with the exclamation '... what a family likeness in all four!' (3) It is to be noted that this statement is punctuated with the exclamation point, as if to signify surprise, insight, and irony.

The exclamation of the announcement of these 'greatest borrowers of all' serves to anticipate the third paragraph, in which each of the six sentences also is followed by the exclamation point (a mark seldom used in the essays which are predominantly nostalgic in tone and theme):

What a careless, even deportment hath your borrower!
 what rosy gills! what a beautiful reliance on Providence doth he
 manifest, -- taking no more thought than lilies! What contempt for
 money--accounting it (yours and mine especially) no better than dross!
 What a liberal confounding of those pedantic distinctions of *meum*
 and *tuum*! or rather, what a noble simplification of language (beyond
 Tooke), resolving these supposed opposites into one clear, intelligible
 pronoun adjective!-- What near approaches doth he make to the
 primitive *community*,-- to the extent of one-half of the principle
 at least!-- (4)

Here is Elia at some of his satiric best, in expository elaboration through tongue-in-cheek recitation, without bitterness or cynicism, skeptically humorous and derisively mocking without carrying the sardonicism to an extreme.

In turn, then, the next paragraph, of still further refinement and variation extending the characterization of 'the great race', the borrowers of this world, utilizes the exclamation point another six times to underscore strength of declaration, so that by now the essayist has assumed a stance ever so slightly hortatory, softened in part by the naturalness of the flow of Elian prose. There is nothing really acerbic here, but the ironic vision is penetrating and impressive.

Having provided a lengthy introductory analysis of 'those who borrow', Elia now offers a specific example in the character of one Ralph Bigod, Esq., an old friend, known by Lamb as John Fenwick, the editor of the *Albion*. Bigod is shown as a very nearly perfect example of the classic borrower whose own predilection leads to extremity; but for us, the readers, perhaps more important than Bigod's exemplary personification of borrower is Elia's reaction as he recollects his deceased friend:

When I think of this man; his fiery glow of heart; his swell of feeling; how magnificent, how *ideal* he was; how great at the midnight hour; and when I compare with him the companions with whom I have associated since, I grudge the saving of a few idle ducats, and think that I am fallen into the society of *lenders*, and *little men*. (5)

The irony is replete; for though Elia has cast back through memory to a review of his friend's essential character, what emerges is a brief analysis of self, a small epiphany, in which the contrast between Bigod and

Elia shows the essayist is not to be a member of the 'great race'.

It is interesting to note that although this essay ostensibly is an expository piece which purports to examine the *two* races of men, in point of fact it dwells upon *one*: the borrowers. Only very short references are made to lenders, with perhaps the most poignant being Elia's self-perception as he stands for the opposite of the ideal which Bigod represented.

The continuing refinement of Elia's categories and examples constitutes one of the special charms of this essay. Having pondered his own identity as a lender and as a member of the society of *little men*, Elia now must warn his readers about a sub-class of borrower whom, through the chagrin of personal experience, he has come to fear:

To one like Elia, whose treasures are rather cased in leather covers than closed in iron coffers, there is a class of alienators more formidable than that which I have touched upon; I mean your *borrowers of books*--those mutilators of collections, spoilers of the symmetry of shelves, and creators of odd volumes. There is Comberbatch, matchless in his depredations! (6)

The deliberate distortion of Comberbacke, the name under which Coleridge enlisted in the Light Dragoons, into Comberbatch carries with it the ironic indictment of Elia's personal friend who in the arena of books achieves a level of the *ideal* similar to that of the feckless Bigod, except that in terms of unobtrusive repayment Coleridge as borrower possesses enviable quality, and especially to Elia of the 'lower race':

To lose a Volume to C. carries some sense and meaning in it. You are sure that he will make one hearty meal on your viands, if he can give no account of the platter after it

Reader, if haply thou art blessed with a moderate collection, be shy of showing it; or if thy heart overfloweth to lend them, lend thy books; but let it be to such a one as S.T.C. --he will return them (generally anticipating the time appointed) with usury; enriched with annotations, tripling their value. I have had experience. Many are these precious MSS. of his--(in *matter* oftentimes, and almost in *quantity* not infrequently, vying with the originals)--in no very clerklly hand--legible in my Daniel; in old Burton; in Sir Thomas Browne ... I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S.T.C. (7)

This admonition to the reader, indeed a gentle admonition, serves to bring the essay full circle. Elia lets us see, through a looking-glass capable of very subtle distinction, how even as bibliophile he must succumb, and must advise us to succumb, to the wiles of so appreciative and compensatory a borrower of books as Coleridge, and thus how Elia by choice relegates himself to the inferior role of lender. There exists in this conclusion a peculiar poignancy for an essay presumably expository.

It was mentioned earlier that 'The Two Races of Men' was the result of Lamb's experiences with book borrowers and that at least partially his love of books and of book collecting might have influenced the content of

the essay, as might other intellectual influences. It is interesting to note that ultimately the essay virtually transcends the notion of borrowing and lending books in its wider, more far-reaching scheme of human classification into the two generic groups. For his opening sentence, Elia has written:

The human species, according to the best theory I can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, *the men who borrow*, and *the men who lend*. (8)

In addition to the other acknowledged possible influences, was Lamb, through Elia, in some wry and intricate configuration of thought and mind, recalling the advice of Polonius to Laertes, who is enjoined to

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry,

a passage followed immediately by the further advice 'To thine own self be true'? Has it happened that even in the face of the proffered wisdom of a sage but ineffectual Polonius, Lamb's insight into the plight of man can admit of no other plan of classification by which to describe the entire race? The wit, the satire, the irony, even to the extent of a possibly mock self-deprecation, seem those of a somewhat more pungent Elia, whose gentleness and wistfulness almost miraculously remain intact. The words of Polonius have perhaps achieved a new and fresh irony from the Elian imagination, from the Elian pen.

II

Approximately one month following the death of John Lamb (or James Elia, as Lamb called him), Dorothy Wordsworth remarked in a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson:

It gave us great concern to hear of the death of John Lamb. Though his brother and sister did not see very much of him the loss will be deeply felt; pray tell us particularly how they are; and give our love to them. I fear Charles' pen will be stopped for a time. What delightful papers he has lately written for that otherwise abominable magazine! The old King's Benchers is exquisite--indeed the only one I do not quite like is the Grace before Meat. (9)

The pivotal word in Dorothy's letter may well be 'quite': '... indeed the only one I do not *quite* like is the Grace before Meat' [*italics are mine*]. For though the readers of the world have disclaimed no essay by Elia, they have their favorites; and it would seem that 'Grace before Meat' is not among them for the majority of readers. Modern anthologies which include Lamb and literary bibliographies which chronicle scholarship would seem to attest to a less popular place in readers' affections for 'Grace before Meat' than for many of the other Elian effusions. In fairness, one must say that those who like the essay like it with total passion and are very dogged in their admiration of it. Miss Wordsworth says that she did not 'quite' like it. Why, does one suppose?

As in 'The Two Races of Men', the title 'Grace before Meat' leads the

reader to expect something other than what he finds. Elia wit and humour, as we know, regularly operate from this basic principle, leading those who know Elia well to see in his approach to the discussion of many subjects what can be called a certain intellectual ambidexterity. The reader perceives but is often surprised by the unusual, unexpected turn of thought, on the one hand; yet, on the other, having come to know and to love this Elia technique, he rouses himself to expect the unexpected. And in the case of 'Grace before Meat', in which Elia posits the inappropriateness of saying grace at a table surrounded by gluttons and gourmets (as they salivate over rich foods for which all earth and ocean have been ransacked), the idea might well shock the sensibilities of anyone holding to the traditional view of the importance of a blessing before partaking of any meal, regardless of immediate circumstances and conditions, and despite the humour interjected into the suggestion by the essayist.

Another thought that may not have occurred to most of us but that obviously is important to Elia and that the world could assuredly do worse than take to heart is, Why confine our grace to eating? He confronts his readers with an implied questioning of values:

I own that I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. I want a form for setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts--a grace before Milton--a grace before Shakespeare--a devotional exercise proper to be said before reading the Fairy Queen? (10)

Despite the advice of Polonius to 'neither a borrower nor a lender be', Elia still sees the human race as consisting of borrowers and lenders; and in that perception, there is a hint of astringent social criticism, if, as pointed out earlier, softened by the wit of the treatment and the characteristic naturalness of the prose itself. And similarly, in 'Grace before Meat', Elia in a sense turns critic again. One might speculate as to whether Dorothy Wordsworth found the critical side of Elia less disarming, or whether his desire to forego grace before gourmandizing somehow offended, or whether his entire approach to the subject she found mysteriously unacceptable. She did not 'quite' like the essay. Did she then dislike it?

Elia's overview of man's saying grace before eating is richly stated in several memorable passages:

It is a confusion of purpose to mutter out praises from a mouth that waters. The heats of epicurism put out the gentle flame of devotion. (11)

and

We may be gratefully sensible of the deliciousness of some kinds of food beyond others, though that is a meaner and inferior gratitude; but the proper object of the grace is sustenance, not relishes; daily bread, not delicacies; the means of life, and not the means of pampering the carcass. (12)

and

Graces are the sweet preluding strains to the banquets of angels and children; to the roots and severer repasts of the Chartreuse; to the slender, but not slenderly acknowledged, refectation of the poor and humble man: but at the heaped-up boards of the pampered and the luxurious they become of dissonant mood, less timed and tuned to the occasion, methinks, than the noise of those better befitting organs would be, which children hear tales of, at Hog's Norton. (13)

The humour is there. The insight is there. The truth is there. The humour of the truth of the critical insight is probing, for some unsettling. Would Miss Wordsworth perhaps have found the humour unsuited to the topic?

For some readers, Elia's invoking of the temptation scene in the wilderness as described by Milton in *Paradise Regained* and his labelling it 'the severest satire upon full tables and surfeits' has been a source of sophisticated humour; for others, it has apparently bordered on heresay. He quotes the elaborate scene of the banquet provided by Satan:

A table richly spread in regal mode,
With dishes piled, and meats of noblest sort
And savour; beasts of chase, or fowl of game
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boiled,
Gris-amber-steamed; all fish from sea or shore,
Freshet or purling brook, for which was drained
Pontus, and Lucrine Bay, and Afric coast.

and then immediately comments further:

The Tempter, I warrant you, thought these cates would go down without the recommendatory preface of a benediction. They are like to be short graces where the devil plays the host. (14)

Perhaps there have been readers who have perceived a bordering on blasphemy in this passage. In any case, Elia goes on to say that Milton lacks his customary sense of decorum in this section of the great poem:

I am afraid the poet wants his usual decorum in this place. Was he thinking of the old Roman luxury, or of a gaudy day at Cambridge? This was a temptation fitter for a Heliogabalus. The whole banquet is too civic and culinary, and the accompaniments altogether a profanation of that deep, abstracted, holy scene. The mighty artillery of sauces, which the cook-fiend conjures up, is out of proportion to the simple wants and plain hunger of the guest. He that disturbed him in his dreams, from his dreams might have been taught better. (15)

A wryness of irony has crept into the piece.

Though Lamb did not succeed in his attempts in the acted drama (and we recall a time at Drury Lane when he helped to hiss his own play from the stage), his penchant for the drama of life comes forward delightfully near the end of 'Grace before Meat' in his description of the two Methodist divines of different persuasions who, in their mutual courtesy, finally forego the speaking of grace at teatime. This is truly a scene from which comic drama is made:

With what spirit might not Lucian have painted two priests, of *his* religion, playing into each other's hands the compliment of performing or omitting a sacrifice,--the hungry God meantime, doubtful of his incense, with expectant nostrils hovering over the two flamens, and (as between two stools) going away in the end without his supper. (16)

Is it barely possible that Dorothy could have accepted the scene of the vying of the Methodist divines, but that she threw up her hands at the image of the hungry God with the expectant nostrils? Or is she on the same track as Southey, to whom Lamb attempted to justify the essay as a serious work? Regardless, 'Grace before Meat' has yet to realize the fullest appreciation among the readers of the world. Unfortunately for too many its aesthetic destiny is yet to be fulfilled.

And as for the borrowers and lenders, 'Grace before Meat', like several other of Elia's essays, was written on East India House paper, in the face of which fact George Barnett reminds us that 'it is tempting to conclude that [it was] written on office time'. (17)

III

Among Lamb's numerous references to his childhood, his tone is almost universally nostalgic. In 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple' he refers to the Temple with obvious affection as being for him pleasantly associated with his earliest years. (18) In 'My First Play' he recounts with joy the experiences he had as a child at Drury Lane. He says of this magical time:

...I knew nothing, understood nothing, discriminated nothing.
I felt all, loved all, wondered all--Was nourished, I could
not tell how-- (19)

Even in 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', while Lamb certainly condemns some of the more questionable practices of his old school, he does so with humour and with respect for the later achievements of many of its pupils. (20)

In his essay 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', however, Lamb uses an entirely different tone. From the first it is much more serious than are most of Elia's essays. As he recounts his preoccupation with a book in his father's library called *History of the Bible* by Stackhouse, he conveys effectively his unwilling but unrelenting fascination with the work, particularly with a picture of, as he tells us, 'the Witch raising up Samuel, which I wish that I had never seen'. (21) Lamb remembers vividly the organization of the book which arranged Old Testament stories, each followed by an objection and then by a solution. He explains that the solution always put an end to doubts, or at least that was its intention. For Lamb, being a thoughtful and sensitive child, this presentation of objections had the effect of teaching him that there were infidels who did object to the Bible stories he had previously accepted as fact. Lamb observes, 'Credulity is the man's weakness, but the child's strength.' (22) In consequence of Lamb's inadvertently damaging the book, it was forbidden to him. After that, he gradually forgot about the objections but not about the picture of the witch. (23)

With a note of dark intensity, Lamb tells us about his childhood sufferings which were perhaps a preamble to the suffering which both he and Mary had to endure as adults:

I was dreadfully alive to nervous terrors. The nighttime solitude, and the dark, were my hell. The sufferings I endured in this nature would justify the expression. I never laid my head on my pillow, I suppose, from the fourth to the seventh or eighth year of my life--so far as memory serves in things so long ago--without an assurance, which realised its own prophecy, of seeing some frightful spectre. Be old Stackhouse then acquitted in part, if I say, that to his picture of the Witch raising up Samuel-- . . . I owe--not my midnight terrors, the hell of my infancy--but the shape and manner of their visitations. . . . Had I never met with the picture, the fears would have come self-pictured in some shape or other-- (24)

Lamb clearly feels that all children have at least some difficulty with unreasonable fears and nightmares. Indeed, he cites as an example Thornton Hunt, Leigh Hunt's son, who, though reared deliberately without exposure to superstition, apparition, goblin, or even the existence of evil, 'will start at shapes, unborrowed of tradition, in sweats to which the reveries of the cell-damned murderer are tranquillity'. (25)

In the midst of his description of his nightly terrors Lamb makes what David Cecil suggests may be an oblique reference to the neglect, or at least the indifference, of his parents. (26) Certainly Lamb was much younger than either John or Mary. His father was doubtless preoccupied with serving Samuel Salt as a means of supporting his family, and his mother was busy running her household which included her sister-in-law. That the two women were incompatible we have no doubt. (27) That his sister and his aunt undertook much of Lamb's care we also know to be true. It may be that though they loved him dearly, neither Mary nor his Aunt Hetty had any inkling of his nightly torment. Apparently he did not consider it their responsibility to know because he says:

Parents do not know what they do when they leave tender babes alone to go to sleep in the dark. The feeling about for a friendly arm--the hoping for a familiar voice--when they wake screaming--and find none to soothe them--what a terrible shaking it is to their poor nerves! (28)

Toward the end of this essay, Lamb takes heart by observing that he no longer suffers unduly from unnerving visions in the night. He even speculates about the soul's creative powers during sleep, pointing inevitably to Coleridge's creation of 'Kubla Khan'; but though he achieves at least some degree of sanguinity concerning dreams, in this essay, with its subject perhaps too near the source of his own family tragedy, Lamb is never able to manage his usual light, bantering tone. For him, though in his middle years and long free of nightly torture, frightening dreams hold too much truth to be gently mocked or humorously effaced.

IV

Even though a number of Lamb's essays are the elaborations of ideas first found in his letters, (29) only 'The Tombs in the Abbey' lived first in its entirety as a part of a letter. That fact is only one of several which set this particular essay outside the general mode of Elia. The

letter which contained 'The Tombs in the Abbey' is one which Lamb wrote in 1823 to Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate and Lamb's close friend since 1795. Over the twenty-eight years of their friendship, Lamb and Southey had exchanged numerous very cordial letters; but this letter is very different. For one thing, Lamb is writing in answer to a slight criticism of *Elia* which had appeared in a review by Southey headed 'Progress of Infidelity' in the *Quarterly Review*. In the review, Southey, speaking of the imaginative faculty which engenders fear, says:

There is a remarkable proof of this in *Elia's Essays*, a book which wants only a sounder religious feeling to be as delightful as it is original. (30)

Although Edwin Marrs observes that Southey had written this passage in kindness, Lamb was deeply hurt by it. His distress was probably increased by an element of shock as well as by the fact that Southey, in referring to 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', had quoted a passage which mentioned Thornton Hunt by name. Southey had also been rather harsh in his comments on Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, two of Lamb's good friends. Lamb could not know that Southey had revised the offending passage, substituting 'sounder' for 'saner', and had intended to revise it still further when he read proof. Unfortunately, Gifford failed to send him the proof sheets. (31) To further complicate and distress Lamb's feelings, he had a long-standing feud with the *Quarterly Review* and with Gifford in particular. Southey's review, indeed, constituted the fifth offence against Lamb in the *Quarterly Review*. (32) At first Lamb did not read the review and determined, because of his love and respect for Southey, to treat the affair with silence. After he did read it, he felt compelled to answer, if only to praise his friends whom Southey had castigated. Hence his reply entitled 'Letter of *Elia* to Robert Southey' appeared in the *London Magazine* on October 8, 1823.

Earlier in the letter to Southey, Lamb expresses his feelings concerning the offending review, but he then launches into a topic which has just come forcibly to his attention. That he should choose to discuss in this letter his outrage over the introduction into Westminster Abbey of fees for viewing the tombs is significant for two reasons. First, Lamb refers in some detail to Southey's days at Westminster School and, being hurt with his friend, recalls by oblique reference an escapade in which Southey had, in his last year at Westminster, been involved and which contributed to his being expelled. (33) Doubtless Lamb's knowledge of this incident had come from Southey himself. Lamb says:

Stifle not the suggestions of your better nature with the pretext, that an indiscriminate admission would expose the Tombs to violation. Remember your boy-days. Did you ever see, or hear, of a mob in the Abbey, while it was free to all? Do the rabble come there, or trouble their heads about such speculations? It is all that you can do to drive them into your churches; they do not voluntarily offer themselves. They have, alas! no passion for antiquities; for tomb of king or prelate, sage or poet. If they had, they would be no longer the rabble. (34)

Lamb continues with a more pointed attack on Southey:

For forty years that I have known the Fabric, the only well-attested

charge of violation adduced, has been--a ridiculous dismemberment committed upon the effigy of that amiable spy, Major André. And is it for this--the wanton mischief of some school-boy, fired perhaps with raw notions of Transatlantic Freedom--or the remote possibility of such a mischief occurring again, so easily to be prevented by stationing a constable within the walls, if the vergers are incompetent to the duty--is it upon such wretched pretences, that the people of England are made to pay a new Peter's Pence, so long abrogated; or must content themselves with contemplating the ragged Exterior of their Cathedral? The mischief was done about the time that you were a scholar there. Do you know anything about the unfortunate relic?--(35)

The second reason which makes Lamb's discussion of 'these Sellers of the Temple' (36) significant is that he sees Southey as the one person who can eradicate this objectionable practice because as Poet Laureate Southey has powerful influence. Lamb uses his personal knowledge of Southey's deep religious orientation, his abiding respect for antiquities, and his continuing loyalty to his old school to urge him to speak out in print against a practice Lamb deems an abomination. Lamb speaks, as always quite eloquently; but his underlying tone is of total outrage, an emotion to which he rarely gives expression:

You owe it to the place of your education; you owe it to your learned fondness for the architecture of your ancestors; you owe it to the venerableness of your ecclesiastical establishment, which is daily lessened and called in question through these practices--to speak aloud your sense of them; never to desist raising your voice against them, till they be totally done away with and abolished; till the doors of Westminster Abbey be no longer closed against the decent, though low-in-purse, enthusiast, or blameless devotee, who must commit an injury against his family economy, if he would be indulged with a bare admission within its walls In vain the public prints have taken up this subject, in vain such poor nameless writers as myself express their indignation. A word from you, Sir--a hint in your Journal--would be sufficient to fling open the doors of the beautiful Temple again, as we can remember them when we were boys. (37)

Perhaps as a reply to Southey's comments on the imagination in the offending review, Lamb continues by saying:

At that time of life, what would the imaginative faculty (such as it is) in both of us, have suffered, if the entrance to so much reflection had been obstructed by the demand of so much silver!-- If we had scraped it up to gain an occasional admission (as we certainly should have done) would the sight of those old tombs have been as impressive to us (while we had been weighing anxiously prudence against sentiment) as when the gates stood open, as those of the adjacent Park; when we could walk in at any time, as the mood brought us, for a shorter or longer time, as that lasted? Is the being shown over a place the same as silently for ourselves detecting the genius of it? In no part of our beloved Abbey now can a person find entrance (out of service time) under the sum of *two shillings*. The rich and the great will smile at the anticlimax, presumed to lie in those two short words. But you can tell them, Sir, how much quiet worth, how much capacity for enlarged feeling, how much taste and genius, may coexist, especially in youth, with a purse incompetent to this demand.--(38)

Although members of the press took up the cause, some siding with Southey and others defending Lamb with great vigor, Southey had no wish to quarrel and proved this by sending, as Lucas reports, a wholly admirable private reply dated November 19, 1823:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Robert Southey (39)

As Marrs puts it, 'Southey and Lamb consequently exchanged marvelously gracious private letters, and the air was cleared forever'. (40)

Lamb replied at once:

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

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

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

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

Will you let me know the day before?

Your penitent,
C. Lamb

The generous spirits of both men united to heal the rift in their long friendship and to carry that friendship with renewed strength to the end of Lamb's life. But, from a misunderstanding between these two friends, both of whom are now eternalized in literary history, there has emerged a perhaps unexpected Elian essay, 'The Tombs in the Abbey', whose genesis is unique and whose tone suggests a minor key.

Another Elia? Who can say? Perhaps so, perhaps no. Elia is multi-faceted, complex, wondrous. One remembers that Flaubert once wrote to a friend:

The most beautiful works . . . are serene in aspect, unfathomable . . . Through small apertures we glimpse abysses whose sombre depths turn us faint. (42)

The small apertures of Elia, each in its turn, reveal a world of intellectual concern and depth of sensitivity standing equally erect and strong with the magic, the uniqueness, of his beloved ventures into the nostalgic.

NOTES

1. George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p.90.
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4. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid*, 29
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*, 30-31
8. *Ibid*, 26.
9. E.V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), II, p.91
10. Lamb, 107
11. *Ibid*, 108
12. *Ibid*, 109
13. *Ibid*, 111-112
14. *Ibid*, 109
15. *Ibid*, 109-110
16. *Ibid*, 112
17. Barnett, 118
18. Lamb, 96-106
19. *Ibid*, 117
20. *Ibid*, 14-26
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24. Ibid, 78-79
25. Ibid, 79
26. David Cecil, *A Portrait of Charles Lamb* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), pp.10-11.
27. Katharine Anthony, *The Lambs: A Story of Pre-Victorian England* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1945), p.8.
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29. George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, A Division of G.K. Hall and Co., 1976), p.87
30. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr. (ed), *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), Vol. III, p.133.
31. Ibid, 133
32. Ibid, 132.
33. William Haller, *The Early Life of Robert Southey 1774-1803* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), p.42.
34. Lamb, 244.
35. Ibid
36. Ibid
37. Ibid, 242-243
38. Ibid, 243
39. Lucas, 157-158
40. Marrs, 133
41. Lucas, 158-159
42. Maynard Mack, 'The Life of Learning', *American Council of Learned Societies Newsletter* (ACLS), XXXIV (Winter-Spring 1983), 8.

POET FATHER AND PAINTER SON: The Rev. Henry Francis Cary (1772-1844) and his son Francis Stephen Cary (1808-1880)

Charles Branchini

A talk given to the Society on 5 April, 1986

The Rev. Henry Francis Cary, destined to be known as 'The Translator of Dante', was born on December 6th at Gibraltar, where his father was an officer in the First Regiment of Foot. Captain William Cary, his father, seems to have had little taste for military life and, on the regiment being relieved, he returned to England with his wife Henrietta and son. He was only twenty-six at the time but seems to have been satisfied to settle down as a well-to-do country gentleman after selling his commission. His first wife died young but not before providing him with a further son William Robert and a daughter Georgina. He married three times in all and lived to the age of eighty-eight. Sensitive from childhood Henry Cary was deeply affected by his mother's untimely death.

Cary initiated his classical studies at an early age at his first school in Uxbridge and moved to Rugby School, conveniently near to Sutton Coldfield where his father was then living. He remained there only two years but long enough to make some lifelong friends. Rugby was then a small school yet to be invigorated by the great Dr. Arnold. Cary's next educational transition was briefly to Sutton Coldfield Grammar School and then to his fourth school, King Edward VI Grammar School. Although already a diligent

writer of verse, Cary's earliest traceable composition is the 'Irregular Ode to General Elliott', famous at the time for his resolute defence of Gibraltar against the French and Spanish.

Among Cary's close friends from school at Sutton Coldfield was Thomas Lister, an aspiring poet but meanwhile embarking on a career in banking in Lichfield, where lived that now little-remembered but at that time prominent Anna Seward, 'The Swan of Lichfield'. Cary duly knelt at her feet and became one of her disciples. 'The Swan' accepted the adoration graciously and was soon writing to William Hayley to recommend the young poet. Cary was described at this time as 'a very extraordinary lad, strongly marked in manners, as well as mind, by the hand of genius.' Future events were to justify this tribute.

In *The Gentleman's Magazine*, devoted to 'Select Poetry, Antient and Modern', Cary began to make his mark, appearing in almost every number from June 1787 to the end of 1789. Some of these contributions Cary considered suitable for inclusion in his volume *Sonnets and Odes* of 1788. Cary was now viewing Miss Seward more realistically and challenging her judgment. This she accepted but a parting of the ways was in sight as Cary interested himself more and more in the study of Italian poetry. Cary's teacher of Italian at Birmingham was A. Vergani, who subsequently published an Italian grammar. By the time Cary went to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1790 it can be assumed that he enjoyed a sound knowledge of the language.

Cary's first impressions of Oxford were not favourable but, although the official tuition was lax and uninspired, Cary himself, a born student, benefited by the facilities for study and by the companionship of men of the same turn of mind as himself, even if his studies of French and Italian received no encouragement from the authorities. Cary's circle of friends was mainly at Christ Church, but he formed a close link with W.S. Landor, his school-fellow at Rugby, and a more fleeting acquaintance with the future Poet Laureate Robert Southey, then at Balliol. Cary, supplied with books and friends, seems to have settled down to a peaceful and happy life, occupying himself chiefly with the study of Provençal and early Italian poetry. The 'Swan' expresses disapproval of the latter and considers it has 'destroyed the health of Cary's taste and feeling', but he has grown free of her thralldom and makes a spirited reply, which includes a eulogy of Dante, at that time viewed with little respect in this country. There ensued a controversy that now appears slightly absurd but subsequently Cary avoids the topic when writing to her, to immerse himself in profounder studies of Dante, thence to Petrarch and the Troubadours, learning Provençal for the latter. This resulted in three outstanding articles in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1793. He wrote little poetry at this time, however, and we need only mention the 200 lines of blank verse in 'The Mountain Seat', a descriptive and meditative piece of the kind popular at that time.

In the summer of 1794 Cary made the acquaintance of William Hayley, a generous-spirited man now better known for his friendship with Cowper and Blake than for his verses, who, as an excellent scholar of Spanish and Italian, was able to give him some good advice. Later in the same year Cary visited Dublin and became acquainted with Mrs. Ormsby, his mother's-old friend, at the same time forming an attachment for her youngest daughter, Jane. But, as must occur to most young men except the very rich, Cary was now faced with a momentous decision, the choice of a career. He had graduated in January 1794 but it was not until two years had passed that he took active

steps to enter the Church and was admitted to deacon's orders in the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry, to be followed by full orders and the presentation by the Earl of Uxbridge to the vicarage of Abbots Bromley, a village in Staffordshire. The income was modest but Cary was emboldened to ask Mrs. Ormsby for her daughter's hand. The offer was received with modest surprise but soon Cary was hastening to Dublin and the pair were married at St. Mary's, Donnybrook. It is pleasant to recall that they were destined to enjoy many years of mutual happiness.

There followed some happy years for Cary as he and his bride settled down to the quiet life of a country parson, with time for study and domestic pleasure. Their first son, William Lucius was born the next summer and in 1799 their second child Jane Sophia. Cary's insatiable appetite for books is noted in his *Literary Journal* and *Commonplace Books* and the range of his reading and study is awesome. Much of this served as a basis for the erudite and extensive notes attached to his translation of Dante. He carried out his parish duties assiduously although he did not rate himself particularly highly as a preacher and in 1800 he was given an opportunity to increase his modest stipend by being offered a second living, the vicarage of Kingsbury in Warwickshire, where he moved his home. Soon after a second daughter Harriet was born.

Cary by temperament could not be called an optimistic or sanguine man and his happiness soon clouded over. Ill-health appears to have been the first cause, although his complaints sound to a great extent to be what today are known as 'psycho-somatic'. However, by 1804 he had recovered somewhat and after four years' work his translation of the *Inferno* was completed. The following year the first edition appeared, and a year later the second. It is interesting to note that Dante was little esteemed by the reading public in this country at the time and Cary's work attracted small attention. Critics were generally unfavourable and Cary, in his son's words, 'had to endure the mortification... of seeing the fruits of many years of toil received with coldness and indifference'. His former idol, Miss Seward, joined in the chorus of disapproval.

In the meanwhile Cary's quiver had been steadily filling. James Walter was born in June 1802, Henry the author of the *Memoir* of his father, in February 1804 and Charles Thomas in 1806. However, the next year an epidemic of typhus struck the family and at the early age of six his daughter Harriet succumbed. The effect on Cary's sensitive temperament was disastrous, both physically and mentally. For a time work of any kind was suspended but he slowly recovered and resumed his translation of *Purgatorio*. He was also able to make a momentous decision, to transfer his home to London. He thus became an absentee vicar, leaving his friend and brother-in-law Price to attend to the curacies of Abbots Bromley and Kingsbury. Early in 1808 the Rev. H.F. Cary and his family left to seek their fortunes in what William Cobbett was to term 'The Great Wen'. It proved a felicitous decision, although many vicissitudes awaited them.

By this bold move Cary attained success to a degree that might almost be termed fame, and, if not wealth, at least a modest affluence, but they were not attained without a struggle. His health, always an uncertain factor, relapsed and he was fortunate to enjoy both the unceasing devotion of his wife and generous assistance from his father to tide him over the difficult

first two years. His mainstay was Church employment a readership at Berkeley Chapel, a curacy at Chiswick and another at the Savoy Chapel Royal in the Strand. He lived at various addresses and in 1810 rented a house in Edg-ware Road which he describes as 'very retired, and looks to the fields'. In the summer of 1811 he was sufficiently settled with his family to resume both his reading and his Journal and his long task of translating the *Commedia* concluded with the simple entry dated May 8, 1812. 'Finished my translation of Dante's *Commedia* begun the 16th January, 1797'. The following eighteen months were occupied by elaborating the notes and we find him making use of the British Museum library for the first time. His extensive reading of the classics in English, French, Italian and now Spanish continued unabated and he now, in addition, occupied himself with superintending the education of his daughter Jane Sophia.

About this time Cary produced some minor works, among them a verse translation of Pignotti's fable *Il Vecchio & L'Asino* and the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus, soon abandoned. More interesting was the *Visions of Romeo*, referring to the wise councillor of Dante's *Paradiso*, canto VI, but this has unfortunately disappeared. But undoubtedly, the main task of this year 1813 was preparation for the publication on New Year's Day, 1814 of the complete translation of the *Commedia*. Cary had hoped to publish it complete with the Italian text and a Life of Dante, but no publisher would take the risk. Cary decided to publish at his own expense, being obliged thereby to dispense with both the Italian text and the Life of Dante, and furthermore, to use his own words, 'printed in so small a character as to deter a numerous class of readers from perusing it'. It was received much as before, favourably by friends but with apathy by critics and the general public, but it must be admitted that Cary had little talent, or indeed taste, for acting as publicity agent for his own work.

Although never in extreme indigence, due largely to an allowance of £200 p.a. from his father, Cary now had to bear the expense of a large and growing family and the cost of education for them. He was fortunately able to exchange this post at the Berkeley Chapel for other duties at Chiswick where he bought a house that had once belonged to Sir James Thornhill, father-in-law to William Hogarth, now known as 'Hogarth's House'. Sadly in the very near future a heavy blow awaited him. Jane Sophia, on whom he had lavished so much care, was struck down by the then dreaded disease, galloping consumption, and died in the middle of April the following year, 1816. Cary was deeply afflicted but, once again, the devotion of his wife came to his aid and by the autumn he was able to view his loss more calmly. After a visit to Ramsgate with his family he returned to London, gave up the house and his curacy at Chiswick and undertook duties at the Savoy Chapel, finding lodgings in Cecil St., Strand.

In the spring of the following year, 1817, the youngest boy, Francis Stephen, born in 1808 and afterwards a painter, fell ill and a further visit to the seaside was indicated, Littlehampton, then a small village, being their choice. Congenial company in the form of Dr. Cyril Jackson, Dean of Christ Church, was nearby, as well as the poet Hayley, now old and in poor health, at Feltham, but most memorable of all was the meeting with no less a person than the great Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who accosted him with the simple words 'Sir, yours is a face I *should* know. I am Samuel Taylor Coleridge'. Coleridge soon joined the family dinner table and took home a copy of Cary's translation. He was greatly impressed by its merits and did much subsequently to bring it to the notice of the public. Cary did not awake

and find himself famous but a new edition was undertaken by the publishers and proprietors of the *London Magazine*, Taylor and Hessey. In July, 1819, the second edition, in three handsome octavos costing 36s. was ready. The 'Life of Dante' was re-instated and the notes much extended. His family had by this time increased by the birth of his sixth son, Richard, who was, however, destined to die at the early age of twenty-seven.

Cary's acquaintanceship with Coleridge bore other fruit than the success of Dante and did much to establish his position in the world of letters. Taylor and Hessey were considering the publication of a new quarterly review with Cary as editor, but after careful reflection he turned down the proposal. Shortly afterwards the *London Magazine* started on its meteor-like career, under the brilliant editorship of John Scott, and Cary found himself, as a contributor, in the highly distinguished company of such writers as Lamb, De Quincey, Hazlitt and Carlyle, among many others of only slightly less stature. After Scott's death in a duel in February 1821, the first publishers, Baldwin, Cradock and Joy sold the magazine to Taylor and Hessey and in July appeared the first of Cary's many contributions. The autumn saw Cary making a long visit to France, visiting his sister and, like Lamb, making the acquaintance of the famous actor Talma. It was about this time that Cary began his long and, at times, close friendship with Charles Lamb. Lamb wrote to Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet, 'Mr. Cary, the Dante-man, dines with me to-day', and he describes him later as 'modest and amiable C'. Subsequently there was much reciprocal hospitality between the two gentlemen and their families.

In 1821 on the initiative of Taylor we see the institution of the famous 'Magazine' dinners, held monthly at the various homes of the members of the circle. The first indeed was given by Cary himself, with Lamb and that rather sad figure, John Clare, the 'Peasant Poet', among the company. Thomas Hood and various others have given accounts of these interesting gatherings but we must limit ourselves to one apposite quotation, 'And there sits Cary, one of the most quiet, amiable and unassuming of men'.

A man, they say, is as good as the company he keeps, and we may now cast a glance at Cary's personal links with members of the circle. Closest were probably Charles Lamb and the now forgotten George Darley, to whom we may add the poet John Clare. He became on terms of acquaintanceship with figures of the stature of Thomas Carlyle, William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey and with lesser lights such as Tom Hood, Allan Cunningham and Procter, known as 'Barry Cornwall'. The most extraordinary career of any member of the circle and at one time a close friend of both Cary and Lamb was T.G. Wainwright, who used the pseudonym 'Janus Weathercock', who subsequently embarked on a career of crime of sufficient dimensions to cause him to be transported to Tasmania.

The career of the *London Magazine* flattered only to deceive and soon the virtue went out of it, but not before Cary had attained sufficient standing with a prominent figure of that time to be a guest at his table. The gentleman in question was Samuel Rogers, the wealthy banker poet, author of the blank verse poem 'Italy', and host at the famous breakfasts, which Cary attended from time to time. On the scene was the amiable Tom Moore, and perhaps more pertinently, Richard Heber, who offered Cary membership of the newly-founded Athenaeum Club. Two additional acquaintanceships of this time, and both fellow poets, were Gabriele Rossetti and William Blake.

The former, a political refugee, is now remembered chiefly as the father of a brilliant family, but he had carried out extensive Dante studies and published a version of the *Inferno*. There is regrettably little in the way of records of Cary's link with Blake but it is established that the latter's magnificent illustrations to the *Divina Commedia* are based on Cary's translation.

It was during the year 1823 that ominous signs appeared to indicate that all was not well with the *London Magazine*. Taylor appears to have lacked tact and there was serious dissatisfaction among contributors with regard to copyright. Contributors dropped off or became associated with the up-and-coming *New Monthly Magazine*. Cary's last contribution was in January 1825, and he subsequently abandoned all work for periodicals. In September the magazine was sold and sank into insignificance. The last 'Magazine dinner' seems to have been held at Cary's house the previous August and they were now a thing of the past.

Cary was a man of great industry and between the years of 1819 and 1826, when he obtained his appointment to the national library, he devoted himself to journalism. Of the contributions to the *London Magazine*, numbering about sixty in all, approximately two-thirds are concerned with the series on 'Early French Poets' and 'Lives of English Poets from Johnson to Kirke White, designed as a continuation of Johnson's Lives'. The work on French poetry prior to Malherbe, much neglected at that time, shows Cary at his best and was greatly admired by Charles Lamb. It included many graceful and accurate translations and we must be a little surprised that he did not at this time devote the same efforts to early Italian poets, in which he was so deeply interested. This may be due to the fact that he had nurtured over many years the project of producing an extensive and ambitious work on the history of Italian poetry. This was destined to be done after Cary's death by D.G. Rossetti.

'The Lives of English Poets' are mainly competent journalism and are limited by being designed as a continuation of Johnson's more famous work. Inevitably many minor and now forgotten poets appear but it is interesting to hear Cary's views on Coleridge, Walter Scott and Byron. But we may well ask who now recalls such names as Mason, Erasmus Darwin, the Wartons, or indeed Kirke White. During this period there came into Cary's ken another famous Italian, Ugo Foscolo, whose *Essays on Petrarch* received a laudatory review, reciprocating Foscolo's praise of the Dante five years earlier. We should not neglect to mention at this juncture Cary's translations from the Greek. His version of *The Birds* by Aristophanes was a first attempt at a metrical rendering in English but subsequent writers have performed the task with greater authority.

The year 1825 was something of a 'sabbatical' for Cary but in June the following year he started work at the British Museum as Assistant Keeper of the Printed Books. The Museum and the Library were modest institutions compared to today but much was changed during the eleven years of Cary's service there. The main building was then Montague House and Cary was offered accommodation in one of the two low-built wings on either side. His immediate superior was the Rev. H.H. Baber and in 1831 the post of second assistant was obtained by an Italian, Antonio Panizzi, destined ultimately to play an outstanding role in the history of the Library. Cary's

salary was £350 p.a. with free lodging for himself and family. The work was dull and arduous and perhaps the key to the situation is best revealed in lines written by his old acquaintance W.S.Landor: 'Cary! I fear the fruits are scanty/Thou gatherest from the fields of Dante'.

At first the accommodation offered was so limited that Cary was actually obliged to commute daily by coach from Chiswick, apparently passing the time involved by translating Pindar, but fortunately two new rooms were built for him the next spring.

As the Museum duties were on a five-day week Cary was able to continue the Sunday services at the Savoy Chapel. His routine work was superintending the care of books, recommending works for purchase and occasionally acting as guide. His speciality was the acquisition of foreign books and periodicals but much of his time was spent in writing out the Poetry Section in the new 'Catalogue of Printed Books'. This was an unrewarding task and subsequently the whole undertaking was abandoned. Perhaps Cary contrasted his situation with Charles Lamb's, retiring in 1825 from the India House with a pension of £400 p.a. Cary performed his duties conscientiously and was well-liked by the other members of the establishment, but little time was left for private reading. For the third edition of Dante in 1831 he could only reprint the 1819 edition without revision and his work on Pindar finally appeared without preface and notes.

Cary, as was characteristic, accepted the situation with philosophy and enjoyed the compensations. Among these were the accessibility of two of his sons, Henry reading for the Bar and Francis at the nearby Sass's Art Academy. Literary friends were more easily available and we soon hear of the names of Coleridge, Rogers, Charles Lamb, Southey and Wordsworth as frequent visitors. Others include George Dyer, friends from the *London Magazine*, and, later, members of a younger generation, such as Moxon and John Forster, biographer of Charles Dickens. Stothard, the artist, now stone-deaf, made a sole visit. When politics were discussed it is interesting and a little amusing to note the consternation displayed by the more conservatively inclined members at the prospect of the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832.

Unfortunately virtually all the correspondence between Cary and Coleridge has disappeared but Charles Lamb comes prominently into the picture again as, wearying a little of his enforced leisure he began exploring at the British Museum the collection of early English plays presented by Garrick and he subsequently made good use of his discoveries. On the scene and enjoying a friendship with both Cary and Lamb, appeared an unusual character, George Darley, described as 'poet and mathematician'. He was a great frequenter of the Reading Room and spent considerable time in Cary's company. We see further glimpses of John Clare, who turned to Cary for advice, which was readily given and always conveyed with discretion and tact. We might add that Lamb's only surviving letter to Clare speaks of his visit to France and his enjoyment of a dish of frogs.

Cary's private life in the first five or six years in Bloomsbury proceeded smoothly enough, his four elder sons being by now settled in various professions, his heir William Lucius in the army, Henry a law student and James in the Church. In due course his family circle increased by six grandchildren. He received a modest £100 for the re-issue of Dante in a third edition in 1831, 1000 copies to be sold at 18s, the three volumes. There had been no time for revision and the text of 1819 is repeated.

The Greek poet Pindar, living some 500 years B.C. may well seem a somewhat remote figure to us but not so to Cary, who placed him next to Dante in his affections. In 1832 the work was finished, after many years of preparation, and sent to press. Appearing finally in 1833, but without notes or even a preface, it was well received and flatteringly reviewed in both the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*. However, the lack of a commentary was a considerable handicap and it soon suffered an undeserved neglect.

Unhappily a devastating calamity occurred in Cary's life in November 1832. His wife died and he was for a time completely overwhelmed, as recorded by his son Henry in the 'Memoirs'. Early the following year, however, being granted six months leave by the Museum, he set out for Italy with his son Francis. They crossed France in three weeks, reaching Genoa and thence to Florence and Pisa and so via Rome to Naples. A month was spent in Rome before the long return journey by way of Venice over the Brenner Pass through Austria, Germany and Holland. As was natural for an artist, Francis occupied a good deal of his time studying & copying the many works of art available. Among interesting encounters were Keats's companion Joseph Severn and a reunion in Florence with his old schoolfellow W.S. Landor.

By July 10th, Cary was back in London in much improved health and the following September was able to resume his work at the Museum. Charles Lamb wrote to say that he and Mary had scrambled through the *Inferno* in Italian, thanks to Cary's translation; and Cary himself, noticing Lamb's feeling of exile at Edmonton, suggested that the Lambs should dine regularly at the Museum on the third Wednesday of every month, an arrangement they were able to maintain for about a year. During this time Cary made a visit to France for a month, travelling through Normandy as far as the Auvergne. Francis was engaged about this time, at his father's request, on the joint portrait of Charles and Mary Lamb, now in the National Portrait Gallery. It is, in addition, the only extant authenticated portrait of Mary Lamb. Shortly before Francis' death in 1880 he wrote 'I commenced the portraits of Charles and Mary Lamb, which were painted entirely from life, at my studio in Hart St., Bloomsbury, in the summer of 1834'. The artist adds that the portrait was not quite finished when Lamb died but was not altered subsequently. There were many tributes written to Charles Lamb after his death and Cary's brief and simple poem is worthy of the company.

His wife dead, and now his friends Lamb and Coleridge, the shadows began to lengthen for Cary and his retirement from the British Museum took place under unhappy circumstances. His health was uncertain and a visit to Germany with Francis was cut short by illness, the cause of which remains a little mysterious. However he soon resumed his customary work at the Museum, and so matters continued for a couple of years, but we now approach the not altogether agreeable matter of his retirement.

An Italian political refugee, Antonio Panizzi, had been in the employ of the Museum for some time in the role of 'Extra Assistant Librarian'. He was a man of great energy and ambition, who was destined ultimately to be granted both a knighthood and the KCB for his efforts in developing the Library. When Baber, the Chief Librarian, announced his somewhat belated intention to retire, it was only natural that Cary should apply for the post, as did Panizzi, with Cary's full knowledge. There followed some rather confused discussions, with possible indecision and vacillation, at the conclusion of which the post was given to Panizzi. Cary's position was now

invidious in the extreme and he, with some reason, felt strongly that he had been the victim of a grave injustice. He even went so far as to demand a public inquiry, which was denied him, and he finally decided that resignation was the only suitable course of action.

An unhappy course of events concludes more agreeably by a comment of Edwards, the historian of the British Museum, that 'Cary left the Museum with the hearty respect and with the brotherly regrets of all his colleagues, without any exception', adding 'Of him it may truly be said, he was a man much beloved'.

Cary had, albeit somewhat tardily, been granted a Civil List pension in 1841 and had in addition inherited some £6,000 on the death of his father in 1834. In consequence the loss of his Museum salary was not too heavy a blow, particularly as his sons, most of them by now adult and launched on their careers, were ready and able to assist him. Francis, the artist, and Richard took up residence with him in a rented house in Park St., Westminster and he turned his thoughts once more to a history of Italian poetry but we are reminded of D.G. Rossetti's moving words, 'My name is might have been. I'm also called no more, too late, farewell'. Intellectually he could no doubt have coped with the efforts required but physically it would have been beyond his powers. A start was made, indeed, in the form of notes and translations but it did not proceed very far and was laid aside when in 1838 a publisher William Smith suggested editing a series of standard English poets in a cheap format. Thus editions of Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Young and Cowper saw the light of day after three or four years given up to this somewhat routine task. Cary now lived quietly, seeing only a restricted circle of old friends but during the summer months from 1838 he regularly visited the Oxford district, his son Henry, after ordination, holding curacies at St. Mary's, Reading, Temple Cowley and Iffley. From there Cary was able to walk into Oxford to read or write in the Bodleian or at All Souls', but the shadows were lengthening with the inevitable disappearance of family and friends. His father, his wife and brother-in-law Price had died within a few years of each other and Coleridge and Lamb had also gone. At Iffley in August 1841 Cary wrote sadly, echoing Lamb's familiar poem:

Where are they, the faithful crew,
That wont with converse gay,
Or graver mood, as best they knew,
To smooth the rugged way?

Another link was broken in the spring of that year by the death of George Dyer, immortalised for ever by his unexpected dip in the New River when leaving Lamb's home in Islington. He was buried in Kensal Green and Cary was moved to write his epitaph, beginning:

Above the scholar's fame, the poet's bays,
Thus, Dyer, on the tomb we write thy praise.

Although Cary's physical strength began to wane, his intellectual energy was unimpaired and, as ever, he remained a voracious reader, as testified by his son Henry. The autumn of 1842 saw his last house-move, this time to 6, Charlotte St., where Francis had taken over an already existing school of art. He had recently married and carried on the academy, often called 'Sass's' after the founder, for more than thirty years. Two of his pupils,

Millais and Rossetti, were to win lasting fame and provide evidence of his success as a teacher. The latter, like Blake, was destined to establish a great reputation as a poet and it is highly likely that his association with Cary so early in life might well have initiated his life-long love of Dante's work, which he did so much to foster. Now approaching its conclusion was Cary's long labour in that particular field. A proposal for a new edition of the *Commedia* with Flaxman's illustrations had fallen through, although many years previously seven of Blake's designs had been engraved with quotations from Cary's text. Finally simultaneous octavo editions were decided on, both in a single volume, priced respectively at 10s. 6d. and 6s. and in March 1844 these appeared. It can be rightly judged a sound and solid piece of work, still to this day, under the title *The Vision of Dante*, readily obtainable and held in high esteem.

Cary's health was now visibly declining but in the summer of 1843 he was able to enjoy a pleasant visit to Sandgate, accompanied by Francis, Richard and the former's wife. It inspired two poems and restored him to London much fortified. He renewed his friendship with Hood, after a long interval, and with Mary Lamb, who had now left Edmonton for St. John's Wood. A glimpse of his last days is given us by his constant companion, Francis who tells us that in June 1844 he took lodgings at West End, Hampstead and later at Willesden, whence he would drive to London to spend his mornings and return for the evening in the country. Towards the end of July there was uneasiness about his health and he died on the morning of Wednesday, 14th August, 1844 at what was then the little village of Willesden. On August 21st, he was laid to rest in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, beside Dr. Johnson and David Garrick, and near the spot where the poet Campbell had been buried a few weeks before. His grave remained unmarked for many years but in 1868 the following inscription was added, presumably by his sons.

'Underneath/lie the remains of/Henry Francis Cary, M.A./
Vicar of Abbots Bromley/Formerly Vicar of Kingsbury Warwicks/
Translator of Dante/Born Dec. 6, 1772/Died Aug.14, 1844.

ROBERT SOUTHEY: BULWARK OF VICTORIAN FAITH

David Pym

For the century following the midpoint of Victoria's reign Southey suffered in reputation as a poet, as a historian, and as an influential religious thinker. The reasons for the denigration of his poetry over this period require a detailed study elsewhere. The explanation for the lessening esteem of his historical and theological writings lies largely in the fact that he made no secret of his motive in using history to defend the Church of England and the assumptions underlying its position in the constitution before 1829. History was unashamedly polemical. While his method shared much with the Liberal Anglicans such a presupposition was to them unacceptable. History requires a liberality of approach, a certain neutrality and a recognition of a pluralism of view point and ideals. As early as January 1828 F.D. Maurice sounded forth the evaluation of Southey that was to become the dominant one within forty years:

He is, indeed, a mournful example of the ruin which may be wrought upon the fairest minds, by attaching an universal feeling to particular institutions, and by processing to find all truth in the creed of one establishment. (1)

By the 1870s very few took seriously the content of Southey's work. He was merely considered as an inspiration in English prose style as when, in his essay of 1876 on Macaulay, John Morley concluded that 'Southey was a man of letters pure and simple, and it is worth remarking that Macaulay himself said that he found so great a charm in Southey's style, as nearly always to read it with pleasure, even when Southey was talking nonsense'. (2) Yet Morley's estimate was merely one of the kindest and most gentle among many critics from 1845 onwards, including John Gibson Lockhart and Whitwell Elwin, who dismissed Southey as dull, staid and narrow. In particular they saw him as the loser of yesteryear's battles. Indeed, the reputation of the third of the Lake poets had declined to such an extent in the last half of Victoria's reign that, when writing his life of Newman in 1897, Wilfred Ward felt from his heart that this position could not be allowed to rest unchallenged.

Poor Southey! there would seem to be a *consensus* today among all classes of critics, that you have lost for ever your seat among the immortals, and yet three at least of the idols of today, Coleridge and Landor and Newman, worshipped you! (3)

Coleridge died too soon to be within our study, but Newman and Landor will both have a significant place, ironical as it is that Landor himself has now faded into a far greater obscurity than Southey. But they were not fools. What was it that they and others of the first generation of Victorians and even beyond found in Robert Southey?

There was certainly a considerable number who found in Southey's person the moral and pastoral authority for which they were seeking. For the respectable his theology, his politics and his moral teaching were safe. His courteousness distinguished him from so many of his literary contemporaries. He set an example of paternal responsibility in the way he applied himself to earning a living from his pen for not only his own family, but, frequently, that of Coleridge as well. He and the office of Poet Laureate mutually enhanced each other in respectability. In short, he epitomised duty and especially Christian duty in a manner that naturally appealed to the early Victorian. Even William Hazlitt, for whom the now conservative Southey had no natural sympathy or affinity 'because he only looks at his own side of the question', was attracted by Southey's consistency, and as early as 1825 was to characterise him as a prime forerunner of Victorian piety and morality.

However irregular in his opinions, Mr. Southey is constant, unremitting, mechanical in his studies and the performance of his duties. There is nothing Pindaric or Shandean here. In all the relations and charities of private life, he is correct, exemplary, generous, just. (4)

Southey was beyond reproach to the extent that it was quite acceptable for sensitive young women to write unannounced seeking personal or literary advice. When she wrote in December 1836 Charlotte Bronte was merely following in the footsteps of Caroline Bowles, whose fifteen years of correspondence with Southey eventually led to her becoming his second wife. Charlotte's original letter is lost, but she labelled the reply as 'Southey's advice to be kept for ever', although it did not answer her deepest question. In a recent study of Charlotte Bronte, Christine Alexander reckons that Southey reinforced a profound internal conflict of fulfilment. On the one hand she felt she

ought to be devoting herself to activities and thoughts considered appropriate for outwardly deeply Christian and respectable young women and, on the other, she had a deep need of fulfilling her literary aspirations with a use of rakish material and a theme of sexual liberation. (5) My own view tends towards the position that she approached Southey because she anticipated receiving advice she felt she ought to hear. Possibly she looked to him to provide a reason for ending her religious restlessness by returning to the conventional outlook of a clergyman's daughter of the time. Although it was limited, Southey's advice was something she worked from and she always held him in the deepest respect. Unfortunately even this relationship has been maligned by twentieth century critics as when E.F. Benson noted that on the occasion of the three sisters publishing a volume of poetry Wordsworth and Tennyson received copies with letters of homage but Southey did not. Benson failed to explain how Southey was to receive these gifts as in 1846 he had already been more than two years departed from this world. (6)

What would have pleased Southey was the knowledge that Charlotte Bronte's biographer regarded him as an authority on the necessity of pastoral work. Although a layman Southey was considered in many circles to have a valid voice in such matters and Mrs. Gaskell approved of his insistence that the parish priest should be at the heart of his people's lives. Writing in 1858 of a friend who was preparing a history of the town of Knutsford, *Cranford's* model, she told her correspondent:

... I would gladly do what I can to help him, remembering what Southey says of how good and well it would be if every Parish priest would write down what he hears and learns about his own Parish, as traits of customs and manners and character might thus be preserved as *Memoires pour servir*.

Coleridge, Maurice, Arnold and many others wrote on the function of the Church as the guardian of the spiritual traditions of the Nation. Yet, with the possible exception of Keble, no one saw more clearly than Southey the microcosm of this, namely the similar importance of the parish clergyman in respect of his parish. My own opinion is that Southey's real motive for emphasising this was a regret that as a young man he had not continued with his plan to take Holy Orders. This led him to spend so much of his later life in commending the work of those who had and to do what he could through his pen to serve the Church that he felt he had failed. It was this sense of a need for spiritual expiation that I feel led him to take up some of the positions that were really lost causes for the Church of England following the constitutional changes of the late 1820s and early 1830s.

This same motive can be seen at work in Southey's influence on educational practice in the National Schools of the early Victorian era. Unlike Thomas Arnold and Butler of Shrewsbury he was not interested in reforming an élite system of education for the few, even if it were on Christian principles. For Southey the boarding school was an anachronism and he was particularly critical of the harshness in the regime of Wesley's foundation at Kingswood:

.... Wesley had learnt a sour German proverb, saying, "He that plays when he is a child, will play when he is a man"; and he had forgotten an English one proceeding from good nature and good sense, which tells us by what kind of a discipline Jack may be made a dull boy. (8)

For Southey the home and not the boarding school was the natural and proper place for a child's upbringing. His own home was such that Charlotte Bronte was able to view it as a model for others. On reading Southey's *Life* in 1850 she wrote:

.... Some people assert that Genius is inconsistent with domestic happiness and yet Southey was happy at home and made his home happy..... learned coteries with their dry pedantry rather scared than attracted him; he found his prime glory in his genius, and his chief felicity in home affections. I like Southey!

It would be unwise to conclude that the sufferings of Jane Eyre in Mr. Brocklehurst's establishment had any direct dependence on those portrayed by Southey in Wesley's foundation. Nevertheless her thoughts were doubtless clarified by her reading.

On a broader front, Southey's place in the development of English education has been assessed with a similar blend of prejudice and ignorance to the one that led to Benson's view of him as a poet and historian. In the late 1820s Southey was vehemently opposing the founding of secular institutions such as London University and the Mechanics Institutes. So important was Southey as a spokesman on behalf of Christian education that half a century later J.S. Mill could regard his father's attacks on him and his educational ideas as one of James Mill's most significant activities. (10) Outwardly the elder Mill was denigrating the *Book of the Church*, but in reality he was attempting to counter the value of Southey's name for those whose purpose was to retain the mainstream of English education under the auspices of the Church of England. Mill joined with Hazlitt in characterizing Southey as an ageing obscurantist to whom the idea of either a liberal or a technical education was alien. They portrayed him as one who paid no attention to the nation's practical needs. In a similar vein Southey has continued to be the Aunt Sally of the modern secular educational historian. Ivor Morrish has criticised him on the grounds that he felt that by the 1820s the Sunday School movement was more concerned with providing practical instruction rather than a religious and liberal education. (11) One is led to ask whether the motive is not to get at the man by misrepresenting the ideas; for the truth is that the ideas are more durable than those of many of his critics. Unlike Mill he had no patience with the tradition of Locke and the utilitarian epistemology. For him education must be based on the liberal and Romantic philosophy of mind. As he told Neville White in 1827: 'The human mind is like the earth, which never lies idle... Cultivate it then for common fruits and culinary plants'. (12) For him this cultivation was best done under the guiding hand of the parish priest of whom John Keble was the ideal example. The two met rarely, but when they did it was with great mutual respect.

Southey could not follow Wesley's view that religion is almost solely to do with the heart of the believer. There is also the need of the concrete, historical reality of the Church. Beyond this, the Church should have the resources to provide a proper Christian education far beyond the scope of the amateurish Sunday School or religious meeting, and this should be guaranteed by statute. Such a system of parochial education would be 'required for completing the Reformation in England'. (13) As the best available means of providing this Southey supported Andrew Bell's Madras System and was later responsible for the first volume of his *Life and Letters*. Morrish is wrong in reckoning that Southey did this because of

any uncritical admiration of Bell. Indeed Southey only undertook the task out of a sense of duty and his recommendation of the use of Bell's system in the National Schools largely stemmed from the fact that there was virtually no alternative to meet the resources provided at the time. But, taken together, the National Society, Bell and Southey established a pattern of parochial education that was to be the norm of English elementary education for eighty years. Unknowingly the mid-Victorian child was as indebted to Southey as to almost any public figure for the way his daily life was ordered.

Apart from education other aspects of Southey are overlooked or misrepresented by the fashion of writing him off for his undeserved reputation as an over authoritarian figure with outdated opinions. Indeed in the then important question of religious authority he consciously steered a middle path between Newman and Arnold. By the late 1830s the more extreme of the Tractarians were of the view that religious teaching is little more than the offering to the hearer of a parcel of propositions to be either totally uncritically accepted or else wholly rejected. The tone of the approach can be gleaned from Newman's title of a public sermon of this time, *Submission to Church Authority*. Southey would have none of this. Newman was aware of his opinion but for all this could still find in Southey's poetry a model of his own destiny 'to do the will of heaven', which he found in reading *Thalaba* at a time around 1830 when his spirits were low on account of both Parliamentary legislation and the rise of Anglican liberal ideas centred around the name of Thomas Arnold. Indeed Southey remained with Newman as an inspiration and in the *Apologia* he did not forget to acknowledge a debt of forty years: as he remembered his feelings as a young man:

Now it was, I think, that I repeated to myself the words, which had ever been dear to me from my school days, 'Exoriare aliquis!' - now too, that Southey's beautiful poem of *Thalaba*, for which I had an immense liking, came forcibly to my mind. I began to think that I had a mission. There are sentences of my letters to my friends to this effect, if they are not destroyed. (14)

In an essay of 1861 Newman called *Thalaba* 'the most sublime of English poems - I don't know Spenser - I mean morally sublime'. If it is considered that, for one whose life was overshadowed by a sense of responsibility to God for every moment and every action, that 'moral' should refer to conduct enacted as part of a divinely imparted mission, then Wilfred Ward is right in quoting this passage where

Son of Herodias, thou art chosen forth
To do the will of heaven;
To avenge thy Father's death,
The murder of thy race,
To work the mightiest enterprize
That mortal man hath wrought.
Live! and remember Destiny
Hath marked thee from mankind!

According to Newman's colleague at the Oratory, Fr. Ignatius Dudley Ryder, *Thalaba* was Newman's 'picture of what he trusted the Movement and his share in the Movement should have been'. (15)

However Southey's poems and *Thalaba* in particular had an influence on a figure of equal stature in Victorian England who was at the opposite end of the ecclesiastical spectrum from Newman. *Thalaba* had a special power over sensitive young men and boys of the 1820s and among them was Arthur Penrhyn Stanley. In 1825 he was a fourteen year old at Arnold's Rugby. 'Southey had been, and still was, his favourite poet. "We have great fun", he writes to Mrs. Stanley in February 1825, "playing at *Thalaba* and *Kehama*".' (16) This love of Southey in the mind of one who became Arnold's biographer and the Queen's most trusted counsellor lasted to the very end of his life. 'When in the year before he died, he revisited the places described in his (schoolboy) journal, he was distressed beyond measure at being prevented from visiting the scenes of Southey's "Roderic".' (17) However, the appeal of Southey was very different for Stanley than Newman. There was not the same unending introspection. Rather the heroic and historical characteristics of the poems spoke to one steeped in the optimism of Victorian England with its consciousness of the nation's past. For Stanley the poems stimulated the imagination rather than comforted the soul.

Yet Southey's influence on the beliefs of the first generation of Victorians extended to one whose concern was primarily the more equal relationship of man with man rather than the very unequal one of the individual in his standing with God. In her recent book on *Ruskin* Joan Abse refers to an axiom of his thinking when 'the Middle Ages, above all an age of profound Christian faith, was a time when the good life had been possible' and she finds in Southey and Walter Scott the origin of this outlook, which was also inherited by the likes of Pugin and William Morris. (18)

Ruskin's diary for December 4th 1843 referred to '... a little reading of Southey's *Colloquies* with which I was much pleased'. (19) The full title is *Sir Thomas More; or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, and it is in their vision of a right social order that Ruskin and Southey had so much in common. Both were socialists in a way that radicals were not. According to the lights of early Victorian England both advocated a very dangerous policy that the rich should contribute to the support of the poor where even Malthus and Mill had, in Southey's words, the opinion that the 'remedy for the existing evils of society is simply to abolish the poor rates and starve the poor into celibacy'. Both too were strongly conservative, not in any sense of wishing to retain an inequality of wealth, but rather in an ambition to realise in the present a vision of the mutual loyalty, care and respect of the various elements of society leading to a harmonious unity, which Ruskin found in the historical perspectives and understanding of Southey. Abse puts it this way:

.... When Ruskin wrote to Sydney Cockerell in March 1886, 'Of course I am a Socialist - of the most stern sort - but I am also a Tory of the sternest sort,' he was not proposing them as equivalents but was describing himself as Janus-faced, looking backwards and forwards for a synthetic solution to the unjust society in which he lived..... His nature, bred to reverence, obedience, and duty, inclined to the past, to the days of feudal England when he fancied kings and nobles had distinguished themselves by taking on extra duties not extra privileges.....It was a vision which had inspired Scott and Southey a generation before him. (20)

However, it was not as a poet with a heroic vision of a divine vocation nor

as a rediscover of the benefits of feudal socialism nor yet as a personal adviser that was the general reason for Southey's name being in the public eye in the early years of Queen Victoria. Rather it was as a loyal upholder of both the traditional position of the Church of England and the associated Tory principles of society, even though this cost him personal ridicule and affected his previously earned standing as a poet. One important representative admirer of this kind was W.S. Landor, previously mentioned as a most prestigious Victorian figure according to Wilfred Ward. Landor was a close friend of Julius Hare and had considerable influence with Richard Monckton Milnes, First Lord Houghton. In the early 1840s Milnes had been able to persuade Sir Robert Peel to grant a pension to Tennyson and this led Landor to attempt the same on behalf of Southey's widow. 'Pray, my dear Milnes, exert your great and noble faculties on behalf of a man whose principles and pursuits were the same as yours - a man who defended with more vigour and consistency than any other the laws and religion of his country'. (21)

Unfortunately the application was put forward while Milnes was abroad and failed. Landor refused Milnes' offer to try again and in doing so paid a tribute to Southey that reflects the tragedy, the loyalty, the character and the appreciation of one who was himself a recognized idol among Victorian intellectuals.

Pray do not try again. Southey was only the best man and the best writer of the age in which he lived, and the strongest support of Peel's administration; but Southey is dead, and no edifice can stand on a dead body. He can work no more for Church or Kingdom: they owe him large wages, but, as nobody demands them, nobody will pay them. (22)

Please note:

This paper was delivered at the Third National Conference on Literature and Religion, which was held at Hatfield College, Durham from 22nd to 25th September 1986. The subject of the Conference was 'The Critical Spirit and the Will to Believe (The Victorian Crisis of Faith)'. Therefore this paper confines itself to the influence Southey had on Victorian Faith, and naturally the character of Southey most relevant is the one of his maturity. It would have been beyond the scope of the Conference to have considered in any detail his poetry, the several phases of faith and unbelief in his own lifetime, or the various controversies with his literary contemporaries.

(We think that our readers, perhaps more familiar with the early Southey, will find this view of him of particular interest. Ed.)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Kenneth Curry, *The Contributions of Robert Southey to the Morning Post*, University of Alabama Press, 1984, 224 pages, cloth £17.95. (Obtainable through European University Press Group, 3 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8LU).

In his biography of the poet published in 1975, Professor Kenneth Curry mentioned Robert Southey's translations from Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Latin, and Greek lying 'for the most part uncollected and unclaimed within the files of *The Morning Post*'. Now, writing from active retirement, Professor Curry has collected these short poems (together with original compositions in English) into an anthology which is also a study in bibliography. He has painstakingly collated references to these poems in Southey's poems and *Commonplace Books*, and gathered together bibliographical notes scattered throughout learned periodicals in this country and in America.

Professor Curry's Introduction is a fascinating account of the detection of Southey's authorship of unsigned poems - particularly difficult in his

occasional satirical pieces and in translations in his style where the original which would confirm his authorship has been lost. Southey used a variety of *noms de plume*, and the difficulty of this work of literary detection is indicated by the remark that while 'It is always safe to assume that a signed poem in the *Post* is not by Southey, it is not always safe to assume that an unsigned poem *is* one of his'. For this reason, Professor Curry reprints in the section 'Conjectural Attributions to Southey' some translations from the French which 'can be assigned to him with less confidence than for those from Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian, which he was doing in far greater number'.

Professor Curry emphasises that Southey was a translator for most of his literary career and occasionally contemplated republishing his scattered translations in book form. Had he done so, Curry conjectures, Southey 'would be far better known as a pioneer in the introduction of Spanish poets and poetry to the British public'. The poet did, however, include some of the translations reprinted here in the second and third editions of his *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal*, in his later reviews of Spanish and Portuguese poetry, and to accompany his translation of *The Cid*. The provenance of these pieces is confirmed by the careful notes Southey made throughout his life, with suggestions and odd lines that came into his head for possible working into poems, and these were preserved in his *Commonplace Books*.

Curry does not reprint poems collected by Southey in his ten-volume *Poetical Works*, so that we miss familiar pieces like 'God's Judgment on a Wicked Bishop', 'The Battle of Blenheim', and 'The Inchcape Rock'. Another poem omitted for the same reason is 'The Old Man's Comforts' ('You are old, Father William...'). It is remembered to-day chiefly because of Lewis Carroll's parody, but Curry appears to agree with Geoffrey Grigson's suspicion that even in the original 'Southey's tongue was in his cheek'. Indeed, Curry defends him against Dr. Carnall's charge that 'there is little humour in (his) poetry' by instancing 'many pleasant, cheerful and humorous poems', 'The Old Man's Comforts' among them. This collection is full of touches of wry humour as well as what Curry describes as 'scatological' and Edward Dowden as 'simply sportive' poems. Southey's light-hearted 'Ode to Gooseberry Pie' is sometimes printed in modern cookery books, and there are poems here to gooseberries, pigeon pie and eggs and bacon. One imagines the relish with which Southey declaimed them at the family table. There are also examples of Southey's blending of 'historical anecdote, contemporary political commentary and humour' and the anthology presents the picture of a scholarly and politically aware young man, receptive to the new forms in which his contemporaries were writing (studies of Wordsworth's 'Idiot Boy' and Southey's 'The Idiot' by Geoffrey Carnall and Elizabeth Duthie show, as does so much of Southey's work, how his mind was often working on parallel lines to that of Wordsworth both in subject matter and form). But Curry is careful not to claim too much merit for Southey's minor poems - 'for the most part competent and attractive examples of the work of a talented and fluent young poet who was sensitive to the new and fashionable themes and forms that poets were exploiting in the last decade of the eighteenth century'.

The chronological list of poems first published in *The Morning Post* shows Southey producing two or three poems a week from January 1798 to December 1799. After his second visit to Portugal he returned to the work from September to December 1801, and again from February to December 1803.

Professor Curry reprints in chronological order all those poems not in *Poetical Works* and one is conscious that towards the close there is a falling-off in Southey's concentration and enthusiasm. As later in his task odes as Poet Laureate, this 'laureateship' to Daniel Stuart of the *Post* was becoming irksome and he was glad to relinquish the guinea a week when his financial circumstances improved. There is an example of this deterioration in the contrast between two amusing translations on Orpheus and Eurydice. That of 1798, from the Count of Villademiana, is more tightly constructed than the longer translation in 1801 from Quevedo. The subject matter is identical, and the difference probably lies with the translator rather than his originals. The later poem takes nine quatrains to make the point reached in only five in the earlier version, and summed up succinctly in the final stanza -

'But still he look'd, and she was lost,
He could not be contented;
Was it the Lover who forgot,
Or Husband who repented?'

Inspiration was obviously flagging as early as the summer of 1799, but he was able to turn his predicament to good account in 'The Poet Perplex' -

'BRAIN! thou must work! begin, or we shall lose
The day, while yet we only think upon it.
The hours run on, and yet thou wilt not chuse
The subject, come, Ode, Elegy, or Sonnet.
You must contribute, Brain! in this hard time
Taxes are high, food dear, and you must rhyme'.

A month later Necessity, 'Hard Mistress', 'inspirer of the needful rhyme' provided the subject for a desperate sonnet.

This is an attractive collection of lyrical poetry, brightened with the wit and satire so often toned down by later editors of the poet's own family. The anthology makes pleasant reading for itself as well as for the bibliographer's satisfaction in discovering with Professor Curry what Isaac D'Israeli called 'the evidence of a master-hand'.

Chrystal Tilney

Wordsworth and the Worth of Words. By Hugh Sykes Davies, edited by John Kerrigan and Jonathan Wordsworth. Cambridge University Press, 1986. pp. xii, 324. £30.

There are two remarkable things about the dust jacket of this book. It is illustrated with (to my knowledge) the first reproduction in a book on Wordsworth of Sir George Beaumont's brooding painting of *The Thorn*, which is now in the possession of Richard and Sylvia Wordsworth. And, just as noteworthy, the standard publisher's puff in the blurb to the effect that the book 'should earn a place among the few essential studies of the poet' is for once true. I can think of no book that has done more to show simultaneously why Wordsworth is our greatest poet, always excepting Shakespeare, and yet why he is a poet whom many will never appreciate.

The reproduction of *The Thorn* is not merely decorative, for that poem is fundamental to Sykes Davies's argument, as may be seen from the Acknowledgements, which begin 'In all Wordsworthian literalness, I have been helped by the memory of two thorn trees, each with a pond beside it, about three feet long and two feet wide. . . . From [them], I learned that the real problem in the study of Wordsworth is to account for his use of words like *thorn* and *pond*'. The central contention of the book is that certain simple words have a peculiar worth for Wordsworth; the playful title is therefore apt, though I suspect that it will put some readers off.

An introductory section lays open the book's chief preoccupations -- language, memory, place-- and shows that many of Wordsworth's most enduring concerns are adumbrated in the early poem *The Vale of Estwaite*. By the end of this introduction, Sykes Davies has demonstrated the intimate relationship in Wordsworth between recurrence in memory and repetition in language. The next section, 'Wordsworthian words', builds on this insight. As Sykes Davies reminds us, Wordsworth was exceptionally self-critical (witness his obsessive revision) and exceptionally aware of what he was trying to do in his poetry. So it is that his own pronouncements repay close attention: since Wordsworth 'regarded an ability to appreciate [*The Thorn*] properly as the touchstone of the reader who could understand his poetry', Sykes Davies devotes a lot of space to a consideration of what he was trying to do in that poem. A key is found in the note regarding the poem in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth speaks of 'the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passions, but as *things* active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion'. Sykes Davies finds certain elemental words -- thorn, pond, moss -- recurring in the poem, and by dwelling on them sympathetically he shows how they do seem to become things. It is almost as if Wordsworth's words have a special capacity to transcend the axiom of linguistic philosophers from Locke to Saussure that the relationship between words and the things they signify is arbitrary.

Wordsworth said, also appropos of *The Thorn*, that 'everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the Author', and it is through his sustainedly thoughtful *reading with* the poems that Sykes Davies comes to apprehend the full power and glory of Wordsworth's repeated use of such words as 'naked' and 'gleam'. No student or reader could fail to benefit from the following advice:

Many of the methods so much and -- on the whole -- so effectively used in modern criticism are simply inapplicable to Wordsworth's best and most characteristic writing. It will yield very little to the deft analyser of imagery. For there is very little imagery, and most of what there is turns out to be almost commonplace. It will not fall readily under the scalpel of the 'New Critics', or conform to the coding of 'structuralism'. What is needed in the study of Wordsworth is not ingenuity or brilliance, but a dogged faithfulness to his own text, aided by the Concordance and a good memory for the many important variants and drafts not yet Concordanced. For the only way of determining the meaning of any word in his poetry is to take all its contexts together, and to ensure that the closest attention is indeed given to those words which, by the process of repetition and tautology, had come to bear in it a weight, a power, greater than they usually carry.

It is for this reason that readers of Wordsworth are addicts or nothing. The casual or desultory reader never gives himself the chance of becoming sensitised to these words, and, taking them at their usual instead of their Wordsworthian weight, he is simply puzzled that anyone has ever taken the poetry very seriously. But once a certain point in this sensitisation is reached, there is a sudden, an almost inexplicable extension in understanding, as personal and intimate as the language through which it has been reached.

Here is Sykes Davies's method in a nutshell: yes, it involves concordance work and tables of word-frequency which might seem dull, but always the sensitivity to the texture of Wordsworth's language brings illumination. And there is surprising variety: in one chapter, De Quincey's conception of the 'involute' is brought to bear on the visionary power of clusters of words, particularly those associated with the 'spots of time' in *The Prelude*; in the next, Wordsworth's 'naked' landscapes are contrasted with the full and ordered landscapes of the fashionable 'picturesque' (Sykes Davies's writing is always elegant and witty, on the picturesque it is at times hilarious); and to conclude, there is an acute account, written before the publication of the love letters, of how Wordsworth's wife played a subtly shaping role in the formation of much of his best poetry (thus Wordsworth is shown to have not only an 'idiolect', a distinctive language, but also an 'ecollect', a language shared with his fellow 'inmates' at Dove Cottage).

I have only two petty cavils. John Kerrigan and Jonathan Wordsworth have done a superb job in preparing for publication a complex typescript which Sykes Davies left at his death in 1984. They say in their preface that the book had gone through many mutations and was being re-shaped again by the author when he died: this might have licensed them to mark off or even demote to an appendix the more technical statistical work on word-frequencies, which will daunt many readers (suffice it to say that most of us should feel able to skip pages 52-62). Secondly, it does seem to me that the discussion of the picturesque seriously under-estimates the importance for Wordsworth of the sublime -- it gets ten pages at the end of a seventy page chapter. To take one example: a line in *An Evening Walk* concerning the thump of a distant forge is referred to Thomas Gray's *Journal*, a key text in the history of Lake District tourism, but not to an equally important allusion to forge-hammers in Burke's treatise on *The Sublime and the Beautiful*.

That Sykes Davies's understanding of Wordsworth was 'personal and intimate' is apparent from a number of autobiographical touches (many delights lie hidden in the footnote). A critic who acknowledges that he himself is a human being and that his reading of poetry might actually relate to his own life: this is something that those of us who have to read a lot of academic criticism are most unaccustomed to. I suppose some will smugly dismiss Sykes Davies as a quaint man of letters from a vanished era; but those who do so will also find themselves dismissing the remarks about the country and the city with which the book ends, remarks that offer powerful testimony to Wordsworth's significance for us in our modern predicament.

Jonathan Bate
Trinity Hall, Cambridge

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION LUNCHEON

Successive February gatherings having been rendered anxious and sometimes depleted by snow and ice, we gave Charles Lamb an 'official birthday' this year on 9 May 1987. This evidently paid off, as we had an excellent attendance, sixty-five members and guests being present at the Vitello d'Oro Restaurant on a pleasant sunny day. Our Guest of Honour on this occasion was Michael Foot, who gave a delightful speech paying tribute to Charles Lamb in many aspects but - naturally! - particularly in his friendship with William Hazlitt. It was a great pleasure to have Mr. Foot with us and to have the privilege of hearing him.

The health of Provincial and Overseas Members was proposed by Bill Ruddick and grace before and after meat was spoken for us by Grecians from Christ's Hospital. For the first time, we saw the girls in their new uniform, adopted since the amalgamation of the two schools. Grecians with us this year were John Carrington, Matthew Kibble, Louise Pickett and Helen Bradley.

BRITISH ACADEMY SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

Several members of the Society were present at the 1987 Shakespeare Lecture at the British Academy on 30 April to hear Dr. Stanley Wells on 'Tales from Shakespeare'. A large proportion of the lecture was given to Charles and Mary Lamb's 'Tales', together with other subsequent versions. The lecture will eventually be published as a British Academy pamphlet and members may be interested to look out for it.

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

In June the Secretary of the George Eliot Fellowship wrote asking for support in protesting at the proposed demolition by Nuneaton Council of the Free School in Chilvers Coton, erected in 1745. This is a building which George Eliot knew and which appears in her first work of fiction *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton*. It is one of the few buildings in the town which has a strong association with the novelist. We were, of course, happy to write to the Chief Executive at Nuneaton deploring the proposed demolition.

M.R.H.

1987/8 PROGRAMME

On 7th November we are delighted to welcome again Dr. Nicholas Roe who spoke to us about four years ago. Dr. Roe is writing an introductory essay to a reissue of Emile Legouis' *Early Life of William Wordsworth*, and his talk will be on Legouis' contributions to English Romantic Studies.

Emile Legouis died in 1937 so this will be a tribute on the 50th Anniversary of his death.

Members may care to re-read the (1921) English edition of the *Early Life*.

PROSE STUDIES

A special number of *Prose Studies* will be devoted to the Essay as a Literary Form. Articles are invited on: individual essays; on the *oeuvre* of an essayist; on the conventions of the essay; on the essay in particular historical periods; and on the theory of the genre, particularly in relation to contemporary literary theory. Articles should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words and should follow the *MLA Style Manual*. The deadline is 1 December 1987.

Articles or proposals should be sent either to:-

Philip Dodd,
Department of English,
University of Leicester,
Leicester,
England, LE1 7RH.

or

Joel Haefner,
608 W. Benton,
Iowa City, IA 52240

BOOK MART

'Charles Lamb and his Hertfordshire' by Reginald Hine (1949).
Offers to Miss H.E. Leigh, 200B Heene Road, Worthing, W. Sussex
BN11 4NT (Tel. Worthing 31945)

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

These are due on 1 January, 1988. Please note the new rates, after no increase for four years, which are reported from the Annual General Meeting in the July issue.

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