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The Charles Lamb Society was founded on 1 February 1935 at a meeting at Essex Hall in The Strand. Its first President was Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Today, the Society aims to advance the study of the life, works, and times of Charles and Mary Lamb and their circle; to preserve for the public a collection of Eliana (currently held at Guildhall Library, London); and to stimulate the Elian spirit of friendliness and humour.

The Society holds a series of events each year in London, including lectures, study days, and a Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon. The Society also publishes the biannual peer-review journal, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*. For further information please contact the Chairman, Nick Powell (nrdpowell@gmail.com).

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# The Charles Lamb Bulletin

Autumn 2013

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*'Let us cultivate the Elian spirit of friendliness and  
humour'*

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On My First Acquaintance with an Essay(ist)  
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## The Bulletin Online

The back catalogue of the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* (from our first issue in 1973 to issue 143 in July 2008) is now available online at our website:

<http://www.charleslambociety.com/b-online.html>

It is a fantastic new resource available to Elians around the world, allowing free access to a range of distinguished scholarship on the Lambs and their circle.

Issues printed in the last five years, however, have not been made available online to encourage continued subscription to our Society. Please do continue to explore our new website devoted to Charles and Mary Lamb.

# The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

New Series, No. 158, Autumn 2013

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## Charles Lamb's Birthday Toast, 2013

Duncan Wu

As you are aware, this is the day immediately before Charles Lamb's 238<sup>th</sup> birthday. There is, however, another anniversary of which I would exhort you to be mindful, even if it isn't what draws us together this afternoon. 200 years and 6 days ago, on 3 February 1813, Leigh Hunt and his brother John, having been tried and convicted of 'printing and publishing a scandalous and defamatory libel on the Prince Regent', were sentenced to two years in separate prisons, and to pay the Regent 500 pounds, with a further 500 as surety.

Leigh Hunt was the editor, and his brother John the publisher, of a Sunday newspaper, *The Examiner*, in which Hunt published a satirical portrait of the Prince Regent. Hunt decided to respond to a sycophantic paean printed in that lickspittle organ, *The Morning Post*, which apostrophized the Regent in the following terms: 'You are the glory of the people, you conquer all hearts, wipe away tears, excite desire and love, and win beauty towards you. You are an Adonis in loveliness!' Unable to let this pass without comment, Hunt unhesitatingly pulled the trigger.

What person, unacquainted with the true state of the case, would imagine, in reading these astounding eulogies, that this 'Glory of the People' was the subject of millions of shrugs and reproaches? That this 'Conqueror of Hearts' was the disappointer of hopes? That this 'Exciter of Desire, this Adonis in Loveliness', is a corpulent gentleman of fifty? In short, that this 'delightful', 'blissful', 'wise', 'pleasurable', 'honorable', 'virtuous', 'true' and 'immortal Prince' was a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in debt and disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps, a man who has just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity?

Libel laws then were much tighter than they are now, designed to discourage unfavorable commentary directed at either the government or head of state. Needless to say, the Regent took immediate offence, not least because – as he was well aware – this was the latest in a fetid stream of insults which had poured from the pages of Hunt's paper over recent months. He had been equally unamused by a scurrilous poem inspired in part by the lavish gala he hosted at Carlton House in June 1811. On that rambunctious occasion, the Regent presided over a supper that commenced at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, boasting a lavish table decoration described in contemporary newspapers as follows: 'Along the centre of the table, about six inches above the surface, a canal

of pure water continued flowing from a silver fountain, beautifully constructed at the head of the table. Its faintly waving, artificial banks were covered with green moss and aquatic flowers; gold and silver-coloured fish, were, by a mechanical invention, made to swim and sport through the bubbling current, which produced a pleasing murmur where it fell, and formed a cascade at the outlet.' Fittingly, our own luncheon this afternoon, held a mere stone's throw from the site formerly occupied by Carlton House, is only marginally less sumptuous. Upon reading the description of the Regent's aquatically themed blow-out, Charles Lamb was inspired to write a versified commemoration, 'The Triumph of the Whale', published in *The Examiner* in March 1812.

Not a mightier Whale than this  
 In the vast Atlantic is;  
 Not a fatter fish than he  
 Flounders round the polar sea.  
 See his blubber – at his gills  
 What a world of drink he swills,  
 From his trunk as from a spout  
 Which the next moment he pours out [...]  
 Every fish of generous kind  
 Scuds aside or slinks behind;  
 But about his presence keep  
 All the monsters of the deep;  
 Mermaids with their tails and singing  
 His delighted fancy stinging;  
 Crooked Dolphins they surround him,  
 Dog-like seals they fawn around him,  
 Following hard the progress mark  
 Of the intolerant salt-sea shark;  
 For his solace and relief  
 Flat-fish are his courtiers chief;  
 Last and lowest in his train  
 Ink-fish (libellers of the main)  
 Their black liquor shed in spite  
 (Such on earth the things that write) [...]  
 By his bulk and by his size,  
 By his oily qualities,  
 This (or else my eyesight fails) –  
 This should be the Prince of Whales.

The day after these none-too-sober lines were published, Lamb and his sister hosted one of their occasional gatherings at their home in Temple Lane, including Leigh Hunt among their guests. As publisher of 'The Triumph of the Whale', Hunt was expecting the worst. 'No one can accuse me of not writing a libel', he told them. 'Everything is a libel, as the law is now declared, and our security lies only in their shame.'

Convicted and sentenced, Hunt was whisked off to the Surrey Gaol in Southwark, there to become what Byron described as 'the wit in the dungeon', though his quarters were not in the least dungeon-like. The ceiling was painted with a cloud-speckled sky; the walls were hung with rose-trellised wallpaper; the barred windows were hidden behind venetian blinds; a portrait of Milton hung on the wall opposite the fireplace. One of his first visitors, Charles Lamb, declared there to be no other such room, except perhaps in fairy tale.

Not only were Charles and his sister Mary the first to visit; they were the most frequent. They made the journey even during the big freeze of early 1814, which ran from late January to mid-March, when an apocalyptic combination of snow, frost and fog struck so hard that mail coaches were unable to leave the capital. The two-mile journey cannot have been easy, but the Lambs made it often. 'What return can I make to the Lambs', Hunt wrote, 'who came to comfort me in all weathers, hail or sunshine, in daylight or darkness, even in the dreadful frost and snow of the beginning of 1814?' His thank-you came in the form of a poetic epistle in the underexploited meter of dactylic tetrameter. 'To Charles Lamb' was probably given to its addressee in manuscript prior to publication in Hunt's volume of poetry, *Foliage*, which appeared in 1818.

You'll guess why I can't see the snow-covered streets,  
 Without thinking of you and your visiting feats,  
 When you call to remembrance how you and one more,  
 When I wanted it most, used to knock at my door.  
 For when the sad winds told us rain would come down,  
 Or snow upon snow fairly clogged up the town,  
 And dun yellow fogs brooded over its white  
 So that scarcely a being was seen towards night,  
 Then, then said the lady yclept near and dear,  
 'Now mind what I tell, the Lambs will be here!'  
 So I poked up the flame, and she got out the tea,  
 And down we both sat, as prepared as could be;  
 And there, sure as fate, came the knock of you two,  
 Then the lanthorn, the laugh, and the 'Well, how d'ye do?'  
 Then your palm tow'rds the fire, and your face turned to me,  
 And shawls and greatcoats being - where they should be -  
 And due 'never saws' being paid to the weather,  
 We cherished our knees and sat sipping together,  
 And leaving the world to the fogs and the fighters,  
 Discussed the pretensions of all sorts of writers;  
 Of Shakspeare's coevals, all spirits divine;  
 Of Chapman, whose Homer's a fine rough old wine;  
 Of Marvell, wit, patriot, and poet who knew  
 How to give, both at once, Charles and Cromwell their due;  
 Of Spenser, who wraps you, wherever you are,  
 In a bow'r of seclusion beneath a sweet star [...]

'Well, how d'ye do?' That salutation speaks eloquently of the character of the man in whose memory we are bidden to lunch this afternoon - a man who remained true to friends in their time of need; whose essential good humour was never in doubt; and whose spirit of fellowship lives on in the Society that bears his name. Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses to the immortal memory of Charles Lamb!

Georgetown University

## Lamb's Art of Subinsinuation

Frederick Burwick

In his essay on 'Stage Illusion' (*London Magazine*, August 1825), Charles Lamb challenged a widely endorsed tenet of acting that held that the actor must appear 'wholly unconscious of the audience' and devote attention exclusively to the dialogue and action on stage. It was a tenet, he observed, that was 'dispensed with every day by our cleverest tragedians.' Breaking through the illusion of the 'fourth wall' does not undermine the dramatic interest in a tragedy, and may even be an asset in comedy, especially in characters who are 'a little extravagant' or who may 'involve some notion repugnant to the moral sense.' Lamb praised John Bannister<sup>1</sup> for his subtle art of 'subinsinuation.' John Palmer,<sup>2</sup> too, was praised for his 'two voices': both voices were 'plausible, hypocritical, and insinuating; but his secondary or supplemental voice still more decisively histrionic than his common one.' The first voice was shared in dialogue with other characters on stage; the second voice 'was reserved for the spectator,' not to be heard by any of the *dramatic personae*. Bannister's 'subinsinuation' was his way of communicating exclusively with his audience.<sup>3</sup>

In July, 1825, the month before the appearance of his essay on 'Stage Illusion' with his account of the illusion-breaking double roles of Bannister, Lamb submitted to George Colman, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, the manuscript for his farce, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter; or, The Reprieved Man*.<sup>4</sup> These two occurrences in the summer of 1825 follow in a series of other significant events: in February he celebrated his fiftieth birthday; in March he retired at two-thirds salary from the East India Company; and in August 'Stage Illusion' was published and he left the *London Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> As he explained to Robert Southey, 'the *London Magazine* has shifted its publishers once more, and I shall shift myself out of it.' His current literary ambition, he added, was 'not at present higher than to write nonsense for the playhouses, to eke out a somewhat contracted income.' In keeping with that endeavour, 'I have a one-act farce going to be acted at Haymarket; but when? is the question.' The answer, of course, was never. "'Tis an extravaganza,' Lamb acknowledged, 'and like

<sup>1</sup> John Bannister (1760-1836; retired in 1815) John Adolphus, *Memoirs of John Bannister, Comedian*, 2 vols. (London, 1839).

<sup>2</sup> John Palmer (1742-1798). H.D. Symonds, *A Sketch of the Theatrical Life of the Late Mr. John Palmer* (London, 1798).

<sup>3</sup> Lamb, 'Stage Illusion' and 'Some of the Old Actors,' *The Life and Works of Charles Lamb*, 12 vols., ed. Alfred Ainger (London, 1899-1900), 3:29-34 and 4:275-87. See also Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama. Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (University Park PA, 1991), 75-79.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Lamb, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter; or, The Reprieved Man*. Plays submitted to the Lord Chamberlain, July 1825. Original copy in the British Library Add. Ms. 42874.

<sup>5</sup> Simon P Hull, *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine: Metropolitan Muse* (London, 2010), 136.

enough to follow *Mr. H.*<sup>6</sup> Through Fanny Kelly, he also informed Samuel James Arnold, manager of the English Opera House, that John Liston at the Haymarket agreed to bring out *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*, 'whom some folks were so delicate about.'<sup>7</sup> There was little chance of it being hissed off the stage on its opening night, but unfortunately it did not secure a place for an opening night.

Had it been performed, it would have had John Pritt Harley in the role of Flint, the Pawnbroker; Phyllis Glover as Marian Flint, his daughter; James Vining as Davenant, her would-be suitor; John Liston as Pendulous, the reprieved Gentleman; and William Farren as Cutlet, the sentimental butcher. These players had secured popularity with far less promising scripts. Indeed, it was their very success that season that crowded out a possible performance of *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*. With Liston in the title role, John Poole's *Paul Pry* (Haymarket, 13 September 1825)<sup>8</sup> enjoyed an extraordinary run of forty-one nights (and another seventy-three nights the ensuing season). Two additional comedies commandeered the stage at Haymarket earlier in the 1825 season. *Quite Correct* (Haymarket, 29 July 1825)<sup>9</sup> met with 'a run of forty-eight nights, 'which John Genest said was 'more owing to Liston's acting, than to the merit of the piece.'<sup>10</sup> Genest also gave credit to Liston as Sir Hilary Heartsease for winning the audience's laughter and applause for the 'contemptible stage trick'<sup>11</sup> at the close of Act II of *Roses and Thorns* (Haymarket, 24 August 1825).<sup>12</sup>

Although not performed, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* was published five years later in *Blackwood's Magazine*.<sup>13</sup> Every reader of Lamb is fascinated by the subtle wit and humour of his essays and marvels at the well-developed persona he created in Elia. The unique quality of that Elian voice, as Wayne McKenna has argued, is achieved by a narrative manner very similar to the dual role-playing that Lamb observed in Bannister's stage performances.<sup>14</sup> Readers are aware of the 'subinsinuations' or authorial intrusions amidst the reflections of Elia. Lamb's own mastery of 'two voices' in the essays of Elia, I contend, also

<sup>6</sup> To Robert Southey, 19 August 1825, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 3 vols. Ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1935), 3:23.

<sup>7</sup> To Fanny Kelly, with Postscript to Samuel James Arnold, n.d. [early July 1825], *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 3:11-12.

<sup>8</sup> John Poole, *Paul Pry, a drama in three acts* (London, 1825).

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Boaden, *Quite Correct*, a comedy in two acts. Submitted to the Lord Chamberlain August 1825. British Library Add. Ms. 42874 (15); adapted from: John Wallace, *The Slanderer; a comedy. In three acts, translated, altered and adapted for the English stage, from 'Le médisant' of [Étienne] Gosse, acting at Paris, upon the Theatre Français, with the most distinguished success and applause, and rejected at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane* (London, 1823).

<sup>10</sup> John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, 10 vols. (Bath, 1832), 9:315.

<sup>11</sup> Genest, 9:316-317.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Lunn, *Roses and thorns, or, Two Houses under one Roof, a comedy in three acts*. Printed from the acting copy, with remarks, biographical and critical, [by George Daniel]. To which are added a description of the costume, cast of the characters, entrances and exits, relative positions of the performers on the stage, and the whole of the stage business (London, 1825).

<sup>13</sup> Lamb, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Edinburgh, 1830), 27 (Jan, 1830), 97-109.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne McKenna, *Charles Lamb and the Theatre* (London, 1978), 8.

enable the reader to appraise the radical difference between the failure of his early farce, *Mr. H.* (Drury Lane, 10 December 1806), and his later farce, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* (July 1825), 'which happily,' wrote Alfred Ainger, 'was not destined to be performed.'<sup>15</sup> I think better of it and to explain why I shall look further into Lamb's admiration of the acting of Bannister and Ellison, examine more closely what went wrong with *Mr. H.* in addition to its bad joke, and then investigate how Lamb's concept 'subinsinuation' informed character and situation of *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*.

~ The acting of Bannister and Elliston ~

The skill that Lamb most admired in Bannister's acting was the ability to counterfeit the moods and emotions of a character and at the same time convey the awareness 'that they are being acted before us; that a likeness only is going on, and not the thing itself.' Nevertheless, 'the degrees of credibility demanded to the two things' must be sustained, and the comic delight is enriched by the spectator's participation in the balancing act of the performance. 'Plausible' Jack Palmer (1742?-1798), whose stage career ran its course twenty years before Jack Bannister's, is credited in Lamb's essay 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century' (*London Magazine*, April 1822) with a similar craft in doubling as Joseph Surface in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (Drury Lane, 8 May 1777). Sheridan's play invites a doubling of the doubling in the characters of the two brothers, Charles Surface, a rake whose carefree manners half-conceal his honesty and loyalty, and Joseph Surface whose piety and sensibility is only a mask of hypocrisy. The wild Charles is charitable and faithful; the sentimental Joseph is greedy and malicious. Palmer, as Lamb recollects, made Joseph Surface the center of attention with 'the gay boldness, the graceful solemn plausibility, the measured step, the insinuating voice -- to express it in a word -- the downright acted villainy of the part.' The 'actual wickedness' of the character was lightened in the acting of the player.

That capacity simultaneously to realise and unrealise a character was acquired in the subsequent generation by Bannister. As the original Sylvester Daggerwood, Bannister introduced that role when Colman's *New Hay at the Old Market* first opened (Haymarket, 9 June 1795). The character of Sylvester Daggerwood, an unemployed actor, was supposed to have so engulfed himself in Shakespeare that he quotes the Bard in his sleep. When Elliston took over that character at the Surrey, in Dennis Lawler's adaptation (Surrey Theatre, 28 November 1811), Daggerwood had been infused with a much wider repertory.<sup>16</sup> Seven years before Coleman provided such a multiple role for Charles Mathews in *Actor of All Work* (Haymarket, 13 August 1817), Lawler contrived for Elliston a venue that would allow him to show off his talent for impersonations. As Bannister before him, Elliston mimicked the Shakespearean roles of John Philip Kemble, but went on to offer his impressions of virtually every other actor

<sup>15</sup> Lamb, *Works*, 11:259.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Murray, *Robert William Elliston, Manager* (London, 1975), 38-39.

popular on the stage at the time. To Palmer's 'two voices' and his talent for conspiratorial asides to the audience Elliston added a further 'subinsinuation' of his own, namely an ability to signal discretely to the patrons in the boxes.

Even before he inherited Bannister's role as Daggerwood, Elliston was already experimenting with roles requiring character shifts.<sup>17</sup> Elliston's relationship with the audience infused his whole acting style. While deceiving characters on stage, he exercised a wide reparatory of asides: duplicity, conspiracy, hypocrisy, or intimacy in sharing a secret with his audience. In 'Ellistoniana,' Charles Lamb recalls Elliston's response to the praise given to Benjamin Wrench, comedian at Drury Lane and the Adelphi, 'because he is the same, natural, easy creature, on the stage, that he is off.' Elliston turned the phrase around: 'I am the same off the stage that I am on.' Lamb notes that the two propositions may seem identical, but are actually opposite: 'the one performer was never, and the other always, acting.'<sup>18</sup> Lamb called Elliston's perpetual off-stage performances his 'charm.'

~ What went wrong with *Mr. H.* ~

In a letter to the Chinese scholar and interpreter Thomas Manning (5 December 1806), Lamb anticipates the opening of *Mr. H.* which was already in rehearsal. He is pleased that Elliston would perform in the title role, and he promptly responded to Elliston's request for a prologue. Before he tells about his own play, he comments on the failure of Thomas Holcroft's *The Vindictive Man* (Drury Lane, 20 November 1806). Perhaps relating the disaster that befell Holcroft was a means of preparing psychologically for the possible fate of his own play. 'It died in part of its own weakness, and in part for being choked up with bad actors.' The play's weakness paradoxically was what Holcroft intended as its strength, the resurrection of the most memorable character of his most successful comedy: Goldfinch the comic sportsman from *Road to Ruin* (Covent Garden, 18 February 1792). The idea, Lamb explained, was similar to Shakespeare reviving Falstaff from the history play and giving him a comedy of his own. 'As the devil of ill-luck would have it, half the audience did not know that Holcroft had written it, but were displeased with his stealing from the *Road to Ruin*.' Worse ill-luck occurred in the casting. Bannister was to have performed as Goldfinch, and Dorothy Jordan was intended for the role of Emily, the unfortunate daughter of Colonel Anson, the Vindictive Man of the title. Unfortunately Jordan was in a 'squabble' with the managers, and Bannister 'shot some of his fingers off by the going off of a gun,' so the roles went instead to Maria Duncan and Vincent De Camp. Not ill-luck but ill-conceived plot and character, 'intolerable vulgarity and inanity,' were the worst of Holcroft's problems, especially in the role of Harriet played by Sarah Harlowe. In the *Road to Ruin*, Harlowe had played the Widow Warren, but in this comedy she played a conniving whore. Her 'action in the play was gross,' Lamb wrote, especially in

<sup>17</sup> Murray, *Elliston*, 3.

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<sup>17</sup> Murray, *Elliston*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Lamb, 'Ellistoniana,' *Works*, 3:40.

'wheedling an old man into marriage.' When De Camp as Goldfinch endeavored to abduct Emily by force, he 'was hooted, more than hist, hooted and bellowed off the stage.' Lamb lamented the consequences for 'Poor Holcroft,' who had been reduced to selling his possessions to stave off the poverty that had befallen his household. 'I assure you his fate has soured a good deal of the pleasure that I should have otherwise taken in my own little farce being accepted.' Still, he has hopes for financial gain: 'I shall get £200 from the theatre if *Mr. H.* has a good run, and I hope for £100 for the copyright. Nothing if it fails; and there was never a more ticklish thing. The whole depends on the manner in which the name is brought out, which I value myself on, as a *chef-d'oeuvre*.'<sup>19</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson accompanied Charles and Mary Lamb to attend the opening of *Mr. H.* (Drury Lane, 10 December 1806). Thomas Holcroft's *The Vindictive Man* had made it through a second night. Lamb's *Mr. H.* closed with its opening. At the Study Weekend at Kilve, 2003, the Blake Drama Group from Bridgwater performed *Mr. H.* to a more tolerant audience, who 'found much to laugh at in the skilful rendering of the script.'<sup>20</sup> As critics have observed, Lamb indulged his inveterate delight in puns by playing on the culinary implications of his own name.<sup>21</sup> His later essay 'On Roast Pig' is cited as another example, and he made the pun more obvious in the titular character of *Mr. H.*, who uses only his initial in order to conceal his actual name, Mr. Hogsflesh. The pun on 'lamb' recurs in the dialogue of Mr. Cutlet, the butcher in *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*.<sup>22</sup> Introduced only by his initial, Mr. H. is the darling of society because everyone assumes that he is a member of a famous family of H's traveling incognito, and everyone tries to guess which prominent name he conceals. When the name is at last revealed he is dismissed with scorn. Elliston no doubt did his best to manage the 'ticklish thing' of Mr. H.'s inadvertant revelation of his unfortunate name, which occurs at the beginning of Act II when Mr. H. is caught up in telling a story:

*Mr. H.* Lord Squandercounsel, who is my particular friend, was pleased to rally me in his inimitable way upon it next day. I shall never forget a sensible thing he said on the occasion--speaking of absence of mind, my foible--says he, my dear Hogs--

Several Lades: Hogs---what--ha--

*Mr. H.* My dear Hogsflesh--my name--(here an universal scream) --  
O my cursed unfortunate tongue!--H, I mean--Where was I?

*First Lady.* Filthy--abominable!

*Second Lady.* Unutterable!

*Third Lady.* Hogs---foh!

<sup>19</sup> To Thomas Manning, 5 December 1806, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 2, 26-29.

<sup>20</sup> John Hagen, 'Mr. H.' by Charles Lamb, Played at the Kilve Study Weekend 2003, *Coleridge Bulletin*, New Series 22 (Winter 2003), 98.

<sup>21</sup> In the sonnet, 'The Family Name,' *Life and Works*, 5, 114, Lamb relates his name to the shepherd of the field and also to the crusader marching under the banner of *Agnus Dei*.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Wallace Craik, 'Hogsflesh Revisited,' *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 112 (2000 Oct), 157-168.

*Fourth Lady.* Disgusting!

*Fifth Lady.* Vile!

*Sixth Lady.* Shocking! (II.i)

Expressions of repugnance echoed among all the characters gathered on stage, but there was no stopping the reaction, and the same disgust continued to reverberate through the audience.

A farce with only one joke, that joke is repeated too often, but, as John Genest observes, 'worse Farces than this have been successful.'<sup>23</sup> Elliston brought his best comic manner to the role, but some in the audience found the name too disgusting to tolerate. Because he was seated at his side, Robinson was the only critic to record Lamb's response to the damning of his play: 'The prologue was very well received. Indeed, it could not fail, being one of the very best in our language. When the squeamishness of the vulgar taste in the pit on the disclosure of the name showed itself in hisses, Lamb joined and was probably the loudest hisser in the house.'<sup>24</sup> Holcroft, not widely known as the playwright, was thought to have stolen the character of Goldfinch from his own play. Lamb, as the loudest of the hissers, was similarly unacknowledged as the punster punning on his own name. 'If it had been any other name in the world,' the exposed Mr Hogflesh laments, 'I could have borne it. If it had been the name of a beast, as Bull, Fox, Kid, Lamb, Wolf, Lion.' In his previous scenes Mr. H. has amused with the ladies with 'the titter-provoking pun.' The ensuing scene with the Landlord reveals punning as the master trope:

*Landlord.* Hope your Honor does not intend to quit the Blue Boar, -- sorry any thing has happened.

*Mr. H.* He has heard it all.

*Landlord.* Your Honour has had some mortification, to be sure, as a man may say; you have brought your pigs to a fine market.

*Mr. H.* Pigs!

*Landlord.* What then? take old Pry's advice, and never mind it. Don't scorch your crackling for 'em, Sir.

*Mr. H.* Scorch my crackling! a queer phrase; but I suppose he don't mean to affront me.

*Landlord.* What is done can't be undone; you can't make a silken purse out of a sow's ear.

*Mr. H.* As you say, Landlord, thinking of a thing does but augment it.

*Landlord.* Does but *hogment* it, indeed, Sir.

*Mr. H.* *Hogment* it! damn it, I said, augment it.

*Landlord.* Lord, Sir, 'tis not every body has such gift of fine phrases as your Honour, that can lard his discourse.

*Mr. H.* Lard!

<sup>23</sup> Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage*, 8:33.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson, *On Books and their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley, 3 vols. (London, 1938) I, 9.

Landlord. Suppose they do smoke you--

Mr. H. Smoke me?

Landlord. One of my phrases; never mind my words, Sir, my meaning is good. We all mean the same thing, only you express yourself one way, and I another, that's all. The meaning's the same; it is all pork.

Mr. H. That's another of your phrases, I presume. (Bell rings, and the Landlord called for.)

Landlord. Anon, anon.

Mr. H. O, I wish I were anonymous. (II.iii)

For Lamb, this two-in-one doubleness, became a favorite form of humour when reduced to its most compact rhetorical form, the pun. Aware of Coleridge's attention to Shakespeare's punning repartee,<sup>25</sup> Lamb expressed his own appraisal of punning in a letter to Coleridge in July, 1825: 'A Pun is a thing of too much consequence to be thrown in as a make-weight. You shall read one of the 'Addresses' over and miss the Puns, and it shall be quite as good, and better, than when you discover 'em. A Pun is a noble thing *per se*: O never lug it in as an accessory. A Pun is a sole object for Reflection (*vide my 'Aide'* to that recessment from a savage state)—it is entire, it fills the mind; it is perfect as a sonnet, better. It limps ashamed in the train and retinue of Humour: it knows it should have an establishment of its own.'<sup>26</sup> It was not until the following year, 1826, that Lamb added to his series on 'Popular Fallacies' in the *New Monthly Magazine* his short piece 'That the Worst Puns are the Best.'<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, puns had already infected the dialogue of *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*.

~ Subinsinuation in *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* ~

To confirm how Lamb's mastery of farce as well as his art of subinsinuation were further developed beyond the Elia essays, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* is a rich and informative text that has received too little critical attention. Opportunity for the doubling (*dédoublement*) and simultaneity that he admired in Bannister and Elliston is implanted in each of the major characters, and it is easy to imagine what Haymarket players like Harley, Farren, Vining, and Liston might have done with these double roles. When his daughter runs off, Flint, the Pawnbroker, is caught in the dilemma of Shakespeare's Shylock, crying out 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!' (II, viii, 15). Yet his pretense as flint-hearted and miserly usurer gives way to kindness and generosity not only to his daughter, but also to those who have cared for her. Cutlet, a Sentimental

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. Reginald A. Foakes, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 5 (London, 1987). On Shakespearean puns: 1:271293. 312, 379-81, 387, 559-60, 564; 2:287, 297, 453, 455, 483-84, 496, 530-32.

<sup>26</sup> To Coleridge, 2 July 1825. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, III, 8. So rampant were the puns in the anonymously published *Odes and Addresses to Great People* by Thomas Hood and J. H. Reynolds, that Coleridge was certain that they were, at least in part, the work of Lamb. Lamb also alludes to Coleridge's recently published *Aids to Reflection* (1825).

<sup>27</sup> Lamb, 'Popular Fallacies. IX. That the Worst Puns are the Best,' *Works*, III, 211-214.

Butcher, is introduced into the farce solely for his comic combination of sentimentality and butchery, with only indirect relevance to the plot. Lamb gives him lines that prove that the relentless punning of *Mr H.* has not abated almost twenty years later. As a butcher, Cutlet's comments predictably include reference to cuts of lamb. Davenport, in love with Flint's daughter Marian, is an honorable suitor, in spite of his dishonesty luring her away from her father's home and concealing her in a private apartment. Pendulous, too, is a proper gentleman, in spite of having been charged with a crime and granted a belated reprieve.

Further doubling involves the comedy-of-errors identity confusion over Marian Flint and Maria Flynn. The latter young lady rents an apartment from the butcher and agrees to take, at Davenport's request, Marian Flint as her border. Maria Flynn is in love with Pendulous. Since being falsely charged with theft, in spite of receiving a court reprieve, Pendulous is so ridden with guilt and shame that he considers himself unworthy to pursue his courtship of Maria Flynn. On hearing the report that Davenport is meeting his beloved at the apartment that he knows belongs to Maria Flynn, Pendulous is sure that she has redirected her affections. Frustrated by the persistent sense of shame that Pendulous harbours, she decides the only way to overcome his self-incrimination is to have herself also falsely charged with theft. The opportunity is at hand when Marian Flint reveals that she left her father's house still in possession of valuable jewels that had been pawned in her father's shop. Angered that his daughter has run away, Flint reports that she is guilty of the theft of jewels. Maria Flynn volunteers to be arrested in her stead. When the officers arrive at the apartment the confusion of the names eases the substitution.

Lamb prepares for the doubling at the very introduction of each of his major characters. Flint comes on stage instructing his apprentice to deliver a carpenter's chest of tools to a buyer, disregarding the ruin that it will bring upon the carpenter who pawned them in desperation to aid his sick wife. A very different sort of ruin may befall the fine lady who has pawned her jewels, and must retrieve them before her husband finds out. Flint intends to add these jewels to the treasures that he has hoarded for his only child and heir. Those riches are intended to bribe Marian's consent to marry the man he chooses for her. As soon as she appears on the scene, Flint queries her for reassurances that he is not one of the cold, cruel villains that pawnbrokers are reputed to be. She first returns the sort of answer that he wants to hear: 'The poor,' she replies, 'look only to the advantages which we derive from them, and overlook the accommodations which they receive from us.' She then offers her explanation, 'But the poor *are* the poor, father, and have little leisure to make distinctions.' She then suggests a resolution: 'I wish that we could give up this business.' Flint's apparent greed is driven by love of his daughter, whom he mistakenly believes will be swayed by his accumulation of riches: 'They are all yours, Marian, if you do not cross me in your marriage. No gentry shall march into this house to flout their wife hereafter with her parentage. I will hold this business with a convulsive grasp to my dying day. I will plague these *poor*, whom you

speak so tenderly of.' (*Pawnbroker's Daughter* I.i) Marian is quite right that 'the poor are the poor,' but Flint's most lucrative clients are not the poor but the improvident wealthy, who don't deserve the inherited treasures they surrender for their passing pleasures.

The second scene is set in a butcher's shop, where Cutlet, like Flint in the first scene, is instructing his apprentice: 'Reach me down that book off the shelf where the shoulder of veal hangs.' Significantly he wants the book not the shoulder of veal. What book? No, not *Flowers of Sentiment*,<sup>28</sup> the other book, Joseph Ritson's *An Argument against the Use of Animal Food*.<sup>29</sup> This is the book that also had a place on Percy Bysshe Shelley's bookshelf, however none of the scholars who have written on Shelley's vegetarianism have noticed the interest that Shelley shared with Lamb's butcher Cutlet.<sup>30</sup> As agent of Lamb's satirical humour, Butcher Cutlet promptly butchers lamb:

*Cutlet.* One cannot dip amiss into such a book as this. The motto, I see, is from Pope; I daresay, very much to the purpose. (Reads:)--  
The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,  
Had he thy Reason, would he skip and play?  
Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry food,  
And licks the hand --<sup>31</sup>  
Bless us! Is that saddle of mutton gone home to Mrs. Simpson's. It should have gone an hour ago. (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I, ii)

As these abrupt changes reveal, two souls dwell in Cutlet's breast as he shifts swiftly back and forth between sentimentalist and butcher. The motto that Ritson took from Pope's *Essay on Man* plays conveniently into Lamb punning again on his own name. Cutlet completes the interrupted line that describes the slaughter: 'And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood. / What an affecting picture!' Interrupted by the business of his meat shop, Cutlet sends his apprentice to deliver sweetbreads to an ailing consumptive and rump-steaks to a pugilist in training. Lapsing into reflections on a profession more suitable to his 'trembling sensibility,' perhaps as glover or haberdasher, he is again interrupted by the arrival of Davenport with Marian and Lucy her maid, who have arrived to inquire about the apartments he has to let. Quickly appraising the situation, Cutlet greets the run-away as 'Pretty lamb,' presumably, like Pope's lamb, being led to slaughter.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel C Atkinson, ed., *The Casket, or Flowers of Literature, Wit and Sentiment*. No. 1 (Philadelphia, 1824).

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Ritson, *Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food, as a Moral Duty* (London, 1802).

<sup>30</sup> Burwick, 'The Revolt of Islam: Vegetarian Shelley and the Narrative of Mental Pathology,' *The Wordsworth Circle*, 40, 2-3 (Spring and Summer 2009), 87-93. Timothy Morton, 'Joseph Ritson, Percy Shelley and the Making of Romantic Vegetarianism,' *Romanticism*, 12 (April 2006), 52-61. Sharon Ruston, 'Vegetarianism and Vitality in the Work of Thomas Forster, William Lawrence and P. B. Shelley,' *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 54 (2005): 113-132. Onno Oerlemans, 'Shelley's Ideal Body: Vegetarianism and Nature,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 34.4 (1995 Winter), 531-552.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, First Epistle, III, 5-8.

After Davenport departs with Marian Flint to meet Maria Flynn, Lucy stays behind, as she says, 'to have some fun with this droll butcher.' There is no indication who might have played the role of Lucy, but it has some similarities to many roles of the pert and flippant maid performed at the time by Mrs. Gibbs. In her younger years she was a formidable termagant in *Katherine and Petruchio* and a simple and tender Mary in *John Bull*.<sup>32</sup> In the 1825 season, she was Artilla in *Roses and Thorns*. To provide occasion for his characters to use their 'two voices,' Lamb frequently relied on the aside. As she quizzes Cutlet on his affectation of weeping sympathies, half of her part in the dialogue is addressed *sotto voce* (sä-tō-'vō-chē) to the audience. In spite of her interruptions, Cutlet persists in his lamentation

*Cut.* The distresses of my fellow-creatures. I never lay my head down on my pillow, but I fall a-thinking, how many at this very instant are perishing. Some with cold---  
*Lucy.* What, in the midst of summer?  
*Cut.* Ay. Not here, but in countries abroad, where the climate is different from ours. Our summers are their winters, and *vice versa*, you know. Some with cold--- (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I, iii)

In her aside to the audience, she devises a prank.

*Lucy.* What a canting rogue it is! I should like to trump up some fine story to plague him  
*Cut.* Others with hunger--some a prey to the rage of wild beasts--  
*Lucy.* He has got this by rote, out of some book.  
*Cut.* Some drowning, crossing crazy bridges in the dark---some by the violence of the devouring flame---<sup>33</sup>  
*Lucy.* I have it.--For that matter, you need not send your humanity a-travelling, Mr. Cutlet. For instance, last night---  
*Cut.* Some by fevers, some by gun-shot wounds---  
*Lucy.* Only two streets off---  
*Cut.* Some in drunken quarrels---  
*Lucy (aloud).* The butcher's shop at the corner.  
*Cut.* What were you saying about poor Cleaver?  
*Lucy.* He has found his ears at last (*aside*).  
That he has had his house burnt down.  
*Cut.* Bless me!  
*Lucy.* I saw four small children taken in at the greengrocer's.  
*Cut.* Do you know if he is insured?  
*Lucy.* Some say he is, but not to the full amount.  
*Cut.* Not to the full amount---how shocking! He killed more meat than any of the trade between here and Carnaby market---and the

<sup>32</sup> William Robson, *The Old Play-Goer* (London, 1846), 81-82.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Isaiah 33:14, on the fate of the sinners in Zion.

poor babes---four of them you say---what a melting sight!---he served some good customers about Marybone---I always think more of the children in these cases than of the fathers and mothers-- -Lady Lovebrown liked his veal better than any man's in the market---I wonder whether her ladyship is engaged---I must go and comfort poor Cleaver, however.--- (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I,ii)

Lucy has steered into Cutlet into another sort of dilemma, not 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!' but 'O my rival! O his customers.' She gloats on having exposed his pretensions as a 'Man of Feeling':<sup>34</sup> 'Now is this pretender to humanity gone to avail himself of a neighbour's supposed ruin to inveigle his customers from him. Fine feelings!---pshaw!' She departs and Cutlet returns: 'What a deceitful young hussey! there is not a word of truth in her. There has been no fire. How can people play with one's feelings so!' (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I, ii) Totally oblivious to the purpose of Lucy's prank, Cutlet closes the scene with a maudlin song, in which Lamb has allowed himself a bit more punning on his name:

At Kentish Town, or Highgate Hill,  
I sit, retired, beside some rill;  
And tears bedew my glistening eye,  
To think my playful lambs must die!

But when they're dead I sell their meat,  
On shambles kept both clean and neat;  
Sweet-breads also I guard full well,  
And keep them from the blue-bottle.

Envy, with breath sharp as my steel,  
Has ne'er yet blown upon my veal;  
And mouths of dames, and daintiest fops,  
Do water at my nice lamb-chops.

[Exit, half laughing, half crying. (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I, ii)]

In his comedies Aristophanes typically inserted a scene in which either the chorus addressed the audience directly on the merit of the play, or a character stepped out of his role to complain about the lines or the action that the playwright imposed upon him.<sup>35</sup> This conventional scene, the *parabasis* (*παράβασις*), required a momentary break in the dramatic illusion. More formalized than a simple aside, the *parabasis* nevertheless was a recognized model and justification for the player departing from the script to share some jest or insight with the audience. In the original *parabasis* this stepping out of the

<sup>34</sup> Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), ed. Brian Vickers (New York, 2009). The 'man of feeling' and his cult of sentimentalism was quickly adapted as a comic character. See: William J. Burling, 'A 'Sickly Sort of Refinement': The Problem of Sentimentalism in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 23 (1988), 136-149.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas K. Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the intertextual parabasis* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991); Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama*, 147-150.

role was itself scripted. The 'aside,' seemingly spoken in the player's own voice, was most often the playwright's own text. As the cult of the virtuoso performer became more predominant in the Romantic period, so too did the habit of the improvisational aside in the manner of Palmer, Betterton, or Elliston. But even with lines inserted *ad libitum*, the illusion of stepping out of the role was, in fact, always stepping into another role. That dance of creating a new illusion out of the act of temporarily disrupting a previous illusion is what prompted the German critic Friedrich Schlegel to define irony as a 'permanent *parabasis*.'<sup>36</sup> As a permanent rather than a momentary gesture, the shift once made did not cease; rather, the character was thereby redefined.

Schlegel's concept of 'permanent *parabasis*' usefully elucidates what Lamb meant by 'perpetual subinsinuation.' In *Flint*, *Cutlet*, *Davenport*, and *Pendulous*, Lamb carefully crafted an almost schizophrenic duality of character. Once the alternate character had been exposed, the audience would know that it was ever-present and lurking: waiting the occasion to re-emerge, waiting not in the wings but within the very character on stage. In praising an actor's 'two voices,' Lamb observed that the first voice was shared in dialogue with other characters on stage, but the second voice 'was reserved for the spectator; and the *dramatis personae* were supposed to know nothing at all about it.' But what if some mischievous playwright mocked the convention and had another character eavesdrop on the supposedly secret aside to the audience? What if that playwright were Lamb himself?

*Pendulous* is in the midst explaining that a short-sighted fellow mistook him for a thief, that he gave a false name to avoid bringing disgrace to his family, and that his character witnesses were then discredited because of the false name. In an aside to the audience *Davenport* confides, 'He must be light-headed.' Counter to stage convention, *Pendulous* overhears the remark: 'Not at all, Mr. *Davenport*. I hear what you say, though you speak it all on one side, as they do at the playhouse.' (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I, iii) Lamb gives *Pendulous* the metatheatrical power to step outside the illusion of stepping outside the illusion. Lamb gives, then takes away again. First, *Pendulous* hears too much, then, just a few lines later, he hears too little. *Pendulous* reveals that the woman whom he loves 'has lodgings in the next street, in a sort of garden-house, that belongs to one *Cutlet*.' This would be *Davenport's* opportunity to reveal that his beloved also resides in the same house. *Davenport* keeps the secret, so that when *Cutlet* informs *Davenport* that 'the young lady at my house is desirous you should return immediately,' *Pendulous* naturally assumes that *Davenport* has usurped his place in the lady's affection. In a far more crucial aside, that *Pendulous* does not overhear, *Davenport* tells the audience that he intends to keep his lady's lodgings a secret, even though he knows that *Pendulous* will be jealous.

<sup>36</sup> 'Die Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbasis.' Friedrich Schlegel, 'Zur Philosophie' (1797), Fragment 688, in *Philosophische Lehrjahre I* (1796-1806), ed. Ernst Behler, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, 35 vols. (Munich, Zürich, 1958-2006), 18, 85.

*Pendulous.* What do I hear?

*Davenport.* 'Tis her fears, I dare say. My dear Pendulous, you will excuse me?—[aside] I must not tell him our situation at present, though it cost him a fit of jealousy. We shall have fifty opportunities for explanation. (*Pawnbroker's Daughter*, I, iii)

The 'fifty opportunities for explanation' are forestalled throughout Act II as Lamb develops the comedy of errors with Maria Flynn and Marian Flint to the confusion of the respective lover and father.

In sustaining that comedy Lamb constructs entire dialogues out of the *subinsinuation* of asides. Such, for example, is the scene in which Maria Flynn conducts a dual dialogue with her maid Betty and the audience, appealing to the latter whether she should trust Betty with the secret of Pendulous's arrest, further complicated when Pendulous arrives, sees Betty with his letter, and rages about being made 'a wretched laughing-stock to all the world' and a source of amusement for 'our drabs and our servant wenches.' When the officers arrive at the pawnbroker's instigation to arrest Marian Flint for theft, Maria Flynn again practices her asides to the audience to let them know her plan to share the fate of Pendulous. She produces the supposedly stolen casket of jewels, and the officers take her prisoner with the remark, 'Ay, ay, Flynn or Flint. 'Tis all one.' Once again in the final court scene, Maria Flynn is the mistress of *subinsinuation* as she shares with the audience her glee in being charged with theft. Marian Flint arrives to explain the mistake and beg her father's forgiveness. The Sentimental Butcher dashes in as witness to Maria Flynn's innocence: 'Ay, poor lamb! poor lamb! I can witness. I have run in such a haste, hearing how affairs stood, that I have left my shambles without a protector.' The 'happy ending' is complete with Pendulous and Maria Flynn united as a pair of 'Acquitted Felons,' and Flint welcoming his daughter's return and now accepting Davenport as an appropriate suitor.

~ Conclusion ~

Following his fiftieth birthday and his retirement from the East India Company, Lamb confessed to Southey that he was prepared 'to write nonsense for the playhouses.'<sup>37</sup> *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*, submitted to Haymarket for the 1825 season, remains the principal evidence of his skill in managing that nonsense. In 'Stage Illusion,' his last essay for the *London Magazine*, he set forth his account of 'perpetual subinsinuation' as a prime ingredient for comic effect. Although not staged at Haymarket, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* reveals Lamb's mastery in scripting the art that he admired in Palmer, Bannister, and Elliston. Informed and transformed by post-Elia doubletiness, Lamb's late farce exhibits a familiar dexterity in *sotto voce* ventriloquism.

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<sup>37</sup> To Robert Southey, 19 August 1825, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, III, 23.

## Lamb and Horace

Richard Gaskin

~ Introduction ~

Anyone who reads both Lamb and Horace cannot fail to notice the many affinities between them. Surprisingly, however, when one consults the secondary literature one finds almost nothing written on this topic. In his delightful book *Horace and his Lyric Poetry*, L. P. Wilkinson noted that Lamb's 'gentle humour, his love of homely detail and his disarming egotism are essentially Horatian',<sup>1</sup> and he alluded to T. R. Glover's happy observation that Horace's birthplace, Venusia, 'is very near Mackery End in Hertfordshire'.<sup>2</sup> But I have found no other Horatian commentator who mentions Lamb, nor a single writer on Lamb who mentions Horace. Certainly there exists, to my knowledge, no published attempt to say in detail what connects the two writers. But Wilkinson's list is a useful start. To it we may immediately add the sense of irony that Lamb and Horace share,<sup>3</sup> their love of books and of literature, their idleness and *flânerie*,<sup>4</sup> the 'painstaking felicity'—Petronius' famous description of Horace<sup>5</sup>—of their writing styles, their nostalgia,<sup>6</sup> their reliance on autobiography, and the consequent inseparability in their *œuvres* of work and life. For it is true of both Horace and Lamb that anyone who loves the writer finds himself loving the man, and acquiring a deep interest in the details of his life, so far as these can be known.<sup>7</sup>

Lamb had of course read Horace. No doubt he first encountered the Roman poet at school: I am unaware of any direct statement to this effect, but it may be inferred not only from our knowledge of contemporary school curricula, in which Horace's poetry certainly figured largely, but also from Lamb's own statement, in commenting on the translations of Horace's *Epistles* made by Charles Lloyd the Elder,<sup>8</sup> that 'I have neglected my Latin (and quite lost my Greek) since I left construing it at School',<sup>9</sup> which makes it unlikely that he first

<sup>1</sup> *Horace and his Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> *Horace: a Return to Allegiance* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), p. 260; D. Cecil, *A Portrait of Charles Lamb* (London, 1983), pp. 153–4; J. Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature 1783–1834* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 233–40.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Horace, *Satires* I, 6, 111–31; on Lamb see F. James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 212–14.

<sup>5</sup> *Satyricon*, §118, 5 ('curiosa felicitas').

<sup>6</sup> Esp. in Horace's fourth book of *Odes*, and *Epistles* I, 1 and 7; on Lamb, see Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing*, pp. 224–33.

<sup>7</sup> See A. Birrell, *The Collected Essays and Addresses* (London, 1922), vol. 2, p. 15; J. Riehl, *That Dangerous Figure: Charles Lamb and the Critics* (Columbia, 1998), pp. 23, 43, 53, 58, 82; James, *Charles Lamb*, pp. 38, 46.

<sup>8</sup> See E. V. Lucas, *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds* (London, 1898), ch. XIV.

<sup>9</sup> E. Marrs, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* (Ithaca/London, 1975–8), vol. 3, p. 81.

read Horace in adulthood. Despite the quoted statement, one would expect Lamb to have continued to read and reread Horace after leaving school, at least occasionally. It is of course possible that Lamb retained such a vivid memory from his school days of the passages of Horace that he had studied there, and of which he went on to make use in his published writings and letters, that he did not need to, and did not, reread him. From what we know of Lamb's reading habits, this hypothesis strikes me as unlikely, but I know of no direct evidence that would settle the matter one way or the other.

However that may be, the mature Lamb certainly knew his Horace well, and often cites the Roman poet or refers to him obliquely: the 'sick men's dreams' of 'The Convalescent'<sup>10</sup> are lifted straight from the *aegri somnia* of the *Ars Poetica* (line 7); the 'stern God of the Sea' in 'Amicus Redivivus' is borrowed from Milton's translation of the Pyrrha ode;<sup>11</sup> Tom Pry's tendency to return no matter how often he is repulsed recalls Horace's comparison of Nature to a farmyard animal that keeps coming back though driven off with pitchforks;<sup>12</sup> and so on. There are many other such allusions, some of which I shall mention in the sequel. My plan of action will be as follows. I shall discuss two places in Lamb's essays where he quotes Horace at length: these passages take us to two themes of considerable significance for both writers, namely the dualities of sanity and madness (§2), and of town and country (§3). This latter topic will then lead naturally on to more general consideration of Lamb and Horace as writers in the Epicurean tradition (§4); here I cannot give a full account, but shall briefly discuss the importance to both Lamb and Horace of the themes of friendship, pleasure, politics, religion, and mortality.

~ 'Demptus per vim mentis gratissimus error' ~

I begin at the end. Most readers first encounter Lamb in an edition of the *Elia* essays: *Last Essays* finishes with some 'Popular Fallacies', and the very last of these, 'That sulky temper is a misfortune', finishes with a quotation from Horace's Epistle to Florus. The final words that Lamb penned in the figure of Elia read thus:

We had been but too lately in the condition of the noble patient in Argos:

Qui se credebat miros audire tragædos,  
In vacuo lætus sessor plausorque theatro —

and could have exclaimed with equal reason against the friendly hands that cured us —

Pol me occidistis, amici,  
Non servâstis, aît; cui sic extorta voluptas,  
Et demptus per vim mentis gratissimus error.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> E. V. Lucas, *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London, 1903), vol. 2, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> Lamb, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 212; Horace, *Odes* I, 5, 15–16; Milton, *Poetical Works* (London, 1966), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Lamb, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 277, 284; Horace, *Epistles* I, 10, 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 274–5.

Here we have to do with the so-called Argive nobleman, who in Horace's version would sit in an empty theatre believing himself to watch delightful dramas unfold before his rapt gaze. His family cured him of the malady, and he was not pleased. Niall Rudd translates the whole passage as follows:

A well-known figure in Argos

used to think he was watching a splendid tragic performance as he sat alone excitedly clapping in the empty theatre.

Apart from that he coped with the daily business of life perfectly well — a good neighbour, a charming host, kind to his wife, the sort who managed to forgive his servants and not go mad with rage if the seal of a jar were broken, who had no trouble avoiding a cliff or an open well.

He was finally cured thanks to his relatives' care and expense.

But when the potent drug had done its work, expelling the harmful bile, and the man recovered, he cried: 'Ah god!

You've killed me, my friends, not cured me; for now you've ruined my [pleasure

by driving away the illusion which gave me such delight.'<sup>14</sup>

The final line of Horace's tale — 'Et demptus per vim mentis gratissimus error' ('and the sweetest delusion of my mind has been taken away by force') seems particularly to have impressed Lamb, for he quotes it more than once. It appears in 'A Chapter on Ears' and, more significantly, in a letter to John Rickman of 1816 in which Lamb gossips pleasantly about his eccentric friend George Dyer, poet and historian of Cambridge University.

In this letter, we hear how Dyer has just come into a fortune thanks to a legal bequest. Recalling *Othello*, Lamb muses on the changes that wealth will bring to Dyer's life:

Indeed I look upon our friend as dead, dead to all his desperate fancies, pleasures, — he has lost the dignity of verse, the dignity of poverty, the dignity of digging on in desperation thro' mines of Literature that yielded nothing. Adieu! the wrinkled brow, the chin half shaved, the Ruined Arm Chair, the wind-admitting-and-expelling screen, the fluttering Pamphlets, the lost Letters, the documents never to be found when wanting — the unserviceable comfortable Landress —

G. D.'s Occupations oer

Demptus per vim mentis gratissimus Error.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Horace, *Epistles* II, 2, 128–40; N. Rudd, *Horace: Satires and Epistles* (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 186–7.

<sup>15</sup> Marrs, *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 239. A 'landress' is a laundress.

Indeed the Shakespearean and Horatian fun that Lamb has at Dyer's expense pervades the letter:

[...] G. Dyer Executor to a Nobleman. G. D. Residuary Legatee. What Whirligig of Fortune is this. Valet ima Summis. Strange World, strange Kings, strange composition!—I can't enjoy it sufficiently till I get a more active belief in it. You've seen the Will of Ld. Stanhope. Conceive his old floor strew'd with disjecta membra Poeseōs, now loaden with Codicills, deeds of Trust, Letters of Attorney, Bonds, Obligations, Forfeitures, Excheqrs. Bills, Noverint Universi's—'Mr Serjeant Best, pray take my Arm Chair, My Lord Holland sit here, Lord Grantly will your Lordship take the other, Mr Jekyll excuse my offering you the Window Seat—We'll now have that Clause read over again'.<sup>16</sup>

In this passage Lamb manages to pack in two quotes from Horace and three allusions to Shakespeare. Interestingly, four of these five intertextualities involve, directly or indirectly, a reference to madness.

The phrase 'Valet ima summis' is taken from the famous ode in which Horace pretends to renounce his Epicurean beliefs, observing that Fortune 'is able to change the places of the lowest with the highest'.<sup>17</sup> This ode begins, significantly, with 'I used to worship the gods grudgingly, / and not often, a wanderer expert / in a crazy wisdom',<sup>18</sup> and the poet goes on to relate, tongue in cheek, how thunder in a clear sky has compelled him to renounce his Epicurean faith and believe in divine intervention in human affairs. The expression 'a wanderer expert in a crazy wisdom' seems to fit Lamb's characterization of Dyer perfectly, as we shall see in more detail shortly. Continuing the explication of the allusions in Lamb's letter to Rickman, we note that the phrase 'disjecta membra Poeseōs' is a slight misquotation of Horace's 'disiecta membra poetae', the torn and scattered limbs of a poet, which Horace tells us you will still get if you dismember Ennius's sonorous lines.<sup>19</sup> The whirligig of fortune comes of course from the end of *Twelfth Night*, where Feste declares to a Malvolio whom fortune has brought low that 'thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges';<sup>20</sup> here again there seems to be a subtle allusion to Dyer, for Lamb thought, and wrote in a passage that I shall quote shortly, that Dyer was the victim of delusions of grandeur. Again, it is significant that, in the words 'strange world, strange kings, strange composition', Lamb has deliberately distorted the 'Mad world, mad kings, mad composition!' of Shakespeare's original.<sup>21</sup> Finally, of

<sup>16</sup> Marrs, *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 238–9. 'His old floor' is of course Dyer's old floor.

<sup>17</sup> *Odes* I, 35, 12–13.

<sup>18</sup> D. West, *Horace: the Complete Odes and Epodes*, pp. 51–2.

<sup>19</sup> *Satires* I, 4, 60–2.

<sup>20</sup> *Twelfth Night* V, 1, 373.

<sup>21</sup> *King John* II, 1, 562.

course, Lamb's courtroom scene recalls the mad trial in *King Lear*. Again, there seems to be a clear implication that Dyer is not altogether sane.

In Lamb's writings, as Augustine Birrell well remarked, Dyer is as much a literary character as a real person: 'Lamb created Dyer as surely as did Cervantes Don Quixote, Sterne Toby Shandy, or Charles Dickens Sam Weller'.<sup>22</sup> Lamb himself says, in an earlier letter to Rickman (of 1801), 'What do you think of a life of G. Dyer? I can scarcely conceive a more amusing novel'.<sup>23</sup> Birrell's reference to Cervantes is a happy one, for Lamb, in a splendid passage, reminds us that those who laugh at the Don are 'mistaking his author's purport, which was—tears'.<sup>24</sup> Just so Lamb's portrait of Dyer has, underneath the comedy, touches of tragedy. When we think of Dyer as a literary figure, some interesting further connections with Horace emerge. The Argive nobleman was mad, but not too mad: for example, he 'had no trouble avoiding a cliff or an open well'. But Dyer is madder than that: in another letter to Rickman (1802), Lamb reports that 'Dyer has at last met with a madman more mad than himself',<sup>25</sup> and his essay 'Amicus Redivivus' describes how Dyer left Lamb's house after a visit and proceeded to walk, in broad daylight, straight into the New River.<sup>26</sup> In this action Dyer recalls the mad poet whom Horace depicts at the end of the *Ars Poetica*, and who, while he wanders about chanting his poetry, is liable, like a fowler intent on a blackbird, to fall into a pit or a well.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in what Lamb calls Dyer's 'unreserved motion towards self-destruction',<sup>28</sup> he almost resembles the mad Empedocles, who, Horace tells us, jumped into Mount Etna deliberately and who would, like the Argive nobleman, have resented being saved.<sup>29</sup> And in the third satire of his second book, Horace tells us of a kind of lunatic who, just like Dyer, 'goes charging into the middle of a fire or a river'.<sup>30</sup>

But is the true poet mad? In some moods Horace certainly thinks so, but on many occasions he is at pains to stress his own sanity: as he tells us, 'nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico' ('So long as I were sane I would compare nothing to a pleasant friend') and 'nil me paeniteat sanum patris huius' ('As long as I am sane let me nowise resent such a father').<sup>31</sup> The ambivalence of his attitude comes out nicely from the wry end of his first epistle: 'In brief, the sensible man is second only to Jove. / He's free, well thought of, handsome, the

<sup>22</sup> *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Marrs, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 233.

<sup>25</sup> Marrs, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> *Ars Poetica*, 457–9.

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 209.

<sup>29</sup> *Ars Poetica*, 464–7, which significantly echoes *Epistles* II, 2, 138–9. The entire concluding movement of 'Amicus Redivivus' artfully intertwines motifs from Horace and Shakespeare, drawing in particular on *Odes* II, 13 and Clarence's dream.

<sup>30</sup> *Satires* II, 3, 56–7; Rudd, *Satires and Epistles*, p. 96. Lamb alludes to this satire in a letter to Manning: 'Pray try and cure yourself. Take Hellebore (the counsel is Horace's, 'twas none of my thought originally)', Marrs, *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 95–6. The reference is to *Satires* II, 3, 82–3.

<sup>31</sup> *Satires* I, 5, 44; I, 6, 89.

very king of kings; / above all, he's *sound*—at least when he hasn't got a cold.<sup>32</sup> The word *Rudd* here translates as *sound* is 'sanus', the root of our word 'sane': at this point the modern reader thinks of Juvenal's 'mens sana in corpore sano',<sup>33</sup> and 'sanus' indeed includes both ideas—mental health and bodily health. But perhaps Horace is slyly suggesting that the latter is really the more important. After all, the story of the Argive nobleman is introduced by Horace to support his assertion that 'I'd sooner be thought a cracked and incompetent writer / (provided my faults gave *me* pleasure or escaped my notice) / than know the truth, and grimace.'<sup>34</sup> The verb that *Rudd* here translates as 'know the truth', 'sapere', in this context contrasts with 'seeming to be mad' ('delirus videri'), and so means 'to be sane'.

Lamb, too, is equivocal in his attitude to madness. His essay 'Sanity of True Genius' argued for the thesis propounded by the title, but he also famously wrote of his sister Mary that 'When she is not violent her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of this world'.<sup>35</sup> Lamb, of course, knew from personal experience what he was talking about when he wrote about madness, and so might be presumed to recognize the symptoms in his friend George Dyer. For Horace, sanity is a matter of knowing your own limits and staying within them;<sup>36</sup> so too for Lamb. Perhaps the most obvious respect in which Dyer offended against this standard concerned his estimation of his own abilities. The letter to Rickman in which Lamb speculates about a novel with Dyer as its protagonist concludes: 'Since he has been so close with me I have perceiv'd the workings of his inordinate vanity, his gigantic attention to particles and to prevent open vowels in his odes, his solicitude that the public may not lose any tittle of his poems by his death and all the while his utter ignorance that the world don't care a pin about his odes and his criticisms, a fact which everybody knows but himself—he is a *rum genius*.'<sup>37</sup> In a later letter to Rickman Lamb remarks, 'I quite give up any hope of reducing him to common sense and human conduct. All that can be done is to bolster up his carcass by a daily habit of Dining, until he finishes his mortal pilgrimage'.<sup>38</sup>

In the *Ars Poetica* Horace tells us that Democritus 'debars a poet from Helicon unless he's mad'. Because of this, he adds, 'many no longer cut their nails / or beard; they make for secluded spots and avoid the baths'.<sup>39</sup> As Sarah Burton observes, Lamb hints obliquely at a similar lack of hygiene on Dyer's part, when in 'Oxford in the Vacation' he remarks that Dyer 'cares not much for Bath', adding, in case we missed the allusion to waters of purification: 'He is out of his element at Buxton, at Scarborough, or Harrowgate. The Cam and the Isis

<sup>32</sup> *Epistles* I, 1, 106–8; *Rudd, Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 100 (adapted).

<sup>33</sup> *Satires* X, 356.

<sup>34</sup> *Epistles* II, 2, 126–8; *Rudd, Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> E. V. Lucas, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London, 1935), vol. 3, p. 401.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., *Epistles* I, 7, 98; I, 18, 30; II, 2, 53.

<sup>37</sup> *Marrs, Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 31–2.

<sup>38</sup> *Marrs, Letters*, vol. 2, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ars Poetica*, 296–8; *Rudd, Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 198.

are to him "better than all the waters of Damascus". On the Muses' hill he is happy, and good'<sup>40</sup>—and unwashed, the reader mentally subjoins. Moreover, like Horace's mad poet who not only avoids the baths but also seeks out secluded spots, Dyer is often to be found in unexpected and out-of-the-way corners, like the 'nook at Oriel' where Lamb unexpectedly came upon him 'busy as a moth over some rotten archive', and so absorbed in his arcane researches that he 'started like an unbroke heifer, when I interrupted him. *A priori* it was not very probable that we should have met at Oriel'.<sup>41</sup>

The merging of life and literature which we have observed in Lamb's treatment of Dyer is uncannily present in what was the single most decisive event in Lamb's life, and in that of his sister Mary, namely her stabbing to death of their mother in September 1796. The killing, and the concomitant wounding of their father with one of the forks that Mary flung about in her fit,<sup>42</sup> seem a grotesque parody of an ancient Dionysiac ritual—the matricide recalling Agave's murder of her son Pentheus, the wounding fork suggesting the *ōmophagia* (eating of raw flesh) that sometimes accompanied these events.<sup>43</sup> Jane Aaron compares it to the story of Orestes' killing of Clytaemnestra (with the matricide transferred from brother to sister).<sup>44</sup> Given the importance of this terrible episode in both their lives, it is striking how rarely Charles and Mary refer to it in their writings—though of course, as Burton points out, it cannot be excluded that relevant materials have been lost or even destroyed 'as part of the veil that was drawn over Mary's history of mental illness by their closest friends'.<sup>45</sup> P. G. Patmore conjectured that Lamb's acute understanding of the old dramatists was fed by his own experience of violence and madness.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps also his engagement with plays like Ford's *The Broken Heart* helped him to control his emotional life; perhaps indeed, one is tempted to speculate further, that Lamb's use of Horace enabled him to touch on a theme that was too painful to address directly.

~ 'Olim rusticus urbanum murem mus . . . ' ~

In his essay 'The Genteel Style in Writing' Lamb expatiates on the style of the essayist Sir William Temple. Transcribing a long passage from 'Of Gardening', in which Temple praises the 'sweetness and satisfaction' of his country retreat, Lamb concludes his quotation as follows:

<sup>40</sup> Burton, *A Double Life: a Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb*, p. 151; *Lamb, Works*, vol. 2, pp. 11–12.

<sup>41</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 10–11. Notice the delightful use of scholastic terminology, as Lamb, who was 'defrauded in his young years of the sweet food of academic institution' pretends to 'strut a Gentleman Commoner' or 'proceed Master of Arts' (*ibid.*, p. 9).

<sup>42</sup> See the report of the incident in the *Morning Chronicle* of 26 September, reproduced by Marrs, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. L. Feder, *Madness in Literature* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 46–7.

<sup>44</sup> 'A Modern Electra: Matricide and the Writings of Mary and Charles Lamb', in P. Martin and R. Jarvis (eds.), *Reviewing Romanticism* (London, 1992), 1–13, at pp. 9–10.

<sup>45</sup> *A Double Life*, p. 98; cf. pp. 217–19. See further Aaron, 'A Modern Electra', pp. 9–10, on possible autobiographical elements in *Mrs Leicester's School*.

<sup>46</sup> *My Friends and Acquaintance* (London, 1854), vol. 1, p. 76.

I have passed five years without ever once going to town, though I am almost in sight of it, and have a house there always ready to receive me. Nor has this been any sort of affectation, as some have thought it, but a mere want of desire or humour to make so small a remove; for when I am in this corner, I can truly say with Horace, *Me quoties reficit, &*.

"Me, when the cold Digentian stream revives,  
What does my friend believe I think or ask?  
Let me yet less possess, so I may live,  
Whate'er of life remains, unto myself.  
May I have books enough; and one year's store,  
Not to depend upon each doubtful hour:  
This is enough of mighty Jove to pray,  
Who, as he pleases, gives and takes away."<sup>47</sup>

Horace's words are translated liberally from a passage in the eighteenth epistle of his first book, in which, like Temple, he defends his rural isolation. Like Temple, Horace does not want to go to town—in his case, Rome. In his fourteenth epistle, writing from Rome, Horace teases the bailiff of his Sabine farm, remarking on their opposite tastes: he, Horace, wishes he were on his farm, gardening and living simply, rather than stuck amid the bustle and noise of the metropolis, while the bailiff hates his agricultural occupations and yearns for the 'brothel and the greasy cook-shop' (two features of London that Lamb praises in a letter to be quoted below): 'my thoughts keep stealing away to where *you* are / and the mind is eager to break the bar that closes the track. / I envy the countryman, *you* the city-dweller.'<sup>48</sup> Note especially the phrase 'break the bar' ('rumpere claustra'): that will be significant shortly.

One is initially struck here by an apparent divergence between Horace and Lamb, for Lamb was of course not only a dweller in but a lover of the town, and in particular of *the* town, London. Horace loves the country, Lamb the town: that seems simple enough. But is the matter really so straightforward? Coleridge certainly thought differently when he wrote 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', there suggesting that Lamb was glad to get away from London and visit Coleridge's country residence at Nether Stowey,

for thou hast pined  
And hungered after Nature, many a year,  
In the great City pent, winning thy way  
With sad and patient soul, through evil and pain  
And strange calamity!<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Lamb, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 201; Horace, *Epistles* I, 18, 104–12.

<sup>48</sup> *Epistles* I, 14, 8–10; Rudd, *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 156. I read 'avei' in place of 'amat' with Bentley and Shackleton Bailey. Rudd's translation implies this reading too.

<sup>49</sup> 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', 28–32; *Complete Poems* (London, 1997), p. 139.

And Lamb himself might seem to encourage such a thought when, in a later letter to Manning (1800), and anticipating a visit to the Lake District, he wrote: 'I need not describe to you the expectations which such an one as myself, pent up all my life in a dirty city, have formed of a tour to the *Lakes*'.<sup>50</sup> Lamb's phraseology here ('pent up all my life in a dirty city') echoes Coleridge's poem ('in the great City pent'),<sup>51</sup> as well as the word 'claustra' in Horace's epistle to his bailiff. But the apparent corroboration of Coleridge's description is a false lead,<sup>52</sup> for the same letter to Manning goes on to praise the town and disparage the country in no uncertain terms:

Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent Gardens, Shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses, Ladies cheapening, Gentlemen behind counters lying, Authors in the street with spectacles, George Dyers (you may know them by their gait), Lamps lit at night, Pastry cook & Silver smith shops, Beautiful Quakers of Pentonville, noise of coaches, drousy cry of mechanic watchmen at night, with Bucks reeling home drunk if you happen to wake at midnight, cries of fire & stop thief, Inns of court (with their learned air and halls and Butteries just like Cambridge colleges), old Book stalls, Jeremy Taylors, Burtons on melancholy, and Religio Medici's on every stall—. These are thy Pleasures O London with-the-many-sins—O City abounding in whores—for these may Keswick and her Giant Brood go hang.<sup>53</sup>

And the equally famous *laudes Londinii* in the letter to Wordsworth of January 1801 are drafted in similar terms.<sup>54</sup> So Coleridge not only managed to offend Lamb with his repeated 'my gentle-hearted Charles',<sup>55</sup> he also misrepresented the character of Lamb's attitude to London.<sup>56</sup> David Cecil wondered: 'What could have led [Coleridge] to think that Charles had ever "pined" after Nature, or looked to her to inspire him with a sense of mystical joy?'<sup>57</sup> When one notes the similar language that Coleridge employs of himself in 'Frost at Midnight'—'For I was reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim, / And saw nought

<sup>50</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> T. McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: the English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford, 1987), p. 35n44.

<sup>52</sup> James, *Charles Lamb*, pp. 186–7.

<sup>53</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 248.

<sup>54</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 267.

<sup>55</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 224.

<sup>56</sup> Wordsworth's sonnet 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' was written while the Wordsworths were staying with the Lambs, and perhaps that influenced the drift of the poem: cf. James, *Charles Lamb*, p. 210. On Lamb's preference for city over countryside, see further his letter to Mary Shelley of about 18 January 1830, and to Wordsworth of 22 January 1830 (Lucas, *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 239–42); H. Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence*, ed. T. Sadler (London, 1869), vol. 1, p. 432; Patmore, *My Friends*, vol. 1, pp. 47–53; Burton, *A Double Life*, pp. 122–3, 178–83, 275, 343–5, 351.

<sup>57</sup> *Portrait*, p. 75.

lovely but the sky and stars<sup>58</sup>—one is inclined to conclude that, in addressing his friend Charles, Coleridge was really thinking of himself.<sup>59</sup> We perhaps have our answer to Cecil's question.

What I called the simple distinction between a town-loving Lamb and a country-loving Horace might seem to be further reinforced by the way in which Lamb makes use of the Roman poet's well-known fable of the town mouse and the country mouse. Horace sets the telling of this story at a dinner shared with his fellow Sabine farmers, and even with his slaves, who—so relaxed is the atmosphere—are permitted to filch delicacies from the master's table. 'O noctes, cenaque deum!', the poet gushes ('Ah, those evenings and dinners. What heaven!'),<sup>60</sup> and Lamb quotes this phrase in a letter to Coleridge of 1797.<sup>61</sup> But in its application to Lamb and Horace the fable of the mice is inverted: if Lamb is the town mouse and Horace the country mouse, in Lamb's case it is not the country mouse who, terrified of the dangers of the town to which his friend has invited him, scurries back to the safety and familiarity of the country, as in Horace's telling, but rather the town mouse, who, appalled by the vastness and impersonality of the country when he visits Coleridge in the Lakes, hastens back to the sights and sounds of London. As he tells Manning in a letter of 1802, Coleridge, playing the role of town mouse but located in the country, welcomed Lamb, playing the role of visiting country mouse but coming from the town, 'with all the hospitality in the world, and gave up his time to shew us all the wonders of the country. He dwells upon a small hill by the side of Keswick, in a comfortable house, quite enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains: great floundering bears & monsters they seem'd, all couchant & asleep.'<sup>62</sup> The monsters and bears which the mountains around Coleridge's house, Greta Hall, bring to Lamb's mind—'Keswick and her Giant Brood', as he put it in a letter to Manning quoted earlier<sup>63</sup>—recall the fierce dogs which disrupt the country mouse's sojourn with his urban host. Significantly, when Lamb refers explicitly to the fable in a letter to Manning of 1801, he makes a revealing mistake: 'Like the *Town Mouse*, that had tasted little of urbane manners, I long to be nibbling my own cheese by my dear self without mouse-traps and time-traps.'<sup>64</sup> Lamb is of course in an obvious sense a town mouse, so he starts the comparison by drawing that connection, but as we read on we realize that he should have written 'like the *Country Mouse*', for that is the point of the comparison. Lamb is a country mouse who prefers the town, Horace a town mouse who prefers the country.

<sup>58</sup> 'Frost at Midnight', 51–3 (*Complete Poems*, p. 232). See also his sonnet 'To the Nightingale' (*Complete Poems*, p. 79); James, *Charles Lamb*, p. 131.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes*, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> *Satires* II, 6, 65; Rudd, *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 93. See here again James, *Charles Lamb*, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 68.

<sup>63</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 248.

<sup>64</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 275.

This point gives us the clue we need in order to correct the simple account I started with in this section. Lamb's preference for town over country seems at first sight to stand in opposition to Horace's preference for country over town, but in fact when we scratch the surface we find that their predilections are rather similar. For *Town is Lamb's countryside*. As he tells us in his early essay 'The Londoner',

a mob of happy faces crowding up at the pit door of Drury-lane Theatre, just at the hour of six, gives me ten thousand sincerer pleasures, than I could ever receive from all the flocks of silly sheep that ever whitened the plains of Arcadia or Epsom Downs. [...] Thus an art of extracting morality from the commonest incidents of a town life, is attained by the same well-natured alchymy, with which the Foresters of Arden, in a beautiful country,

Found tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.<sup>65</sup>

The pleasure that Lamb takes in the town *is* the pleasure that the countryman takes in the country.<sup>66</sup> He remarks to Wordsworth that 'So fading upon me from disuse, have been the Beauties of Nature, as they have been confinedly called; so fresh and green and warm are all the inventions of men and assemblies of men in this great city'.<sup>67</sup> Only in London can Lamb be truly alone, truly anonymous. As he tells Manning, 'It is a great object to me to live in town, where we shall be much more *private*; and to quit a house & a neighbourhood where poor Mary's disorder, so frequently recurring, has made us a sort of marked people. We can be no where private except in the midst of London.'<sup>68</sup> Patmore wrote of Lamb: 'To him, the tide of human life that flowed through Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill, was worth all the Wyes and Yarrows in the universe; there were, to his thinking, no "Green Lanes" to compare with Fetter Lane or St Bride's; no Garden like Covent Garden.'<sup>69</sup> For Lamb, Covent Garden functions as a kind of Garden of Epicurus, a place of retreat, isolation, and spiritual recreation.

#### ~ Epicurean themes ~

Mention of Epicurus and his Garden takes us to a final respect that I want to explore in which Lamb and Horace are similar, and that is in their sharing of a number of Epicurean attitudes. So, for example, both Lamb and Horace are hedonists.<sup>70</sup> Both, after early flirtations with radicalism, settle in middle age into political quietism,<sup>71</sup> exemplifying the Epicurean motto *lathe biōsas* (live

<sup>65</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 39–40.

<sup>66</sup> I. Babbit, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Austin, Texas, 1977), p. 83; Riehl, *That Dangerous Figure*, p. 74.

<sup>67</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 268.

<sup>68</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 207. See Aaron, 'A Modern Electra', pp. 7–8.

<sup>69</sup> *My Friends*, vol. 1, p. 51.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Cecil, *Portrait*, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> On Horace, see esp. *Odes* II, 7 with J. Moles, 'Politics, Philosophy, and Friendship in Horace: *Odes* 2, 7', in W. Anderson (ed.), *Why Horace? A Collection of Interpretations* (Wauconda, Ill., 1999), 130–42;

unnoticed). Critics have castigated the mature Lamb for being politically cowardly, 'apparently more interested in roast pig than in Peterloo', as Felicity James nicely puts it<sup>72</sup>—and it is quite true that, by his own admission, his mind dwelt more on the Glorious Revolution than on the French Revolution<sup>73</sup>—and the mature Horace as a regime time-server. If 'admirers of Elia have a sapless, inherited respect for literature, conceived as uplift and unrelated to living', as Denys Thompson put it,<sup>74</sup> Horace's political poetry was, in A. E. Housman's view, 'sapless'.<sup>75</sup>

Both writers are lovers of the pleasures of wine—and, in Lamb's case, of other tipples too, such as that 'extra glass of gin and water' demurely mentioned by Patmore<sup>76</sup>—and of friendship. I quoted above Horace's 'nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico' ('So long as I were sane I would compare nothing to a pleasant friend'), in which the influence of Epicurus is clear.<sup>77</sup> Horace's attitude to friendship has been thoroughly explored in the secondary literature;<sup>78</sup> so too Lamb's.<sup>79</sup> A slightly less obvious point of contact is that Lamb and Horace both on occasion complain about the burdens of friendship, and particularly of unwanted guests. 'He could neither live *with* his friends, nor without them', Patmore remarked of Lamb.<sup>80</sup> Hospita's diatribe against the greed of Edax ('Can he have read Mr. Malthus's Thoughts on the Ratio of Food to Population? Can he think it reasonable that one man should consume the sustenance of so many?'),<sup>81</sup> 'The "Lepus" Papers' ('these accursed friends, or fiends, that torture me [...]'),<sup>82</sup> the letter to Manning in which Lamb compares himself to Horace's town mouse,<sup>83</sup> as well as numerous other passages in his letters and essays,<sup>84</sup> attest to the fact that on many occasions Lamb found his friends and acquaintances wearisome, and yearned for solitude. As he put it in his Popular Fallacy 'That Home is Home though it is never so Homely', 'At our time of life, to be alone sometimes is as needful as sleep', but the unwanted visitor 'takes

on Lamb, see B. Pollin, 'Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd as Jacobins and Anti-Jacobins', *Studies in Romanticism* 12, 1973, 633–47; W. Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb* (New York, 1983), ch. 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Charles Lamb*, p. 2; cf. pp. 16–18, 46; Riehl, *That Dangerous Figure*, pp. 30, 99–104.

<sup>73</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 187–8.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted by Riehl, *That Dangerous Figure*, p. 100.

<sup>75</sup> *The Letters of A. E. Housman*, ed. A. Burnett (Oxford, 2007), vol. 1, p. 186.

<sup>76</sup> *My Friends*, vol. 1, p. 54. Patmore goes on to affirm, somewhat desperately and in conflict with our other evidence, that 'to the abuse [of alcohol] he was never addicted' (*ibid.*).

<sup>77</sup> See E. Gowers's note ad loc.: *Horace Satires Book I* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 197–8.

<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace Odes, Book I* (Oxford, 1970), p. xxi; P. White, 'Friendship, Patronage, and Horatian Sociopoetics', in S. Harrison (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Horace* (Cambridge, 2007), 195–206; W. Anderson, 'Horace's Friendship: Adaptation of a Circular Argument', in G. Davis (ed.), *A Companion to Horace* (Blackwell, 2010), 34–52.

<sup>79</sup> See Cecil, *Portrait*, pp. 30–1, 107–19; McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes*, pp. 38–44; and of course James, *Charles Lamb*, now the definitive study of this topic.

<sup>80</sup> *My Friends*, vol. 1, p. 72.

<sup>81</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. 126.

<sup>82</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, p. 271.

<sup>83</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 277.

<sup>84</sup> See Burton, *A Double Life*, pp. 190, 192, 220–1, 259, 303, 320–1, 338.

your good time, and gives you his bad in exchange'.<sup>85</sup> Horace, too, complains of unwanted guests at supper, and of the bore who pesters him while he is wandering at will down the Via Sacra.<sup>86</sup>

Horace and Lamb share, then, the pleasures of wine and friendship. What of those other traditional diversions of the Epicurean man, women and song? As far as the latter is concerned, we must enter a negative in our comparison between the two writers, for while Horace represents himself as enjoying the company of alluring and talented *chanteuses* with tantalizing Greek names, and even as joining in the musical performances himself,<sup>87</sup> Lamb tells us frankly that 'I have no ear'.<sup>88</sup> The sophisticated ladies of the *Odes* provided, it is intimated, other services. There has of course been a debate among Horace's readers concerning the extent to which the erotic narrative of his poetry—and in particular the Hellenized *demi monde* of the *Odes*—is based on fact. In my view, while Horace's love poems are presumably not (in general) accurate historical records of actual events, they do describe the kind of thing that went on in the Rome of Horace's day, the kind of life that men of means and opportunity—and probably bachelor Horace, too—led.<sup>89</sup> In bachelor Lamb's case the matter is murkier. Cecil tries to head off the issue by assuring us that Lamb 'had never been a man of strong sexual passions',<sup>90</sup> but this is merely an inference from the documents that have come down to us—combined, perhaps, with a dash of prudery—and the fact is that we are not in a position to make a confident judgement. It would indeed be interesting to ascertain how much, if anything, lies behind Lamb's apostrophe to London quoted above, 'O City abounding in whores'—whether he frequented 'the very women of the Town', as he calls them in his famous letter to Wordsworth of January 1801<sup>91</sup>—but so far as I know we lack firm evidence one way or the other.

The theme of mortality is important to both writers, and reflection on it fills both with a deep and ever-recurring melancholy. Patmore remarked that 'there was a constitutional sadness about Lamb's mind'.<sup>92</sup> Horace's odes to Sestius and Torquatus, 'Solvitur acris hiems' (I, 4) and 'Diffugere nives' (IV, 7), explore the connections between the coming of spring and the imminence and inevitability of death.<sup>93</sup> In their remarks on the former of these odes R. G. M. Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard say, aptly for our purposes, that 'New Year's Day

<sup>85</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 265.

<sup>86</sup> *Satires* II, 4, 17; I, 9.

<sup>87</sup> So, for example, in the moving ode 'Festo quid potius' (III, 28), on which see Wilkinson, *Horace and his Lyric Poetry*, pp. 148–9.

<sup>88</sup> *Works*, vol. 2, p. 38.

<sup>89</sup> See here J. Griffin, 'Lyrical Moralizing', *Journal of Roman Studies* 70, 1980, 182–5, and *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (Bristol, 1985).

<sup>90</sup> *Portrait*, p. 145.

<sup>91</sup> Marris, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 267.

<sup>92</sup> *My Friends*, vol. 1, p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> For some analysis, with reference to further literature on the topic, see my *Language, Truth, and Literature: a Defence of Literary Humanism* (Oxford, 2013), §21; my *Horace and Housman* (New York, 2013), ch. 3.

and other anniversaries may bring us similar reflections':<sup>94</sup> they do not mention Lamb by name, but they must surely have in mind his great essay 'New Year's Eve', in which the theme of mortality is so powerfully handled. Bertram Jessup remarked that 'Believing in life as it comes leads Elia to believe also in life as it goes. He accepts the simple tragedy of its evanescence. He is no two-worlds man. Life is real and good and the loss of it is real and evil.'<sup>95</sup>

In their attitudes to religion, Lamb and Horace were conservative and sceptical. An eclecticism and lack of dogmatism pervade their writings – Horace tells us that 'I don't feel bound to swear obedience to any master',<sup>96</sup> and Henry Crabb Robinson records in his diary that 'The dogmatism of theology has disgusted Lamb, and it is that alone which he opposes; he has the organ of theosophy, and is by nature pious'.<sup>97</sup> Southey famously accused Lamb's Elia of evincing a lack of sound religious feeling, and though Lamb replied vigorously to the charge,<sup>98</sup> his letters and essays surely do breathe an atmosphere of secularism, something that perhaps worries modern readers less than it did Southey. Lamb pays lip-service to the main doctrines of (Unitarian) Christianity, but as the essay 'New Year's Eve' demonstrates, he did not really believe in any kind of afterlife. He agrees with Horace that 'mors ultima linea rerum est', 'death is the end of the race'.<sup>99</sup>

Lamb's poem 'Composed at Midnight' is a direct response to Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'.<sup>100</sup> Where Coleridge hears the 'gentle breathings' of his baby, 'cradled by my side',<sup>101</sup> Lamb hears only 'the moanings of the dying man', his father, 'who lies in the upper chamber'.<sup>102</sup> Where Coleridge predicts to his child

so shalt thou see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself,<sup>103</sup>

Lamb anticipates his father's last moments: 'Some few groans more, death comes, and there an end. / 'Tis darkness and conjecture all beyond.'<sup>104</sup> Lamb's poem is not irreligious – it concludes with a recollection of Milton's sonnet on his blindness – but it is humble: recalling Horace's doubts about the *fabulae*

<sup>94</sup> *Horace Odes I*, p. 60.

<sup>95</sup> 'The Mind of Elia', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15, 1954, 246–59, at p. 248; cf. Riehl, *That Dangerous Figure*, p. 126.

<sup>96</sup> *Epistles I*, 1, 14; Rudd, *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 129. On Lamb, see again Riehl, *That Dangerous Figure*, pp. 48, 67, and James, *Charles Lamb*, pp. 174, 182.

<sup>97</sup> *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 270. Cf. Cecil, *Portrait*, pp. 90–1.

<sup>98</sup> *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 226–36.

<sup>99</sup> *Epistles I*, 16, 79; Rudd, *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, p. 162.

<sup>100</sup> See here James, *Charles Lamb*, pp. 130–4.

<sup>101</sup> 'Frost at Midnight', 44–5 (*Complete Poems*, p. 232).

<sup>102</sup> 'Composed at Midnight', 9–10 (*Works*, vol. 5, p. 24).

<sup>103</sup> 'Frost at Midnight', 58–62 (*Complete Poems*, p. 232).

<sup>104</sup> 'Composed at Midnight', 24–5 (*Works*, vol. 5, p. 24).

*Manes* ('the ghosts of fable') in 'Solvitur acris hiems',<sup>105</sup> Lamb inveighs against the 'enormous fablings and mad lies'<sup>106</sup> that Fancy tells about hell and the afterlife. And he includes what looks distinctly like a hit at Coleridge himself who, in words that recall Milton's Mammon –

the least erected Spirit that fell  
From heav'n, for ev'n in heav'n his looks and thoughts  
Were always downward bent, admiring more  
The riches of heav'n's pavement, trodden gold,  
Than aught divine or holy<sup>107</sup> –

is more interested in treading heaven's golden pavement than in considering the sufferings of his fellow man.<sup>108</sup>

#### ~ Conclusion ~

Much more connects Lamb and Horace than I have had space to explore here. For one thing, they were both eminent critics as well as creative writers. With opposite leanings: Lamb revived interest in the old dramatists; Horace criticized the tendency of his contemporaries to lionize Lucilius. They both believed in the cognitive and moral value of literature, though perhaps a little too simplistically for our taste.<sup>109</sup> Above all, perhaps, they presented themselves as writers embedded in a locality. In the introduction to their edition of Horace's first book of odes, Nisbet and Hubbard write that

Horace seems to be the first European poet who persistently connects the charm of the country with a specific and recognizable locality. The villages of his childhood and the place-names of the Digentia valley are given significance because he himself happened to write about them ([*Odes*] I, 17; III, 4, 14ff.). The Romans owed least to the Greeks in the more personal genres, satire, love-poetry, letter-writing. In the same way Horace's Sabine farm introduces a new way of thinking to European literature.<sup>110</sup>

A new way of thinking, one might add, that, many centuries down the line, was to find a perfect urban realization in the Strand and Fleet Street of Lamb's essays and letters.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Odes I*, 4, 16.

<sup>106</sup> 'Composed at Midnight', 25–31 (*Works*, vol. 5, p. 24).

<sup>107</sup> *Paradise Lost I*, 679–83 (*Poetical Works*, p. 228).

<sup>108</sup> 'Composed at Midnight', 31–44 (*Works*, vol. 5, pp. 24–5).

<sup>109</sup> See my *Language, Truth, and Literature*, pp. 81–2, 104–5.

<sup>110</sup> *Horace Odes I*, pp. xx–xxi.

<sup>111</sup> An earlier version of part of this paper was read at the Charles Lamb Study Day 2012, and I am grateful to the participants for their most helpful comments.

## Beyond Whist Sobriety: the Lambs, Crabb Robinson, and their Discourse on Literature

Philipp Hunnekuhl

Henry Crabb Robinson met Charles and Mary Lamb for the first time on 10 June 1806, in the house of the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, whose wife Catherine had been Robinson's childhood friend and, as she once suggested, surrogate sister.<sup>1</sup> A lifelong friendship between Robinson and the Lambs ensued. During many a party at the Lambs', whist was played in abundance, wine, ale, and gin were consumed to a similar extent, and books were read and discussed. Robinson was a moderate drinker, though, and on some occasions a total absentee<sup>2</sup> – but it is perhaps not least due to this circumstance that we owe the detailed accounts of evenings with the Lambs that survive in Robinson's diaries and correspondence.

The character of this literary conviviality as it emerges from Robinson's records is the topic of the present essay. Here, on the one hand, the card game of whist emerges as characterised by a sober attentiveness that offers its players the enjoyment of a rational competitiveness amid clear rules. Reading and discoursing on literature, on the other hand, compelled the people at the Lambs' parties beyond the rules of the game, I argue, as literature dissolves the rules that confine whist's playfulness to the rational and observable. While these rules, in their rigidity and unambiguousness, may represent an oversimplification of those of society, and exert their appeal in their outlook of success within one's immediate reach, literature undoes any such quick, positive gratification. Literature comes into play where the card game ultimately proves insufficient, and where it fails to gratify: in its appeal beyond the moment of enjoyment. An interpersonal truth of which literature takes ownership remains unspoken in whist, namely that of the possibility of change through agency, of commandeering and modifying the moral givens unquestioned in card play. The perception and appreciation of this truth was the main reason for Robinson's admiration of both Charles and Mary Lamb's writings, as I hope to show in due course.

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The whist layman (such as myself) can perhaps best deduce the game's character from Elia's essay entitled 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist'. The late

<sup>1</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson (hereafter referred to as HCR), 'Pocket Diary' 1806, Bundle 6.VIII, Dr Williams's Library (hereafter DWL), 36. I wish to thank the director of the library, Dr David Wykes, who has kindly given his permission on behalf of the Trustees to publish from Henry Crabb Robinson's manuscripts in their keeping. I would also like to express my gratitude to Miss Jane Giscombe, the Conservator, for her great efforts in making these documents available to me.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Sarah Burton, *A Double Life: A Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London, 2003), 261.

Sarah Battle, the piece begins, was 'none of your lukewarm gamblers'.<sup>3</sup> She took the game seriously, and expected as much from the party at her gaming table. She allegedly did not look for compassion and collaboration in the game, but she 'loved a thorough-paced partner, a determined enemy'. In the ensuing battle, then, Mrs. Battle 'took, and gave, no concessions'. She sat 'bolt upright' as she 'fought a good fight: cut and thrust'.

Whist's rules of engagement, so to speak, are as clear as the combatants' allegiances. An attentiveness and steady rationality accompanies these clear rules, engendering a sobriety that may stretch up to nine rounds. Hence, Mrs. Battle found that whist 'was the *solider* game' than quadrille not only because one or two 'rubbers' (a rubber being the best of three games) of the former 'might co-extend in duration with an evening', but also because the latter involves 'uncertainty and quick shifting of partners – a thing which the constancy of whist abhors'.<sup>4</sup> Whist subordinates tactics for the momentary gain to long-term strategy, whilst triumph requires foresight and near-scientific calculation. Its 'grave simplicity' emerges from the assumption of steady relationships warranting the achievability of long-term success. If indeed 'cards are warfare', and the 'ends are gain, with glory', then these ends undergo simplification insofar as they lose the threat of betrayal and insurgency that none of life's relations, from friendships via family relations to state allegiance, are ever entirely free of. Allegiance is not questioned in whist.

Sarah Battle also took the name of the game literally, since she 'never introduced, or connived at, miscellaneous conversation during its process' (38). The Oxford English Dictionary reveals that the adjective 'whist' once denoted 'silent, quiet, still, hushed', 'making no sound', or being 'free from noise or disturbance'.<sup>5</sup> It could also mean the 'keeping silence in relation to something', or 'saying nothing about the matter', implying a conscious holding back of information or opinion despite its likely significance. Whist requires a holding back of something from its participants that renders it convenient enough for the enjoyment of momentary competitiveness – but too convenient not to suggest itself for scrutiny in the long run: the transformability of social relationships. Decision-making quickly finds a moral anchor in whist, according to Lamb's Mrs. Battle. Hence, 'the wars of whist were comparable to the long, steady, deep-rooted, rational, antipathies of the great French and English nations'.<sup>6</sup>

Literature seems to address precisely this unutterable element. Sarah Battle, Lamb insinuates, showed 'unmingled distaste in her fine last-century countenance' at 'the airs of a young gentleman of a literary turn, who had been with difficulty persuaded to take a hand', and who treated whist – Mrs. Battle's 'business, her duty, the thing she came into the world to do' – as a merely

<sup>3</sup> Charles Lamb ('Elia'), 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist', in *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1912), 37.

<sup>4</sup> Lamb, 'Whist', 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> 'whist', adjective, *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/?rskey=uSmSeP&result=5&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 2 October 2012].

<sup>6</sup> Lamb, 'Whist', 39.

recreational activity (38). Books, on the other hand, were just that for her: play for no other aim than itself, or momentary distraction, from the target-driven game. Thus, whist 'abhors neutrality, or interest beyond its sphere' (41); its structural consistency precludes transcendental disinterestedness while the material gains (and losses) are shared by each pre-established party. Whist's universal call to arms, to endure the rhetoric of war only a little longer, and its not allowing for spectators in the self-contained 'theatre' it establishes, resemble a playful experimentation with totalitarianism in Mrs. Battle's account. But Elia of course reveals that, despite his veneration of her reasonings, he cannot help seeing 'idle folly' in whist at certain times, and that the pure enjoyment of play's sociability may sneak in and substitute any interest in gain or glory – especially when one is 'subdued and humble' (43). Suddenly, in directly impacting on, and offering an alteration of, one's difficult situation, card play becomes literary – as it does in Lamb's very essay.

For Robinson, perusing works of literature provided the intoxication that he barely sought in alcohol. As a twenty-one-year-old, he had described his escape from the subduing monotony of his existence as a legal clerk thus to his brother: 'Is that state enviable which consists in the alternate Ravings of Maniac Joy And the Depressions of Hypochondriac Melancholy? And this is my Condition exactly. When I think of myself I see Poverty, Contempt, Injury, Violence & Death[.] When I desperately fly from myself I do not indeed have recourse to the gaming Table or the Bottle but I riot in literary Dissipations.'<sup>7</sup> Dissipation through reading was, for Robinson, therefore more than the mere distraction from experience that Walter Benjamin criticised as apathetic reception in his concept of *Zerstreuung* occasioned by the increasing reproducibility of the work of art. Literary reception for Robinson was transcendental insofar as it did not preclude art's sanctity (*Weihe*),<sup>8</sup> yet his 'riot[ing]' therein comprised a direct involvement with it that was close to the participatory aesthetic that Benjamin overall favoured. Literature in particular had this direct bearing on Robinson's life, constantly calling into question the moral standards by which he lived. A corresponding critical stance is reflected throughout the literary criticism that one finds in Robinson's largely informal writings.<sup>9</sup>

Where drinking and gambling may have offered a temporary albeit not all that edifying distraction, literature gave Robinson the outlook of truly overcoming extreme – if not bipolar – mood swings. He found that art in general, and literature in particular, was not merely a realm detached from the purposes of worldly experience (the argument Immanuel Kant had put forward, and with which Robinson was very familiar). Rather, literature directly appeals to a moral sense, opening it up to renegotiation, thereby undoing existing

<sup>7</sup> HCR to Thomas Robinson, 2 March 1797, 'Correspondence 1725-1799', Letter 91, DWL.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theorie der Zerstreuung', *Gesammelte Schriften* 7 (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), II, 678.

<sup>9</sup> See Philipp Hunnekuhl, 'Reconstructing the Voice of the Mediator: Henry Crabb Robinson's Literary Criticism', in *Informal Romanticism*, ed. James Vigus (Trier, 2012), 61-76.

prejudices and furthering disinterestedness. Or in short, Robinson had arrived at the conviction that art not merely reflects life, but that it has a transformative bearing on it. And Robinson relished the Lambs' writings precisely for invoking this universalising sentiment. Byron, for comparison, Robinson would criticise on these very grounds. Around this true core of Lamb's writing, his wit unfolded structurally like a card game calling into question its own rules. The sobriety – both in the sense of gravity and alcoholic austerity – of the game thus increasingly yielded to the author's fancy.

On 10 June 1806, the day of the Lambs' first encounter with Robinson, the latter notes in his Pocket Diary (kept almost exclusively in German) that Lamb 'amused him', that in conversation, he was humorous (*witzig*) like Hazlitt, and that his sister seemed amiable (*liebenswertig*).<sup>10</sup> The Lambs soon thereafter began to invite Robinson to their regular parties, and his Pocket Diaries from the years 1808 to 1810, kept still mainly in German, are scattered with brief yet regular entries on time spent with the Lambs. One most significant entry, for instance, is that of 15 March 1808, since it mentions the breakfast at the Lambs' at which Robinson met Wordsworth for the first time.<sup>11</sup> On Sunday 7 May 1809, Robinson records Lamb's drinking habits for the first time, followed by the brief entry 'Ms. Lamb's poems for Children' and 'Mrs. Leicester's School' in the expenses section for week 29 of the year 1809.<sup>12</sup> On Tuesday 3 October 1809, on a coach to Bury St Edmunds (Robinson's birthplace), he read Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*. And on Monday, 11 June 1810, he, Mary and Charles Lamb together visited Blake's exhibition in the shop in Bond Street that belonged to the artist's brother, an experience which led Robinson to write an article on the then almost entirely unknown Blake and publish it in a German periodical the following year.<sup>13</sup> None of these entries in Robinson's small Pocket Diaries contain any detailed accounts or critical opinions of the Lambs' work, however. That changed with the commencement of his main Diary in January 1811.

Only Robinson's comments on Charles Lamb's play *Mr. H* – and its unsuccessful first staging are more detailed at this early stage of his informal criticism and record-keeping. On Wednesday 10 December 1806, Robinson accompanied the Lambs to the premiere, and he briefly noted in his Pocket Diary that he did not share the public disapproval and ridicule. Soon thereafter, Robinson elaborated on the matter in a letter to his brother, written on 13 December 1806, thus: 'Charles Lamb's Farce *Mr. H* had the misfortune to be [paper torn] on Wednesday night. But I would rather be damned for such a piece, than have the honour of many a popular production. In spite of the condemnation which arose more from want of exertion & management than from the decided disapprobation of the public; "I risk "my reputation as a man of sense & a –" Psha what shall I put in the "Christian's" stead? N'Importe! ^Mr

<sup>10</sup> HCR, 'Pocket Diary' 1806, 36.

<sup>11</sup> HCR, 'Pocket Diary' 1808, Bundle 11.8, DWL.

<sup>12</sup> HCR, 'Pocket Diary' 1809, Bundle 11.9, DWL.

<sup>13</sup> HCR, 'Pocket Diary' 1810, Bundle 11.10, DWL. HCR (anon.), 'William Blake, Künstler, Dichter und religiöser Schwärmer', *Vaterländisches Museum* (Hamburg, 1810), 2 vols, II, 107-131.

H. ^ has more genuine Wit & Humour than I am sure any english farce contains, or any Comedy, even since the School for Scandal. The prologue is most excellent – Look for it in the Thursday's (yesterday's) papers – Lamb has borne his disappointment like an hero.<sup>14</sup> Robinson's standard for comparison is Sheridan's 1777 *School for Scandal*, some twelve years before Hazlitt so emphatically praised Sheridan's work in his *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*. The genuineness of the wit and humour here is, for Robinson as well as for Hazlitt, based on the original disinterestedness – or other-centredness – of human nature.<sup>15</sup> Lamb's play, like Sheridan's, exhibits this humane feature, and in the Prologue to *Mr. H* – it emerges most distinctly from the ridiculing of the depersonalising 'new modes of speech', namely the use of initials instead of names, that cause 'each lov'd syllable' to 'melt away'.<sup>16</sup> As loved elements of speech habitually remain unspoken, Lamb's play sets out to counter such practice.

From Robinson's Diary it emerges that therefore he did not forget about *Mr. H* – after its catastrophic first staging. On 9 May 1812, Robinson writes that he 'Borrowed of L[amb] his M<sup>r</sup> H which in the evening I read at M<sup>rs</sup> Barbauld[']s to M<sup>rs</sup> & Miss Aikin', and 'M<sup>rs</sup> & Miss Kinder'.<sup>17</sup> Robinson adds that 'They all appeared to enjoy it very much', and that 'The sincerity with which they praise L[amb] & his pieces does the family credit'. Somewhat unusually among a number of Diary entries showing the regularity with which whist was played however, and to the likely disapprobation of Mrs. Battle, the Diary entry's paragraph ends in the statement that 'My visit was spent in this reading & in a game of chess'.

On 27 March 1813, then again after a game of whist during an evening at the Flaxmans', Robinson read Lamb's play to the party gathered there. Still with the first performance in mind, Robinson was 'apprehensive they might not be pleased', so he read his best, 'with an effort which gave spirit', as he recalls.<sup>18</sup> The result was that his audience 'laughed heartily at the punn[in]g scenes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Act, w[h]ich they enjoyed more than the 1<sup>st</sup>[.] And they tho[ugh]t the farce ought to have succeeded', dispelling Robinson's initial apprehensions. Significantly, in *Mr. H* –, very much as in whist, the plot and actions are structured around the unutterable: the name of the protagonist who attempts to keep it a secret for as long as he can. Once Mr. Hogsflesh, in the second act stressed by Robinson, makes the mistake of quoting a friend, and thus revealing his own, carefully disguised name, the admiration of the surrounding ladies

<sup>14</sup> HCR to Thomas Robinson, 13 December 1806, 'Correspondence 1805-1808', Letter 71, DWL.

<sup>15</sup> For the similarities of Robinson's and Hazlitt's metaphysics and literary appreciation, see my forthcoming article: Philipp Hunnekuhl, 'Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson: The Common Pursuit' in the *Hazlitt Review* (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Charles Lamb, *Mr. H* –, in *Poems and Plays by Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1912), 203.

<sup>17</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 2, 9 May 1812, DWL.

<sup>18</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 3, 27 March 1813, DWL.

immediately turns into repulsion, and the envy of the gentlemen into ridicule and mockery.

With this revelation, unfortunately for Lamb at the premiere of his play, the mood of the audience also turned against him, and the hissing, in which he would soon join, commenced.<sup>19</sup> Mr. Hogsflesh, after enduring incessant ridicule, famously saves his Bacon by adopting that very name of his ancestors without changing the denotation of his birth name. Lamb thus reveals the prejudice at the basis of language and the human understanding: the grammaticality of the rules of whist in which Mrs. Battle purportedly delighted so much does not comprise the emotional reactions that associations with synonyms (or their compound parts) may conjure up. But Lamb could not avoid his audience falling into the same trap into which the dismayed ladies and mocking gentleman of his plot also fall. He breaks the suspense (it is, after all, primarily the concealing of the name that accounts for it), and supplies an element of truth, on the tip of everyone's tongue yet too strong for comfort, that takes a hold of the play's spectators. Or, he has undone the whist-like routine of exchanging clear signification (in the denoted values of cards), and turned it into a compelling dialogue on the limitations of human cognition. Lamb does not spare his hero, and yet he ultimately saves him – at the expense of confronting, and inconveniencing, his audience by laying bare the flaws of their subjectivity. This critical yet benevolent mirth is what Robinson appreciated most, here as well as in Lamb's other writings.

Not long before the alcohol took over on 17 January 1812 for the rest of the night, Robinson walked in on a party at Barron Field's. He found Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt engaged in a literary debate:

Lamb & Hunt I found had had a contest about Coleridge. H. had spoken of him as a bad writer, L. as of the first man he ever knew. The dispute was revived by me; but nothing remarkable was said. C. L. who soon became tipsy in his droll & extravagant way abused every one who denied transcendency, while H. dryly denied the excellency of his writings & expressed his regret that he did not know him personally. H. took L's speeches in good part, evidently by his manner shewed his respect for his talents, while C. L. to make his freedoms endurable praised Hunt's remarks on Fuseli (a praise H. seemed to relish).

I spoke about Hazlitt's lectures in terms of great praise, but C. L. would not join me, & I fear I did not succeed in my object.

I left C. L. getting very drunk and I understand the party remained up till late. I staid only till 12.<sup>20</sup>

Alcohol fuels the benevolent literary dispute, and Lamb's tipsiness triggers his defence of transcendental speculation. His 'droll & extravagant way' and the

<sup>19</sup> HCR, 'Reminiscences' 1, 354, DWL.

<sup>20</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 2, 17 January 1812, DWL.

'freedoms' he takes encircle, as they do in his writings, transcendence as the token of the unutterable – of the element which, like Schelling's concept of the Absolute, is beyond signification. It can only be explored and sketched, but not defined. The question of transcendence, the accessibility of something radically different from worldly experience, is of course crucial to the Romantic discourse on art – although it remains open to speculation like the unutterable in whist.

The supposition that *art* may be a token of transcendence was familiar to both Coleridge and Robinson (not at least through their study of Kant and Schelling). In the very first Diary entry, dated 8 January 1811, Robinson had made related observations: 'Spent part of the evening with C. Lamb (unwell) & his sister. [...] We spoke of Wordsworth and Coleridge. C. L. to my surprise asserted Coleridge to be the greater man. He preferred the Mariner to anything W. had written. W. he thought is narrow and confined in his views compared with W. [sic; Coleridge] he does not like Shakespear become everything he pleases but forces the reader to submit to his individual feelings.'<sup>21</sup> In Coleridge's 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' especially, Lamb finds that the author subordinates his own, 'individual feelings' to the feelings engendered in the reader, thus precluding the danger of moral prescriptiveness on the author's part. Robinson was very much preoccupied with the issue of moral prescriptiveness in his literary criticism, but he would still have placed Wordsworth above Coleridge for his literarily opening up of moral discourse. In short, it seems that both Lamb and Coleridge sought the liberation of moral standards in art, supposing that therein art may possess its transcendental command. And yet, while Robinson and Lamb at times disagreed as to where that power best reveals itself, more often than not Robinson discerned it in the very writings of Charles Lamb.

The ensuing question of truth and feeling is perhaps best expressed in Robinson's comment that, in the 'Confessions of a Drunkard', Lamb is 'sometimes painfully eloquent'.<sup>22</sup> Lamb is conveying truth at face value yet his readers will not take it as such. This Robinson discerns when he writes that, after an evening of playing 'whist as usual', Lamb's essay was 'a very striking compos[iti]o[n] And calculated to do good generally though it will hardly be tho[ugh]t so near a correct represent[ati]o[n] of a fact as it really is'. Lamb thus makes truth in literary composition overt, but, in its guise as literature, that very truth loses its factuality in the imaginative involvement of the reader. Or, for once and not necessarily, authorial intention and the mere possibility of representation by the author – of describing things as they appear and not as they could or should be – may not affect the reader quite as 'painfully' as personal acquaintance and intercourse do, Robinson finds.

This pain, alleviated through the distance between the author and his readers' imagination, may thus emerge as just about bearable and compelling rather than rejecting. Robinson's close friendship with Lamb, however, made

<sup>21</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 1, 8 January 1811.

<sup>22</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 3, 29 April 1813, DWL.

him aware that in this case the circumstances of authorial composition largely corresponded to the truth engendered by the reader, rendering the sentiment evoked at times too 'painfully' immediate. Just how painful the closure of this hermeneutical distance was for Robinson, he tells us much later, in a description of a breakfast on 20 March 1834, a mere nine months before Lamb's death: '[Lamb] would drink a large quantity of brandy and milk on his coming into the room at nine, saying that he had had but one glass in the morning, and when he left me he would have more! [...] To have so excellent a creature, with all his infirmities, in one's room is delightful, but mixed with pain on account of the destruction he is rapidly bringing on himself.'<sup>23</sup> Moreover, though, the circumstance that this pain was not just Robinson's but also Lamb's emerges from his Diary entry of 20 May 1827. Robinson here describes how he paid a visit to Lamb that was 'not an agreeable' one, adding in brackets to the corresponding section of his Diary that 'I foolishly told Lamb that he had been seen drunk on the Enfield Road by the Proctors'.<sup>24</sup> As a result, 'Lamb was very angry and said it was brutal on their part, he will never forgive them. I was angry with myself for mentioning the matter'. Someone else's observation that the hopelessness and despair permeating the 'Confessions of a Drunkard' may not merely be speculative – that they are the uttering of a truth that ought to remain unsaid – must have touched Lamb so profoundly that, rather atypically, he could not help getting carried away with anger.

Personal afflictions of an even stronger kind had emerged earlier in Lamb's writings. Robinson, on his way to discovering them, addressed the piety in Lamb's early writings in a Diary passage of considerable length and depth on 27 March 1813: 'Also looked over Lloyd & Lamb's "blank verse"[.] A little volume w[hi]ch more than any other perhaps gave rise to the classing Lamb as one of the five bards. Lamb[']s blank verse is not with[ou]t feeling[.] strength & beauty, but its pious tone & sentimentality are strongly contrasted with the exquisite wit and strong critical sense he has displayed in his subsequent Works – his allusion to his sister's malady here must make him anxious to repress this little book.'<sup>25</sup> Robinson is stepping back into a time of Lamb's authorship when he had not yet known him, his sister, or the distressful circumstances of their mother's death in 1796. The solemnity Robinson finds among the 'feeling', 'strength', and 'beauty' of the compositions reveals a truth to him which was not made quite so explicit in Lamb's subsequent writings. Hence, Robinson cites four striking passages from Lamb's early poetry in remarkable detail, occasionally coming to a halt and inserting his own thoughts and feelings. He begins with the 1797 'Composed at Midnight', adding that these lines 'on the vulgar notions of heaven & hell shew the freedom of his mind, even when under the influence of strong religious feelings'. Lamb brings Robinson 'under the influence of' a truth in feeling that compels him to copy and comment on his

<sup>23</sup> Edith Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 3 vols (London, 1938), I, 439.

<sup>24</sup> Cited after Morley, *Books and Writers*, I, 347.

<sup>25</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 3, 27 March 1813, DWL.

favourite passages. It is as if Lamb had once uttered the transcendental component that lies at the heart of literature's rule-bound, overt utterances, and quickly Robinson assumes that this revelatory slip of the tongue must now cause Lamb a discomfort that has him wish to 'repress' his *Blank Verse*.

It is also as if Lamb's sobriety, his gravity, is yet to unleash its playfulness, though not at the expense of appreciation on Robinson's part, as his detailed copying of Lamb's poetry suggests. The Diary passage runs thus:

"Some few groans more, death comes, & there an end.

[...] The man of parts,  
Poet or prose declaimer, on his couch  
Loll[in]g, like one indifferent, fabricates  
A Heaven of gold, where he, & such as he,  
Their heads encompassed with crowns, their heels  
With fine wings garlanded, shall tread the stars  
Beneath their feet, heaven's pavement, far removed  
From damned spirits, & the torturing cries  
Of men, his bretheren, fashion'd of the earth,  
As he was, nourish'd with the self-same bread,  
Belike his kindred, or companions once,  
Through everlasting ages now divorced,  
In chains, & savage torments, to repent  
Short years of folly on earth. Their groans unheard  
In heaven, the saint nor pity feels, nor care,  
For those thus sentenced - pity might disturb  
The delicate sense, & most divine repose,  
Of spirits angelical. Blessed be God,  
The measures of his judgements are not fix'd  
By man's erroneous standard, he discerns  
No such inordinate difference and vast  
Betwixt the Sinner & the Saint, to doom  
To disproportion'd fates. Compared with him,  
No man on earth is holy call'd: they best  
Stand in his sight approved, who at his feet  
Their little crowns of virtue cast & give  
To him of his own works the praise, his due.

In verses "Written on Christmas Day 1797 - he refers to his sister thus:

"Alas! that honour'd mind" - "become a fearful blank"  
Her senses locked up, & herself kept out  
From human sight or converse" - [...] Yet I will not think  
Sweet friend but we shall one day meet & live  
In quietness And die so, fearing God.

[...] Lamb's poems contain a still more striking allusion to his sufferings And those of his family. In a queer sort of Sapphic verse he has written some affect[in]g stanzas.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES

"Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?  
I had a mother, but she died & left me,  
Died prematurely in a day of horrors -  
All, all, are gone, the old familiar faces

He thus begins, and he concludes - the underscored words in italics:

For some they have died, & some they have left me,  
And some are taken from me; all are departed;  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces. (Jan[uary] 1798).

(L. in other Stanzas speaks of a love whose doors are closed on him and of a friend whom he left abruptly like an [in]grate.)<sup>27</sup>

Love and loss here resemble the binary tokens of transcendence in literary composition to Robinson, delineating the unutterable. The 'Poet or prose declaimer', as Lamb writes, who 'on his couch / Loll[in]g, like one indifferent, fabricates / A Heaven of gold', overlooks the 'salutary fears' and 'darkness' - the 'chains, and savage torments' - that are heaven's dialectical complement experienced during the 'Short years of folly on earth'. What Robinson relished most in these lines is the way in which *divine* judgement, whose 'measure [...] is not fixed', undoes simplistic and imperfect *human* judgement. Lamb absolves his sister from 'man's erroneous standard' that is the 'inordinate difference and vast / Betwixt the sinner and the saint', and Robinson is clearly touched by, and agrees with, such generosity of feeling that overcomes the horrors of experience. Immediate interpersonal relationships go beyond prescriptive social rules (as reflected in whist), and literature here places the former against the backdrop of the latter. Lamb's poetry undoes and resolves the 'disproportion'd fates' of human judgement in an act of quasi-divine benevolence, and Robinson, long familiar with the similar logic underlying Schelling's idea of the Absolute as the divine intuition reflected in art, could not have approved more. From this point of worldly oppositions, Robinson believed, the intuition of love springs.<sup>28</sup>

Lamb's essays consequently toy more humorously with this underlying benevolent gravity, Robinson finds: 'Read the Reflector No. 2. The only interesting ar[tic]les are by C. Lamb. They are marked by his characteristic humour, which however is fond of playing on the borders of melancholy or even disgust[.] One Essay, on the inconvenience of having been hanged[,] sports with the shame which a man wo[ul]d feel at the recollection of having been half

<sup>26</sup> My ellipses denote omissions made by Robinson as well as interjected subject matter unrelated to Lamb.

<sup>27</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 1, 27 March 1813, DWL.

<sup>28</sup> For Robinson's treatment of Schelling, and his philosophical elaboration of love, see Hunnekuhl, 'Reconstructing', 66-67.

hanged & then cut down, tho' innocent of the crime imputed to him; Another on the possible changes which might have been produced by Guy Fawkes's Plot[.] And he jokes & puns on this subject with all imaginable glee.<sup>29</sup> Lamb's essay 'On the Inconveniences Resulting from being Hanged', similarly to *Mr H-*, playfully exposes the unfair consequences of human prejudice playfully. The narrator tells of the social obstacles and rejection he meets with after having been innocently hanged and cut down at the last moment. He then nonetheless finds himself mocked in the streets and rejected by the opposite sex due to no fault of his own. Even when he feels that love and marriage will eventually succeed over the unjustly inflicted scars of the near execution, his prospective wife's imagination, founded on the image of a man on a gallows, defeats any such optimistic prospects. Very much like we have seen above, where Lamb describes a 'love whose doors are closed on him', he puns melancholically, so to speak, on the circumstances that accompany its loss. He has his readers sympathise with someone who attracts rejection according to man's erroneous standards of judgement – with a social outlaw, thus taking compassion beyond the conventions and rules of society. Whist sobriety is thus overcome, and the transcendental truth that Robinson relished is made experienceable, in Lamb's literary creation.

The malleability of social relations also stands at the centre of 'Guy Faux' when Lamb, towards the end of the essay, puns speculatively about the 'new race of peers' that Fawkes, the 'English Napoleon', would have appointed.<sup>30</sup> You and I, he writes, may have become 'Knights of the Barrel, or Lords of the Tub, Grand almoners of the Cellar, or Ministers of Explosion'. To follow what Lamb calls the pursuits of a 'poetical mind' even further, Fawkes's plot may have occasioned that 'the whole borough-mongering system would have been got rid of, fairly exploded' – and that with it, 'the senseless distinctions of party must have disappeared', 'faction must have vanished', and 'corruption have expired in air' (284, 285). Such a radical eradication of social structures Elia suggests to be undesirable, but he nevertheless declares it 'the duty of every honest Englishman to endeavour, by means less wholesale than Guido's, to ameliorate, without extinguishing, Parliaments', to 'hold the lantern to the dark places of corruption', to 'apply the match to the rotten parts of the system only', and to 'wrap himself up, not in the muffling mantle of conspiracy, but in the warm, honest cloak of integrity and patriotic intention' (285). Thus the hyperbole of the 'poetical mind' provides the playful framework (or the form) to the question at the heart of it (or the content) that is the transformability, and the 'amelioration', of social structures.

Nor was Robinson's critical admiration of literary compositions and opinions restricted to Charles. When Robinson made his final attempt to sustain himself through writing – Longman published his translation of a German fairy

<sup>29</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 1, 20 July 1811.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Lamb ('Elia'), 'Guy Faux', in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1912), 283.

tale entitled 'Amatonda' (which had been fairly successful in Germany, both critically and commercially, just over a decade earlier) – he asked Coleridge, Charles, and Mary Lamb for their opinions on the story. 'Charles Lamb liked the beginning & end of my book', Robinson recalls, 'but was not pleased with the story of Amatonda, which Mary Lamb liked'.<sup>31</sup> The beginning of Robinson's translation is a subplot to the main story, in which the narrator claims to have inherited the tale from an uncle who had spent many years rambling in Persia, and the end consists of translations from Jean Paul, similarly opaque in character to the introduction. The tale as such is a fable of happiness achieved through the disobedience to prescriptive strictures and blinding (yet empty) promises of success and gain made by others. For the taste of Charles Lamb in 1811, it may still have been too solemnly whist-like in the 'picture of moral excellence and domestic felicity' it exhibits,<sup>32</sup> but the humility of the resistance to pursuing 'gain' and 'glory' conveyed with so little ambiguity in the tale seems to have appealed to Mary.

On 5 April 1809, Robinson had relayed to his friend William Patisson, after remarks on Wordsworth's 'moral feeling and high poetic conceptions of man', that he was 'delighted that you are so much pleased with Miss Lamb's book'.<sup>33</sup> To this he added that 'She is a very worthy woman indeed – a prime favourite with me as you know'. Similarly, on 11 December 1814, Robinson visited Mary Lamb and 'chatted with her', he recalls in his Diary: 'She spoke of her writing as a most painful occupation, which only necessity co[ul]d make her attempt. She has been learning Latin merely to assist her in acquiring a correct style – Yet, while she speaks of inabil[it]y to write, what grace & talent has she not manifested in Mrs Leicester's School'.<sup>34</sup> Robinson's appreciation of *Mrs Leicester's School* and the way in which it manifested itself can be traced in a series of further Diary entries, up until as late as 1853. On 11 March 1835, for instance, Robinson read to a dinner party Mary Lamb's 'The Changeling', calling it 'an admirable tale, full of deep feeling and great truth of imagination'.<sup>35</sup> Written from the perspective of the temporarily enfranchised, this story's plot unfolds around a secret too, namely the befriended protagonist's and antagonist's 'keeping silent in relation to' their having been exchanged as infants. Between them, when it came to literary composition, 'the difference of [...] rank left no room for competition'.<sup>36</sup> Once the secret is revealed, however (in the performance of a play), the established bonds of friendship do not subside

<sup>31</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 1, 6 March 1811, DWL.

<sup>32</sup> Christian Lebrecht Heyne ('Anton Wall'), *Amatonda: A Tale, from the German of Anton Wall*, tr. Henry Crabb Robinson (London, 1811), xiv.

<sup>33</sup> Cited after Morley, *Books and Writers*, III, 845. Hilary Newman skillfully depicts the friendship between Robinson and Mary Lamb as well as the former's admiration of *Mrs Leicester's School*: Hilary Newman, 'Through the Eyes of a Contemporary: Mary Lamb as seen by Henry Crabb Robinson', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* 152 (October 2010), 129-132.

<sup>34</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 4.1, 11 December 1814, DWL.

<sup>35</sup> Cited after Morley, *Books and Writers*, II, 459.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Lamb, 'The Changeling', in *Books for Children by Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1912), 340.

despite the renewed reversal of social roles. The 'deep feeling' and 'great truth of imagination' that Robinson praises in Mary Lamb's authorship come to pass in the narrator's humility which subtly transcends the social structures along which the plot unfolds (rather than undoing them radically). Whereas Ann Withers, the narrator, implies how the prestige of the easy accessibility of learning did not have a great effect on her, the other changeling, Miss Lesley, experienced her sudden entitlement to an education as 'so new and delightful' – and, after initial difficulties, prospered accordingly. Ann Withers's becoming aware of her ensuing jealousy generates further humility in her, and in the last lines of the story, roles are reversed one more time. Ann Withers is sent to a school elsewhere to overcome a social situation, including her friendships in London, that has become untenable, and the generosity of the proposal has her resolve to meet her 'hard fate with cheerfulness' (350). Such an un-whist-like renewal of social constellations supplies a new scope and incentive for moral agency, as opposed to the apathetic despondence or resignation that an implied insuperability of society's laws may produce.

Robinson's comments on Charles Lamb's *The Wife's Trial; Or, the Intruding Widow* suggest that in the 'great feeling' it contains, it transcends the unambiguousness of dummy whist (which is played by three instead of four players). Its potential, however, does not unfold quite so much as it does in the dealings of *Mr. H* –. Robinson wrote on 13 December 1828: 'I dined with Ch. & Mary Lamb – and after dinner had a long spell at dummy whist with them – When they went to bed I read a little drama by Lamb which appeared in Blackwood's Magazine[,] *The Intruding Widow* – a piece of great feeling but utterly unfit for performance – there being no action whatever in it.'<sup>37</sup> This story too centres on something unuttered, namely the intruding widow's secret that she has been married twice. The constellation around this quietness comprises an intrinsic and potentially compelling sentiment, but, according to Robinson, the play does not quite succeed in breaking free from this quietness. He further observes that 'There is not so much made of the uncertainty as to the death of the first husband as might be', implying that whist certainty prevails in it. In this instance, sobriety is never quiet overcome for Robinson.

Yet such mild criticism neither represents Robinson's overall opinion of Lamb's works nor did it ever prevent him from reading them to the parties he attended. Moreover, from the 'genuine Wit & Humour' of *Mr. H* –, Charles Lamb's defence of 'transcendancy' and the emancipation of feeling in Coleridge's writings, to the 'deep feeling and great truth of imagination' of Mary Lamb's 'Changeling' mentioned above – Robinson's records divulge many an instance of literary discourse going beyond the sober attentiveness of whist. What remained unspoken in the card game, namely play according to rules involving fixed social constellations, literature addressed and questioned in its appeal to shared, interpersonal feeling.

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<sup>37</sup> HCR, 'Diary' 14, 13 December 1828, DWL.

## Charles Lamb's letter-readers and the *Essays of Elia*

Heather B. Stone

The fact that Charles Lamb's letters sometimes show similarities to some of his well-known essays has been discussed frequently.<sup>1</sup> Lamb appears in some cases to have used his letters as a test ground, often later reworking parts of them into his 'Elia' essays. In the essays that draw on his letters, Lamb simultaneously addresses two different audiences: his known friend, and the *London Magazine's* readership of unknowable strangers. The contrast between these co-existing readerships sheds light on the way that Lamb's essays examine how sympathy and benevolent feeling are created and transmitted between individuals, and extend these concerns to the process of reading and the relationship between writer and reader.

### ~ The epistolary transmission of sympathy ~

Lamb's essay, 'Distant Correspondents,' is his fullest reflection upon the problems which letter-writers can experience. The essay seems to be the culmination of thoughts that have arisen in Lamb's mind during several years of correspondence with Barron Field in New South Wales, and Thomas Manning in China. The *London Magazine* prints Lamb's essay, subtitled 'in a letter to B. F. Esq., Sydney, New South Wales,' in the same issue as the 'Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales' by 'B. F.', thereby highlighting the connection between the two writers and demonstrating to its readers that Elia's epistolary essay has a root in a genuine correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

Lamb's essay parallels the anxieties experienced by a letter-writer addressing a distant correspondent with those of an author writing for posterity. Addressing 'B. F.' in New South Wales, he complains that, 'The weary world of waters between us oppresses the imagination. It is difficult to conceive how a scrawl of mine should ever stretch across it. It is a sort of presumption to expect that one's thoughts should live so far. It is like writing for posterity; and reminds me of one of Mrs. Rowe's superscriptions, 'Alcander to Strephon, in the shades.'<sup>3</sup> A letter sent overseas has a vulnerable status, as Lamb remarks to Thomas Manning in China: 'it is such a forlorn hope to send a scrap of paper straggling over wide oceans'; as is sending one's works forth to be judged by future

<sup>1</sup> Firstly by George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb: the evolution of Elia*, (Bloomington, IN, 1964), but more recently the similarities have been examined by Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: reading friendship in the 1790s*, (Basingstoke, 2008), 201; David Stewart, 'Elia, Epistles and Elegy: Lamb and his readers,' *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 146 (2009), 54-67; and David Higgins, 'Writing to Colonial Australia: Charles Lamb and Barron Field,' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 32.3 (2010), 219-233.

<sup>2</sup> *London Magazine*, 5 (March 1822).

<sup>3</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 282.

generations of readers whose tastes cannot be predicted.<sup>4</sup> The magazine writer can at least rely upon a contemporaneous audience, reading to the moment.

The practical difficulty in sending letters overseas is shown by the fact that, on Christmas Day and Boxing Day 1815, Lamb wrote Manning two different letters – one addressed to Canton, the other to St. Helena – because he could not predict where Manning would be in six months' time. Lamb's letters to Field and Manning frequently comment upon the problems which arise from the time delay between his writing and their reading of the letters. A letter to Barron Field describes how the discrepancy between 'my *Now*' and 'your *Now*' undermines the writer's veracity: after jokingly mixing in some invented stories when recounting news about their mutual friends, Lamb reflects that 'half the truths I have sent you in this letter will become lies before they reach you, and some of the lies (which I have mixed for variety's sake, and to exercise your judgment in the finding of them out) may be turned into sad realities before you shall be called upon to detect them.'<sup>5</sup> Lamb teases Manning, who had been absent from England for over ten years, with an exaggerated description of the changes that have occurred since his departure:

Empires have been overturned, crowns trodden into dust, the face of the western world quite changed; your friends have all got old – [...] St. Paul's Church is a heap of ruins; the Monument isn't half so high as you knew it, divers parts being successively taken down which the ravages of time had rendered dangerous – [...] Scarce here and there one will be able to make out your face; all your opinions will be out of date, your jokes obsolete, your puns rejected with fastidiousness as wit of the last age. Your way of mathematics has already given way to a new method<sup>6</sup>

In this passage, Lamb builds, develops, and exaggerates his images in a similar style to his essays: the letter, like the essay, is an exploratory space – a free form that can be used to represent a mental reverie, or the movement of the mind through various subjects. The distorted chronology is illustrated with images of ruin – the aging and deaths of friends, the crumbling of buildings and civilizations. The letter-writer's worries about obsolescence – of opinions, jokes, or even 'the phrases of our English letters' – hold true of the essay-writer who knows his work may not remain fresh for posterity.<sup>7</sup>

In the essay 'Distant Correspondents' Lamb elaborates on the crux of the problem arising from a temporal distance between writer and reader: it threatens to inhibit the transmission of sympathetic feeling between them. Not only sympathy, but envy is rendered pointless by the distance. 'Elia' tells 'F.' that he is going to the theatre that evening – were it merely a few days after this

<sup>4</sup> *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. E. W. Marris, 3 vols (Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), III, 208.

<sup>5</sup> Marris, *Letters*, III, 252.

<sup>6</sup> Marris, *Letters*, III, 204-5.

<sup>7</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 284.

treat, 'F.' would have a reason to envy Elia for the 'relish left on my mental palate' afterwards; yet 'ten months hence, your envy or your sympathy would be as useless as a passion spent upon the dead'.<sup>8</sup> The fact that the time difference negates the 'hateful emotion' of envy is not necessarily a positive thing; rather, 'F.'s envy is a token of the fact that he can enter into Elia's relish of the theatre – it is a marker of their shared tastes. The temporal distance removes any spur to enter into his friend's emotions, be it with envy or sympathy, because the emotion has long since passed.

Lamb repeatedly uses images of tasting and relishing foods to express sympathetic identification between writer and reader. In contrast to the letter which has gone stale on its journey to foreign lands, 'in twenty-four hours a friend in Cumberland gets it as fresh as if it came in ice'.<sup>9</sup> Sentiment, Lamb writes, is the kind of dish which 'requires to be served up hot; or sent off in water-plates, that your friend may have it almost as warm as yourself. If it have time to cool, it is the most tasteless of all cold meats.'<sup>10</sup> A pun, likewise, 'hath a hearty kind of present ear-kissing smack with it; you can no more transmit it in its pristine flavour, than you can send a kiss.'<sup>11</sup> In typically Elian fashion, the ability to share in a taste, relish or flavour is the starting point of an amicable relationship.

A letter cannot replicate the kind of instantaneous rapport necessary to support punning: a pun can have only a 'brief existence', like lightning, and thrives on instant acknowledgement, so that 'A pun is reflected from a friend's face as from a mirror', an image which suggests that the hearty recognition of a shared pun creates a sympathetic merging of identities between punster and audience.<sup>12</sup> Lamb's review of Field's 'First Fruits of Australian Poetry' in the *Examiner* had told the story of 'a merry Captain' (James Burney), who, 'prides himself on having planted the first pun in Otaheite. It was in their own language, and the islanders first looked at him, then stared at one another, and all at once burst out in a genial laugh. It was a stranger, and as a stranger they gave it welcome.'<sup>13</sup> The pun and its answering laughter, reflected between the faces of punster and audience, permits a sympathetic bond to be formed between strangers.

The problem of conveying sentiment or humour between letter-writer and recipient is a problem also faced by the essay-writer: one cannot tell if the jokes will carry, or anticipate the tastes of the public readership. The form of the pretend 'overheard' letter, from 'Elia' to 'B.F.', deploys of one of the standard stylistic tropes of sentimental fiction in an essay which addresses the pitfalls and problems of writing with sentiment, and of using writing to perform and create intimacy between writer and reader. While Lamb deploys the epistolary feint of

<sup>8</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 282.

<sup>9</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 282.

<sup>10</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 283.

<sup>11</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 284.

<sup>12</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 284.

<sup>13</sup> *The Examiner* (16 January 1820), 39.

'insensibly chatting' with his correspondent, the pose of inclusive familiarity is really being addressed at the reader of the *London Magazine*.<sup>14</sup>

~ Sympathy and shared pleasures: Lamb's letters to Coleridge ~

Lamb's essay 'The Two Races of Men' has distinct similarities in language and concept with a letter to Coleridge in which Lamb rebukes his friend for plundering his bookshelves.<sup>15</sup> The two friends had had a long-running and semi-serious quarrel over Coleridge's borrowing of Lamb's books. In his letter, Lamb portrays his own welfare and identity as intertwined with his books, complaining to Coleridge that, 'You never come but you take away some folio that is part of my existence'; and that 'a huge fissure [in his bookshelves] suddenly disclosed to me the true nature of the damage I had sustained.'<sup>16</sup> In his *Elia* essay, Lamb expands this image that books and identities are intertwined, personifying his collection as a number of acquaintances with their own appropriate characteristics: 'Here stood the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, in sober state. There loitered the *Complete Angler*; quiet as in life, by some stream side.'<sup>17</sup>

In both the letter and essay Lamb uses the image of the books as abandoned children: the 'orphans' that he welcomes into his home, treating both natives and stranger just the same. Yet Lamb also presents the books as commodities stored in his warehouse on behalf of his friends. The contrasting imagery of the books—sometimes friends, sometimes merchandise—expresses the dual role of essayist himself in the literary marketplace, who offers himself as the reader's companion, and yet is in fact aiming to have his work bought and consumed by the reading market. The image of author-as-companion, common to Lamb, Hunt, and other magazine writers, therefore forms an uneasy and sometimes ironic contrast to the way in which this textual feint of companionship is also in some respects a means of coercing the reader to consume the magazine essay as material commodity.

In his essay, Lamb uses the description of place to establish the illusion of intimacy with the *London Magazine's* reader, directing them to regard 'That foul gap in the bottom shelf facing you, like a great eye-tooth knocked out—(you are now with me in my little back study in Bloomsbury, reader!)' as if they were able to know the little room as well as Coleridge.<sup>18</sup> Lamb's final plea to his magazine readers, 'I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S. T. C.,' creates a fictional bridge of intimacy between his two coexisting

<sup>14</sup> *LM*, 5 (March 1822), 284.

<sup>15</sup> *The Letters of Charles Lamb: to which are added those of his sister, Mary Lamb*. ed. E. V. Lucas, 3 vols (London, 1935), II, 284-6. Lucas speculates that this letter dates to Autumn 1820, although it may perhaps have an earlier date since it describes Coleridge taking away Lamb's copy of *Luther's Table Talk*, and one of Coleridge's marginal notes in that book is dated 25 September 1819 (see *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia*, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley, 6 vols (Princeton, NJ, 1980-2001), III, 753).

<sup>16</sup> Lucas, *Letters*, II, 284.

<sup>17</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 625.

<sup>18</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 624.

readerships, by supposing, for a moment at least, that they could interact.<sup>19</sup> The joke, of course, being that the reader can indeed have the well-known man-of-letters 'S. T. C.' in their own library in the form of Coleridge's own books.

In turning his letter into an essay, Lamb fictionalizes Coleridge into two different manifestations—Comberbatch and S.T.C—with contrasting characteristics. 'Comberbatch' plunders Elia's shelves and is 'matchless in his depredations'—he is a 'mutilator of collections', and consumes the books with a kind of gluttony: 'he will make one hearty meal on your viands, if he can give no account of the platter after it.'<sup>20</sup> Comberbatch's gustatory relish for books, while it leads him to devour Elia's collection, also means that their tastes are in sympathy with one another. Like an unstoppable force (and not unlike the irrepressible borrowers of Elia's money), Comberbatch makes his absent-minded substitutions of books: 'if he sometimes, like the sea, sweeps away a treasure, at another time, sea-like, he throws up as rich an equivalent to match it'.<sup>21</sup> As if to make up for his gentle teasing of Coleridge, Elia's essay concludes with a contrasting description of 'S. T. C.' who returns the books 'with usury; enriched with annotations tripling their value', with 'precious MSS.' of copious annotations.<sup>22</sup> The bifurcating identities of Comberbatch and S. T. C., like the divergence between Lamb and Elia, is characteristic of the games often played with multiple 'masquerading' identities in magazine writing of the time.

As well as using similar images to his letter, Lamb's essay continues to pursue the same themes. The essay, 'The Two Races of Men,' hinges on the idea that value is subjective: Bigod, the essay's archetypal borrower, accords no value to money at all. Lamb's letter to Coleridge had similarly highlighted how scales of value depend on the individual's viewpoint. While complaining about his friends borrowing his books, Lamb confesses to his own moral failing in keeping hold of a book that does not belong to him by a sort of wilful inaction: a book which 'is the property of a friend, who does not know its value, not indeed have I been very sedulous in explaining to him the estimate of it; but was rather contented in giving a sort of corroboration to a hint that he let fall, as to its suspected to be not genuine, so that in all probability it would have fallen to me as a deodand'.<sup>23</sup> The letter poses a mismatch between the book's monetary value, which rests on it being 'genuine,' and Lamb's appreciation of its literary value, which leads him to want to keep it regardless.

Lamb's guilty confession in the letter has a parallel in the essay, where he hints that he has subtly manipulated the rights of ownership. Elia presents himself as acting charitably by taking in the 'orphan' books, and charging 'no warehouse-room' for their storage; on the other hand, however, he makes no effort to find out 'their true lineage' and restore them to their rightful owners.

<sup>19</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 625.

<sup>20</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 625.

<sup>21</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 625.

<sup>22</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 625.

<sup>23</sup> Lucas, *Letters*, II, 284-5.

Elia's attitude to the books makes him similar to the good-natured borrowers of money who confound distinctions of ownership:

'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!'<sup>24</sup>

Lamb ironically presents these borrowers of money as establishing a radical notion of shared property – a touch which, considering the essay's genesis in the letter to Coleridge, suggests that Lamb is gently teasing his friend for retaining a pantisocratic attitude towards Lamb's books, even if he has otherwise abandoned his old principles.

~ Subjectivity and the limits of sympathy ~

Lamb continues his discussion of the implication which subjective valuation has on an individual's rights of ownership and entitlement in another essay which also has its genesis in a letter to Coleridge: his essay 'A Dissertation upon Roast Pig.' Lamb defends his right to keep roast pigs for his own consumption rather than giving them away to his friends, by protesting that a pig is 'a blessing, so particularly adapted, predestined, I may say, to my individual palate,' that it would be an affront to God or Nature to send them away, 'under pretext of friendship, or I know not what'.<sup>25</sup> The same kind of mock-philosophic reasoning lies behind the theory attributed to 'Comberbatch' in 'The Two Races of Men' that 'the title to property in a book [...] is in exact ratio to the claimant's powers of understanding and appreciating the same'.<sup>26</sup> The character of Comberbatch presents himself as the ideal interpreter of Lamb's books, as his marginal notes and glosses on them testify. However, S. T. Coleridge appears to be posited as the ideal reader of the essay, able to bring to it his contextual knowledge of their ongoing conversation in letters and marginalia.

As in 'Distant Correspondents,' Lamb's essay on roast pig addresses the question of whether there is a limit to the ability to sympathize or identify oneself with another person's experience. Elia claims that 'I take as great an interest in my friend's pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own', so that in sending his friends presents of game, 'I love to taste them, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend'.<sup>27</sup> As in 'Distant correspondents,' the imagery of tasting and relishing food is used to evoke sympathetic identification. Lamb attempts to involve himself in his friends' identities by imagining their relish of gustatory pleasures and vicariously participating in it.

<sup>24</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 623.

<sup>25</sup> *LM*, 6 (September 1822), 247.

<sup>26</sup> *LM*, 2 (December 1820), 624.

<sup>27</sup> *LM*, 6 (September 1822), 247.

Lamb's act of sympathetic imagination in 'A Dissertation on Roast Pig,' seems, therefore, to be a counterpoint to Coleridge's 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison,' in which Coleridge presents himself imaginatively participating in Lamb's experience of a familiar walk through the Somerset landscape. Coleridge imagines that Lamb will enjoy the experience just as he himself does, and imagining Lamb's happiness makes Coleridge vicariously happy: 'A delight / Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad / As I myself were there.'<sup>28</sup> This sympathetic imaginative participation in Lamb's experience appears, at first sight, to offer a bridge between the two friends' individual, subjective perceptions. However, while Coleridge can imagine his friends walking the route over the hills that is so familiar to him, his ability to imagine Lamb's response to the landscape derives solely from memories of his own experience. Coleridge may speculate that,

So my friend,  
Struck with deep joy, may stand, as I have stood  
Silent with swimming sense<sup>29</sup>

However, there is an implicit possibility that, while Lamb *might* stand there and have the same experience, equally, presumably, he might not – because Coleridge has imagined a Lamb who is based on Coleridge.

Felicity James and Gurion Taussig have pointed out the implicit tensions created by the poem's portrayal of the relationship between Coleridge and Lamb: the poem imperatively demands Coleridge's friends 'Behold' the scene before them; and belittles 'gentle-hearted Charles' by defining his responses for him.<sup>30</sup>

Coleridge's poem raises the question of whether sympathetic identification with one's friends can transcend the limits of individual subjectivity. In his essay on roast pig, Lamb examines the same issue of the limits of sympathetic identification through the example of culinary pleasures. Like Coleridge, Lamb's ability to imagine his friends' tastes can only be achieved by projecting his own pleasures and antipathies onto another, in an attempt to guess at their potential response. Both Coleridge's poem and Lamb's essay show the writers examining the issue that acts of apparent sympathetic identification with another can, on the contrary, be viewed as the author's ego subsuming the independent identities of their friends, and constructing the friend not as an 'other', but as simply a mirror for the author's own ideas and emotions.

<sup>28</sup> *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols (Princeton, NJ, 2001), I:1, 353.

<sup>29</sup> Mays, *Poetical Works*, I:1, 352.

<sup>30</sup> Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: reading friendship in the 1790s*, (Basingstoke, 2008), 108-9; Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship* (Newark, DE, 2002), 236.

## ~ Conclusion ~

Lamb's essays show how the act of sympathetic identification can be problematic. Lamb's concerns about the limitations of sympathy can be extended, as in 'Distant correspondents,' to the issue of establishing a sympathetic relationship between writer and audience in the act of reading. The presence of the known, friendly, letter-reader as the phantom reader of the essays cannot offset the insecurity of the transaction between writer and magazine reader. The letter-reading friend may in some sense be the ideal reader in the way that both Coleridge and his German contemporary Schleiermacher theorised: a reader possessed with the greatest ability to understand the writer and therefore interpret their meaning.<sup>31</sup> However, in the case of Lamb's essays the unknown reader of the *London Magazine* is confronted with the ever-shifting and playful persona of 'Elia'. The masquerading habits of magazine writers confound readers' attempts to project a real-life authorial personality behind the pseudonymous persona, and Lamb criticises certain readers who search for the real birthplace of Elia. Due to the limitations of a kind of reading based on sympathetic identification, when Lamb drafts a preface for his essays he asks instead for a kind of reading which is based on a knowing, collusive relationship with the writer. Even though Lamb still invokes the trope of the magazine as a conversation with its readers, he suggests that they might read with something like a suspension of disbelief, a 'judicious' laxity rather than a too-pressing judgement, 'not understanding every thing perversely in the absolute and literal sense, but giving fair construction as to an after-dinner conversation; allowing for the rashness and necessary incompleteness of first thoughts.'<sup>32</sup> The fact that Lamb's essays are addressed to two different audiences simultaneously—his letter-reading friends, and the anonymous, public, magazine readership—highlights how different models of the writer/reader relationship are necessary for each scenario. All kinds of reading cannot be represented as simply acts of sympathetic identification, in the same way that novel-reading, for example, was often portrayed, with all its dangerous implications. Instead, as Lamb's essays and preface hint, new theories of the reading process had to be developed to suit the situation of writers and readers in the literary marketplace of the periodical press.

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<sup>31</sup> For a further discussion of Romantic-era theories of reader-response, see Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Influence*, (Oxford, 2000), 69-70.

<sup>32</sup> Lucas, *Letters*, II, 350.

## Inversnaid: 'the genius of the place'

Ian M. Emberson

The long bank of cumulous reflected in the water – the cloud shadows moving over the mountains – the little white boats plying Loch Lomond – surely this is a place to inspire poets? It lies where the Artlet Burn (also known as the Slaid Burn) tumbles into the loch via a series of waterfalls. To the south is a range of hills culminating in Ben Lomond; and to the north various lesser peaks such as Beinn a Choin. Also to the north, close to the loch shore, is Rob Roy's Cave – hiding place of the famous Scottish outlaw.<sup>1</sup>

The area's poetic associations go back a long way. In the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh flourished. He was brought up in Ireland, but fled after murdering the King's tax collector. (His feelings are readily understood!) He settled at Balloch at the southern end of Loch Lomond, and wrote long Gaelic poems in praise and dispraise of the family of the Earls of Lennox. Six hundred years later lived a man with the very English-sounding name of John Walker, who was nonetheless a Gaelic poet. Amongst other things he is said to have helped with a Gaelic translation of the New Testament. He also wrote largely about the urisks, a species of water fairy who once haunted the Inversnaid Waterfall. It is to be regretted that they have long since been frightened away by the influx of tourism.<sup>2</sup>

The two most famous poems about Inversnaid, however, were both written in the nineteenth century by Englishmen who really only had the most fleeting knowledge of the area: Gerard Manley Hopkins and William Wordsworth. In both cases the writing captures a feeling for the place, but goes beyond this to something more generalized. With Hopkins the acquaintance with the Scottish Highlands was very brief indeed, and occurred in September 1881. Six years later he wrote to his friend Baillie:

I could wish I were in the Highlands. I never had more than a glimpse of their skirts. I hurried from Glasgow one day to Loch Lomond. The day was dark and partly hid the lake, yet it did not altogether disfigure it but gave a pensive or solemn beauty which left a deep impression on me. I landed at Inversnaid [...]<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank Dr Ken Edward Smith for his help with this essay – both directly, and via his book *Dorothy Wordsworth and the Profession of Authorship* (Lampeter, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The information about Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh and John Walker is largely derived from Michael Newton's article *Border Disputes: Gaelic Cultural Identity and Interaction in the Lennox and Mentieth* published in *Celtic Cultural Studies: an Interdisciplinary Online Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> *Gerald Manley Hopkins: Poetry and Prose*, ed. Ken Edward Smith (Exeter, 1976), 172.

It might have been a brief visit, but Hopkins certainly absorbed the spirit of the place, and expressed its essence in four very memorable verses. The first three verses are concerned with the waterfall and its immediate surroundings, portrayed with his usual startling originality – incorporating dialect words, and at least one word of his own invention – ‘twindles’. The final verse escapes from the precise description, and conveys a message which is even more pressing in the twenty-first century than it was in the nineteenth.

#### Inversnaid

This darksome burn, horseback brown,  
His rollrock highroad roaring down,  
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam  
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

A wind puff-bonnet of fáwn-fróth  
Turns and twindles over the broth  
Of a pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning,  
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

Degged with dew, dappled with dew  
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through,  
Wiry heathpacks, fitches of fern,  
And the beadbony ash that sits over the burn.

What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wilderness? Let them be left,  
Oh let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.<sup>4</sup>

Hopkins is primarily concerned with landscape-painting in words, but Wordsworth, when he depicts Inversnaid, places a figure in his landscape – namely the Highland Girl. This girl must have made quite an impression on both Dorothy and William Wordsworth. Dorothy mentions her several times in her Journals.<sup>5</sup> William mentions her in his poem *The Three Cottage Girls* – part of his *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent 1820*, and he was still remembering her at the age of seventy-two when he dictated notes on his poems to Isabella Fenwick.<sup>6</sup> However, the main enshrinement of his feelings for her occurs in his poem *To a Highland Girl at Inversneyde, upon Loch Lomond*.<sup>7</sup> We do not normally think of Wordsworth as a love poet, yet some of his most exquisite poems focus on girls and women who were important to him. The Lucy poems stand somewhat apart from the rest – they have an ethereal quality not found

<sup>4</sup> Hopkins: *Poetry and Prose*, 73-4.

<sup>5</sup> The key passage occurs in her entry for 28 August 1803. The girl was apparently the young sister of the ferryman. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt (London, 1941), I, 279-285.

<sup>6</sup> *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. John Morley (London, 1889), 591.

<sup>7</sup> *Complete Poetical Works*, 191. Note variant spelling of the place name.

elsewhere in his work. However, in the early 1800s he wrote a number of pieces which have a more down-to-earth feel about them. One senses that the females depicted, despite their many virtues, are nonetheless made of flesh and blood. Perhaps the finest of all these poems is about his wife, Mary – ‘She was a phantom of delight’. It’s the sort of poem that could only be written about a woman one knows pretty thoroughly – what other poet ever likened his beloved to a machine? (The vagaries of German romantic love poetry seem a long way off!) Closer in spirit to the Inversnaid poem is ‘The Solitary Reaper’ – likewise part of *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803*. William wrote very little on the tour itself, and most of the poems in the *Memorial* were written about two years later. ‘The Solitary Reaper’, however, actually owes its origins to a passage in Thomas Wilkinson’s journal of his own tour in Scotland in 1787, and the wording is very close to Wilkinson’s original.<sup>8</sup>

The Highland Girl of Inversneyde, however, was a very tangible person. We don’t know her name, but we do know her age at the time of the meeting, which was fourteen. Despite her extreme youthfulness and the slightness of the acquaintance, I think it is right to see this as a love poem, since it is full of adoration. The poet longs to have some sort of relationship with her – not necessarily sexual – it could be that of a neighbour, an elder brother or a father. (Did William have some thoughts here of his illegitimate daughter Caroline – who was only a few years younger?) Somehow he manages to convey the very Celtic beauty of the girl – not just her looks seen in repose, but her movements and manners. This is particularly vivid in the lines comparing her to a bird:

So have I, not unmoved in mind,  
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind –  
Thus beating up against the wind.’ (44 – 47)

One wonders if Charlotte Brontë was influenced by this passage when she put bird imagery into the mouth of Rochester: ‘Jane, be still; don’t struggle so, like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation.’<sup>9</sup>

Although the Highland Girl is the heroine of the piece, we are never allowed to forget her surroundings: the ‘grey rocks’ – the trees – and above all ‘This fall of water that doth make / A murmur near the silent lake’. And finally the two come together in the last couplet. For the rest let the poem speak for itself:

#### To a Highland Girl at Inversneyde, upon Loch Lomond

Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower  
Of beauty is thy earthly dower!  
Twice seven consenting years have shed  
Their utmost bounty on thy head:

<sup>8</sup> Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: a Life* (London, 2000), 866n31.

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford, 1998), 266.

And these grey rocks; that household lawn;  
 Those trees, a veil just half withdrawn;  
 This fall of water that doth make  
 A murmur near the silent lake;  
 This little bay; a quiet road  
 That holds in shelter thy Abode -  
 In truth together do ye seem  
 Like something fashioned in a dream;  
 Such Forms as from their covert peep  
 When earthly cares are laid asleep!  
 But, O fair Creature! in the light  
 Of common day, so heavenly bright,  
 I bless Thee, Vision as thou art,  
 I bless thee with a human heart;  
 God shield thee to thy latest years!  
 Thee, neither know I, nor thy piers;  
 And yet my eyes are filled with tears.

With earnest feelings I shall pray  
 For thee when I am far away:  
 For never saw I mien, or face,  
 In which more plainly I could trace  
 Benignity and home-bred sense  
 Ripening in perfect innocence.  
 Here scattered, like a random seed,  
 Remote from men, Thou dost not need  
 The embarrassed look of shy distress,  
 And maidenly shamefacedness:  
 Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear  
 The freedom of a Mountaineer:  
 A face with gladness overspread!  
 Soft smiles, by human kindness bred!  
 And seemliness complete, that sways  
 Thy courtesies, about thee plays;  
 With no restraint, but such as springs  
 From quick and eager visitings  
 Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach  
 Of thy few words of English speech;  
 A bondage sweetly brooked, a strife  
 That gives thy gestures grace and life!  
 So have I, not unmoved in mind,  
 Seen birds of tempest-loving kind -  
 Thus beating up against the wind.

What hand but would a garland cull  
 For thee who art so beautiful?  
 O happy pleasure! here to dwell

Beside thee in some heathy dell;  
 Adopt your homely ways, and dress,  
 A Shepherd, thou a Shepherdess!  
 But I would frame a wish for thee  
 More like a grave reality:  
 Thou art to me but as a wave  
 Of the wild sea; and I would have  
 Some claim upon thee, if I could,  
 Though but of common neighbourhood.  
 What joy to hear thee, and to see!  
 Thy elder Brother I would be,  
 Thy Father - anything to thee!  
 Now thanks to Heaven! that of its grace  
 Hath led me to this lonely place.  
 Joy have I had; and going hence  
 I bear away my recompense.  
 In spots like these it is we prize  
 Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes:  
 Then, why should I be loth to stir?  
 I feel this place was made for her;  
 To give new pleasure like the past,  
 Continued long as life shall last.  
 Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,  
 Sweet Highland Girl! from thee to part:  
 For I, methinks, till I grow old,  
 As fair before me shall behold,  
 As I do now, the cabin small,  
 The lake, the bay, the waterfall;  
 And Thee, the Spirit of them all!<sup>10</sup>

Todmorden, Yorkshire

<sup>10</sup> See footnotes 5 and 6 above. Note the rhyme scheme - mainly couplets - but with three lines rhyming together at the end of each paragraph. The subtitle of this article comes from Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Lord Burlington*.

## On My First Acquaintance with an Essay(ist)

Paolo Bugliani

What a strange, demented feeling it gives me when I realize I have spent whole days before this inkstone, with nothing better to do, jotting down at random whatever nonsensical thoughts have entered my head. (Kenko, *Essays in Idleness*)

For an Italian student, Charles Lamb is indeed a "difficult" author. Not to understand or to appreciate, but most certainly to reach. He is a Romantic, beyond the shadow of a doubt, and his chronological bond to the great poets of the age alone would seem a sufficient reason for his notoriety. In fact, Italian students of English literature hardly ever happen to hear about him. When they study Romanticism in secondary school it is always something about Byron's romantic dalliances, or Shelley's ruminations, or if they are blessed enough, Wordsworth's botanical preferences. As regards prose, dead silence. And more or less the same happens at University, where they enhance their knowledge of the period by coming to terms with Scott's historical novels or Austen's fiction and (maybe) they are asked to comment on some excerpts from Keats's or Coleridge's prose musing about Glorious Poetry. Unfortunately, prose, namely essayistic prose, suffers utter discrimination.

Nevertheless, during the first year of my Honours Degree in Foreign Languages, I was unexpectedly introduced to Charles Lamb. I must admit I had to "check him out", and was rather surprised to discover that my literature handbook did actually mention a certain Charles Lamb, born in London in 1775. A friend of Coleridge's. Occupation: essayist. My mind instinctively went back to a well-known opium-tainted dome in a faraway land, while after a second or two another face came to my mind, that of a certain Seigneur de Montaigne. During my apprenticeship in French Literature I had been introduced to the *Essais*, but in a manner that did not so much elicit my interest as frightened me, that is by the perusal of "The Apology of Raymond Sebond", which, despite its providing an interesting example of a subtle deconstruction of the Medieval treatise, can hardly be considered the most suitable specimen to represent an Idealtypus of the Montaignian essay. As a consequence, in my mind the essay was filed as a merely technical item, a reference point for nitpicking theories.

Until I met Mr. Lamb. I am not being sentimental: he literally revolutionized my way of looking at prose. I had always been an overt admirer of Poetry. Despite being a massive novel reader, I too felt the burden of the prejudice that deemed prose inferior to verse. But reading Elia's opinions actually enlightened me. His wit and humour, artfully concealed in seemingly artless sentences, were the perfect counters to the maybe too heated and passionate verse of Romantic Poetry. Lamb reminded me of a tamed Jonathan

Swift, disguised as an old country gentleman, a little bit "inetto", as Italo Svevo might have labelled him.

"My gentle-hearted Charles!", as his friend Coleridge would affectionately refer to him, admittedly depicted Elia as "unfitting" to the world. "Something ludicrous occurred to me at this most serious of all moments - a sense of my unfitness to have disposal, even in my imagination, of the sweet young creature beside me", and this very unfitness was maybe the reason for which Lamb chose prose over poetry.<sup>1</sup> But he did not follow the path that his 19th-century precursors (Richardson, Fielding etc.) had so successfully opened up, he decided to turn back to the great nonfiction writers of the 17th century: Burton, Walton, Overbury, Earle and, last but certainly not least, Bacon. This choice was extremely meaningful: Lamb could have written his memoir, an autobiography, instead he decided to borrow a form that had already been successful in the past, but had never been fully recognised as literature *stricto sensu*. And maybe it was exactly this nonchalant rejection of the role of the demiurge author, whose personality is always on display, the reason why Charles Lamb suited me so.

So far from a personal point of view. From an academic perspective, on the other hand, my acquaintance with Lamb inevitably entailed an involvement with the Essay. After reading "The Apology of Raymond Sebond", I soon discovered "another" Montaigne, the Montaigne of meditation, of introspection, the Montaigne of the Self: "There is no description equal in difficulty, or certainly in usefulness, to the description of oneself. Even so one must spruce up, even so one must present oneself in an orderly arrangement, if one would go out in public. Now, I am constantly adorning myself, for I am constantly describing myself."<sup>2</sup> It was precisely the "lack of arrangement" that most appealed to me, the freedom one enjoys while reading an essay, the unpredictability of its subject, that might range from the ritual of tea to the description of a card game:

The essay is an essentially ambulatory and fragmentary prose form. Its direction and pace, the tracks it chooses to follow, can be changed at will; hence its fragmentary or "paratactic" structure. Rather than progressing in a linear and planned fashion, the essay develops around a number of topics which offer themselves along the way. And this sauntering from one topic to the next together with the way in which each topic is informally "tried out" suggests a tentativeness, a looseness, in short a randomness which seems to elude the unifying conception [...] of a recognizable generic identity<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, an essay is akin to many other genres, but it is nonetheless clearly distinct from all: neither a Senecan letter, since the didactic element is not

<sup>1</sup> As suggested in an article by Giovanna Mochi, "Musa Minore: la prosa del romanticismo inglese e gli *Essays of Elia*", *Rivista di letteratura comparata*, 43 (1990), 150-178

<sup>2</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. Donald M. Frame, (Stanford, 1958), 273.

<sup>3</sup> Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism and the Essay* (Oxford, 1995), 2.

always crucial, nor an autobiography, a memoir or a confession, since in the essay personal details are distorted to a point that even when the essayist talks about himself, he is actually describing someone else. And this process is blatant in Lamb's writings, given the presence of the notorious Elia, not a mere pseudonym, but a self-sufficient heteronym, a character of its own. One might argue that Sir Bickerstaff too had a life of his own, and a family, and a younger sister too, but nearly all the information we get about him is functional to Addison's need to make some point. For example, Jenny, the sister Sir Bickerstaff mentions in *Tatler* 75, 1 October, 1709, has a personal history: 'The girl is of great merit, and pleasing conversation; but being born of my father's first wife, and she of his third, she converses with me rather like a daughter than a sister.' This characterization, however, serves a purpose, i.e. to illustrate (whether sarcastically or not) women's duty to appeal to men, and ultimately women's subjection to male rule: 'For this reason I have disposed of her to a man of business, who will soon let her see, that to be well dressed, in good humour, and cheerful in the command of her family, are the arts and sciences of female life.' This goal-oriented characterization is absent in Elia's accounts of his family life. Bridget is not a means to meditate about brotherhood, or even spinsterhood, but a roundly depicted persona, who inhabits the universe of the *Essays*, turning out to be its very tutelary deity. Little matters to me that Charles Lamb and his sister Mary enjoyed a similar proximity in real life. The ability of the author is that of creating these characters and establishing between them a bond whose tenderness and depth is clearly depicted in the following passage: 'We house together, old bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness; with such tolerable comfort, upon the whole, that I, for one, find myself in no sort of disposition to go out upon the mountains, with the rash king's offspring, to bewail my celibacy.'<sup>4</sup> Here many forces are at work: love of course, but also interdependence and satisfaction. No such details are to be found in Addison's fictive description of his Bickerstaff. In Lamb's essay the fictional element is, so to speak, *foregrounded*, in the sense that it becomes necessary to thoroughly appreciate the work of art, to underline the threads that connect the two main characters. The *Essays* are not just "dispersed meditation", as Francis Bacon had brilliantly labelled his own writings two centuries before, there are some bonds and features which are recurrent and that all lead to the figure of Elia. We cannot ignore that throughout the *Essays*, flowing like an underground river, a series of actions are set forth by some *actants* that are not just reinterpretations of the Vices and Virtues of Mystery Plays. They may not be engaged in a lot of actions or dialogues, but they nevertheless *play* a role in the work's general design. It is precisely the presence of such refined characters that enhances the importance of the fictional nature of the whole work, and distances sensibly Lamb's from, for example, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, although the two items have been given the same name. Evidently, "essay" is a

<sup>4</sup> "Mackery End, in Hertfordshire" in *The Essays of Elia and the Last Essays of Elia*, op. cit.

hyperonym that can shelter under his protective "wing" the most different types of writing.

It is this peculiar feature of Lamb's prose that elicited my present interest in the essay as a creative genre, and not simply as a secondary source to *interpret* literary artefacts. Since I have discovered Lamb, I have switched labels in my head: Genette's *Figures*, Barthes's *Degré Zéro*, and Auerbach's *Mimesis* have stopped being essays to me, and joined the category of specialized works dealing with the fruition of literature. From now onwards, I will need to "figure the essay out". Starting from Lamb, and eventually going back to him, hopefully.

University of Pisa

## The Rees-Ireland Archives: Additions

Deborah Hedgecock's listing of the Society's Collection at Guildhall Library (*A Supplement to the Charles Lamb Bulletin*, January 1995) refers four times to J. Rogers Rees and items from his collections.<sup>5</sup>

J. Rogers Rees (1884-1913) was an author and a collector of Eliana. Claude Prance's *Companion* says that information about him is difficult to find and that Mrs (Gertrude) Anderson, the Lamb scholar, was seeking it without success in 1924.

Rees's friend Alexander Ireland (1810-1894) is recorded in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and was the compiler of that old warhorse, *The Book-Lover's Enchiridion* (1882). He collected Lamb, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt, producing bibliographies of the last two.

Nearly a decade ago the Society was offered, and in mid-2004 bought, an archive of the two men. It may be summarized as: (1) Two corrected proof copies of Rees's book, *With Elia and his Friends in Books and Dreams* (1903); (2) About two hundred pages of autograph notes, drafts, etc. concerning Charles Lamb and the book; (3) About fifteen reviews dealing with Lamb and his circle, with other newspaper cuttings and clippings from booksellers' catalogues; and (4) forty-one letters, 1886-1894 from Ireland to Rees on books, authors, and Charles Lamb.

Whether the Charles Lamb Society now owns all the surviving Rees-Ireland Archive is a puzzle that we would seem to have no way of solving, at least in the foreseeable future. Claude Prance (in the *Companion*, 165) says that Ireland's Lamb papers are in the Manchester Free Library.

David Wickham

<sup>5</sup> See Hedgecock, 12, 14, 23, and 25. The Handlist is now available to download from the Society's website: [http://www.charleslambociety.com/docs/Deborah%20Hedgecock%20-%20\(supp%201995\).pdf](http://www.charleslambociety.com/docs/Deborah%20Hedgecock%20-%20(supp%201995).pdf)

## Reviews

SUSAN J. WOLFSON, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being & the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010). £30.00 paperback. 978 0 8018 9474 3.

Susan Wolfson's latest monograph challenges traditional conceptions of the paradigms of poetic influence propounded by the likes of Foucault, Barthes and Bloom. Wolfson rejects the notion that influence was restricted within the boundaries of gender, genre or popularity, and instead demonstrates the ways in which poetic 'influence' was actually more a case of dialogic interactions between poets and politics, friends, relations and admirers. By expanding her field of enquiry beyond the textual to include key political, social and cultural events of the day, Wolfson's study rejects readings which are simply intertextual; intertextuality, she suggests, 'would capture and consume the illusion of author'. What Wolfson argues for instead is a tradition built upon active interchanges and exchanges with past and contemporary events as well as texts, and she re-presents Romantic poets as being in constant dialogue with the world, people, and texts around them. She suggests that,

authorial self-recognition takes shape as a reciprocal formation in a society of formations, that it is continuously challenged by this field, and that it is best revealed not in categorical rhetorics, but in specific sites and textual reflections of complex interactions. (8)

The domestic, here, is as significant as the public, the bookshelf as important as the book, and a single syllable can alter the meaning of an entire poem. Wolfson's historicized readings also emphasize the power of the metonym, and her broad selection of writers highlight the importance of the marginal to the canonical as well as the opposite trajectory. Wolfson's chapter titles introduce a largely canonical set of Romantic writers: Wordsworth, Byron, Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Smith headline this text. These major authors turn out to be ciphers for the grit of the study, however, which engages with a diverse selection of little-known or, rather, overshadowed writers, including Dorothy Wordsworth, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Annabella Milbanke.

The first section focuses on Charlotte Smith and Mary Wollstonecraft, and specifically the ways in which the two women engaged with ideas of poetry and the poet in the 1790s; as Wolfson notes, 'poets were nothing if not a dilemma for a woman in the age of Enlightenment' (61). The same male poets reappear in discussions of both women's writing: Pope and Milton in particular are important here. Where Wolfson departs from previous explorations of similar influences, however, is in her close reading of the texts, in which she demonstrates the extent to which Smith's and Wollstonecraft's specific choice

and positioning of quotations from previous poets within their own poetry indicates how far they were willing to challenge their canonical precursors. As Wolfson suggests of Smith, these writers' interactions with their male predecessors produces 'a politics of literary form' (17) through which they could actively engage with previous texts. These engagements were not always straightforward: in the case of Wollstonecraft, Wolfson suggests that

Her interactions with the poets are diverse, even divergent; she may use poets to voice her thoughts, or to elevate and amplify her passions; she may put their words in revisionary frame or work the words against the grain; or indict the complicity of poetry with the social text. (68)

Although Wolfson suggests that political experiences, not death, acted as the Romantic social leveller, that is not what this study really implies. Instead, it is poetic metre which emerges as the leveller; by incorporating predecessors' texts into their own work, these later, specifically female, writers could engage with canonical male texts on the level playing field of a verse which spoke of contemporary anxieties using established forms - rhymes, in particular, increasingly become the focus here.

Wolfson moves from Wollstonecraft to Wordsworth, signalling the beginning of a focus centred on two of the 'Big Six': Wordsworth gives way to Byron for the final section of the study. It is in these two sections that Wolfson's reworking of previous influence theories - and Harold Bloom's in particular - becomes most evident, because - especially in the case of the Bloomian favourite, Wordsworth - whilst she does not reject these previous readings in a straightforward way, instead challenging it through her combination of it with the works of feminist critics, notably Elaine Showalter and Anne Mellor, in a way which also expands upon her own previous publication *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (2009), as well as her chapter in Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Feminism* (1988). Wolfson begins by locating Wordsworth's anxiety in the female. She focuses on *Lyrical Ballads* to suggest that 'a common anxiety is the proximity of the trope [of impregnation] to the female condition and, perforce, to a field of interaction with female passions that may compromise male poetic identity' (114). She suggests that texts such as the *Lucy* poems and *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* indicate the protagonists', and through them the poet's, physical sympathies with the suffering female body, an entity explored through tightly-controlled verse.

If Wordsworth's sense of male poetic identity is compromised in his poetry's identification with femininity, then it is most evidently challenged in his poetic interactions with his 'dear Sister', Dorothy:

The poetry that William Wordsworth wrote in her company, sometimes about her company, amasses an archive that exposes, at nearly every turn, interactions that vex his sense of poetic priority

and thus poetic authority. If this dynamic does not add up to a revolution in male manners, its turns and counterturns are acutely attentive to what Dorothy was doing and writing, often at William's side, in pregnant alternatives to his Romanticism. (151)

Without undermining Dorothy's poetic integrity or autonomy, Wolfson demonstrates the dialogues that may be located within the Wordsworths' writings. The domestic intimacy which was so crucial to both poets' personal happiness also proves necessary to their creative success, but it could simultaneously disrupt the individual poetics of both writers. Wolfson does not present an idyllic process of mutual exchange, but rather an interaction troubled by a mutual knowledge that neither poet could write so successfully alone. Dorothy emerges as a prose writer necessary to her brother's poetry; she seems to provide the imagery which William transforms into the metre which will engage with the established poetic canon. What Wolfson terms the 'volatile grammar' of the relationship between William and his 'alter-ego' (152) – both in the Freudian sense, and in the sense that Dorothy acted as an influence of change upon him – is found in their re-writing and re-forming of each other's work, so that the 'grammar' of their writings may be found to comment upon their interactive creative processes, often more than the explicit messages located in the verse. Whereas William publicly suppressed Dorothy's role in his poetic creations, however, Dorothy celebrated such dialogic processes; unlike William, whose poetry acts as an 'archive' detailing the 'impressions on his mind', Dorothy 'will set herself up as author in a language of community, and in a community of language' (199). Far from being the secluded private space, Dorothy's experiences of the domestic reveal an important community spirit which emerges in her work through its content, its 'grammar', and the creative processes undergone to produce it.

The final section, 'A Public Attraction', examines a very different sort of community: that which built up around Lord Byron's celebrity status. Wolfson examines the role that Byron's very public separation from Annabella Milbanke – the woman who coined the term 'Byromania' following the release of the first canto of *Childe Harold* – in 1816 played in the construction of Byron as celebrity poet. Wolfson begins by focusing on Byron's Separation poetry, particularly his provocative 'Fare Thee Well', and uses this poetry to demonstrate Byron's use of his private life in constructing his public persona: 'Immortal Byron was also a genre, and a pattern for mere mortals. Shifting the glamour from agent to effect, the formulaic stylizing set the persona into a riot of impersonations' (239). Wolfson proceeds to explore the ways in which Annabella Milbanke's writing refuted the claims made in her estranged husband's poetry, and offers a rare chance for analyses of Milbanke as poet in her own right.

The study closes with an examination of other women's textual responses to Byron. Thematically returning the idea of the text as the sexualised female body, Wolfson demonstrates the ways in which Byron's female contemporaries

colluded with him in writing themselves into his sexual myth, and, more than this, explores the ways that these women proceeded to control that myth:

Turn the recesses of Byronic penetration into the female heart, and Byron is the modern master. But turn Byron himself into such a recess to penetrate and women may become the scientists: scientists of Byronism. (257)

Wolfson utilises the career of Letitia Landon – who published under L.E.L., but was popularly known as 'the female Byron' – to demonstrate how Byron became a 'brand-name' for a certain type of cross-gender poetics; the women who followed him, including writers as diverse as Felicia Hemans and Harriet Beecher Stowe, became scientists in their study of the Byronic creature, and marketers in their use of it.

Wolfson's study suggests a new way of approaching the old problem of poetic influence. There are no 'strong' or 'weak' poets here; strengths and weaknesses alike provide the basis for creative interactions with texts which are 'trans-national, trans-historical' (17) and trans-gender, and, crucially, interactions with people which demand the construction of a mutually-important dialogue.

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**JAMES VIGUS, ed. *Informal Romanticism, Studien zur Englischen Romantik* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag: Trier, 2012). € 24,00. ISBN 978 3 86821 391 1.**

In a notebook entry of December 1804, Coleridge lamented that, 'I often when I read a book that delights me on the whole, feel a pang that the Author is not present – that I cannot *object* to this & that – express my sympathy and gratitude for this part, & mention some fact that self-evidently oversets a second'. *Informal Romanticism*, a collection of essays edited by James Vigus, focuses on informal and often overlooked genres which tend to depict writing as a sociable rather than a solitary pursuit. It covers letters, diaries, travel journals, notebooks and annotations which partially allow the interaction with the author which Coleridge craves. The work provides a timely and extremely wide-ranging attempt to concentrate on the concept of informal writing in Romantic studies, with Godwin's diary recently made available online and the Henry Crabb Robinson project aiming to publish his diary and reminiscences over the next fifteen years (both writers form the focus of essays in this volume).

Felicitas Meifert-Menhard opens the collection with an extensive summary of theories on informal writing, particularly annotation, using an exchange between Wordsworth and Coleridge written on a page of Shakespeare's sonnets to prove this marginal space a scene of conversational (or argumentative) intertextuality. Cecilia Muratori expands this potential for informal disagreement into a very different field. She finds in Schopenhauer's notebooks a challenge to the vivisections conducted by his lecturer, Johann

Friedrich Blumenbach, as Schopenhauer's observations lead him to focus not on whether a newt's eye is able to grow back after its removal, but on a form of consciousness shared by man and animals which questions the ethics of such practices. Observations of nature also form the basis of Rosa Karl's essay, but she explores the paradox that while the Romantic gaze has traditionally been regarded as solitary and semi-spiritual, it encouraged the development of mass tourism. Karl quotes Lamb's letter of September 1802 written on his return from the Lake District ('I have satisfied myself, that there is such a thing as that, which tourists call romantic') to suggest that touristic experience is necessarily pre-mediated through others, who are motivated by the same impulse which encourages writers like Keats or Wordsworth to share their experiences of beauty through poetry.

It is David Duff's contribution, 'Intimations of Informality', however, which provides the volume's most extended engagement with Lamb. As the aptly Lambian pun forming its title intimates, Duff's essay expands on his allusions to Lamb's 'anti-didacticism' in *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* to characterise 'Imperfect Sympathies' as a response to Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'. Following Roy Park's example, Duff focuses on Lamb's contrast between the Scottish mind, distinguished by 'perfect order and completeness', and the 'anti-Caledonian', or imperfect, approach which uses 'surmises, guesses, misgivings, half-intuitions, semi-consciousnesses, partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions'. Like Park, he discovers in the mental processes of the anti-Caledonian an analogue for the paratactic workings and uncertain conclusions of the familiar essay. However, Duff initiates several more novel contributions, notably the suggestion that 'Imperfect Sympathies' forms an antidote to the perfect sympathy implied in the 'theory of moral sentiments' developed by Scottish Enlightenment writers. He also suggests that 'Imperfect Sympathies' is a reassertion of the essay's etymological roots as a tentative and uncertain attempt in a genre crowded by abstract, often precise, philosophical treatises masquerading as essays. These arguments become even more convincing given the knowledge that Hume, James Beattie and William Robertson appear on a list of 'books which are no books' that Lamb finds himself pointedly unable to read in 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading'.

The chapter's major critical departure sees Duff regarding Lamb's anti-Caledonianism as an appropriation of Wordsworth's 'poetics of intimation'. From Park to Uttara Natarajan to Felicity James, there has been a common, and important, tendency amongst critics to stress the connection between Lamb's support for uncertainty in 'Imperfect Sympathies' and Keats's formulation of negative capability. The 'surmises, guesses, misgivings' associated with the essayistic mind shade into Keats's 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'. Duff, however, finds echoes of Lamb's praise for the indefinite mindset in the pivotal ninth stanza of Wordsworth's 'Intimations' Ode, with the child's 'obstinate questionings', 'fallings' and 'shadowy recollections' integral to imaginative growth. This opens the way for an extended and inspired comparison between the Romantic ode and the

familiar essay by a shared 'poetics of intimation': the informal insinuation of half-formed or inconsequential ideas which prove to have momentous implications. Finally, Duff proclaims the essay to be both the inheritor and preserver of this informal poetics in the 1820s.

Duff's essay briefly incorporates Lamb's description of the Quaker mindset in 'Imperfect Sympathies', which seems to adhere to a strict formality by eschewing the 'chit-chat, scandal, jokes, ambiguities, and a thousand whims-whams' that Lamb yearns for. Vigus's own contribution to *Informal Romanticism* instead focuses on the informality of Quakerism, which he perceives to be both the reason for Coleridge and Southey's initial attraction to the denomination, and why they ultimately reject it. He argues that the emphasis of early Quakers on private spiritual judgement and less conventional forms of worship, together with the relatively fluid boundaries between Quakerism and other nonconformist groups, led Southey and Coleridge to admire its anti-authoritarian informality in their letters. After 1809, however, such praise dwindles, as Southey begins to lend his support to the Church of England and Coleridge is increasingly unable to reconcile Quakerish pacifism to his support for the Napoleonic Wars. Surprisingly little has been written on the relationship between Romantic writing and Quakerism despite its well-studied links with Protestant Dissent, and Vigus's chapter proves both a necessary encouragement to further study of this connection and an incisive essay in its own right.

Duff characterises his concept of the 'poetics of intimation' with 'seemingly trivial, meaningless experiences that turn out to have profound significance'. By encompassing works as diverse as Southey's unfinished manuscript, 'The Life of George Fox & the Rise and Progress of Quakerism', Coleridge's annotations, and Lamb's letters, *Informal Romanticism* similarly demonstrates that informal and overlooked forms can offer significant contributions to Romantic studies.

MIRANDA KITCHENER  
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## Effortless Superiority

At the Chelsea Book Fair in west London in November 2007 I had the opportunity of inspecting Sotheby's catalogue of the Bradley Martin sale in 1990. There was a four-page letter from Charles Lamb to Edward and Emma Moxon of 29 November 1833, published as Lucas No. 981. The catalogue notes comment that Charles Lamb reports his wife's thoughts ('Mary is of opinion with me ...') and that the letter was printed in 1935, apparently in an American edition and edited by C. V. Lucas (sic)!!

I do not know how many thousands of facts the compiler of the catalogue had to assemble but, my goodness, this lot made at least one Elian feel effortlessly superior.

D. E. Wickham

## Society News

Confounding forecasters, 7th September proved to be a fine, sunny autumn day, perfect for making an excursion into Hertfordshire 'to beat up the quarters' frequented by Lamb and his 'less-known relations in that fine corn country'. Under the expert leadership of Robin Healey, author of the *Shell Guide* to the county, a party of Elians (including the impeccably-behaved four month old son of our Vice-Chairman) spent a most enjoyable day of exploration. We began at Ware with the canalised New River and the monument at Amwell to Sir Hugh Myddleton, the driving force behind its construction. Here the party lunched in the churchyard, thinking about the foundation nearby in 1806 of the college for East India Company clerks, now Hailybury College, and about John Scott (1731-1783), the poet /critic whose home was at Amwell. Scott's writings were called 'feeble but amiable' in Lamb's hoax 'Ritson versus John Scott the Quaker' in the London Magazine of April 1823. On to Widford, where we found the grave of Mary Field, Lamb's 'Grandame' and admired the extensive prospect over the site of Blakesware, the original of Lamb's 'Blakesmoor in H---shire'. After paying our respects to Lamb's watering-hole, the Bell, now a private house but at least with a plaque recording the Elian connection, we returned to Amwell in order to 'descend into the profundities of the earth' and feel our way in semi-darkness through the extraordinary grotto created by Quaker Scott. The six shell, flint and mineral-lined chambers with their narrow connecting corridors, said to have cost upwards of £10,000 to construct in the mid-eighteenth century, is a marvel well worth the trip from London. Emerging into the sunshine again, the party of Elians proceeded to Wadesmill to inspect the monument to the Lambs' friend Thomas Clarkson. This was built on the very spot pointed out by Clarkson as the place where his decision to dedicate his life to the Anti-Slavery cause was formed and it was restored in 2007 for the bicentenary of the abolition of the Trade. Finally, we moved north towards Puckeridge to take a look at Button Snap, the cottage once owned, though never occupied, by Lamb (and, indeed, at one time by the Society). The various inscribed Elian plaques on the cottage and the large relief of Lamb on the roadside verge outside we found to be in good order. This delightful and much pictured cottage is now in private hands, but Mr and Mrs Bliss, the present owners were most welcoming and we were pleased to be able to show Mrs Bliss Reginald Hine's reproduction of Lamb's receipt for the proceeds of sale (£50) in 1815, signed by Lamb himself and witnessed by Hazlitt. Mrs Bliss told us that living at Button Snap was 'like living in heaven' and we could well believe her! Many thanks to Robin Healey for arranging a spectacularly successful excursion.

Nick Powell

## A Poem by John Lamb (1725?-1799)

John Lamb, the father of the essayist, was probably born in 1725 and died in April 1799 in Islington. For most of his life he worked as a servant for Samuel Salt in the Inner Temple. Our sharpest portrait of him is from Lamb's essay 'Old Benchers of the Inner Temple' where he appears as Lovel:

I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and "would strike." In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. He once wrested a sword out of the hand of a man of quality that had drawn upon him; and pommelled him severely with the hilt of it. The swordsman had offered insult to a female — an occasion upon which no odds against him could have prevented the interference of Lovel. He would stand next day bare-headed to the same person, modestly to excuse his interference — for L. never forgot rank, where something better was not concerned. L. was the liveliest little fellow breathing, had a face as gay as Garrick's, whom he was said greatly to resemble (I have a portrait of him which confirms it), possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry — next to Swift and Prior — moulded heads in clay or plaster of Paris to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely; turned cribbage boards, and such small cabinet toys, to perfection; took a hand at quadrille or bowls with equal facility; made punch better than any man of his degree in England; had the merriest quips and conceits, and was altogether as brimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire. He was a brother of the angle, moreover, and just such a free, hearty, honest companion as Mr. Isaac Walton would have chosen to go a fishing with.

We have some further evidence for John Lamb's 'fine turn for humorous poetry' in the form of a slender volume entitled *Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*, published by Shatwell in 1770. The Society's archive at Guildhall holds one of, I think, only three extant copies. The following poetic epistle entitled 'A Letter to a Friend in the Country' is one of the highlights and, I thought, an apt way to close this issue.

MY GOOD FRIEND,

For favours to my son and wife,  
I shall love you whilst I've life,  
Your clysters, potions, help'd to save,  
Our infant lambkin from the grave,

May you for this and each good deed,  
 Ne'er want a friend in time of need,  
 And when you leave a single life,  
 To make I--- S---- a lawful wife  
 I hope God will his blessing pour  
 Upon you both every hour,  
 No quarrelling like cat and dog  
 Nor think the marriage life a clog,  
 But rather pass your time away,  
 With cheerfulness and equal sway.  
 I wish you every sort of joy,  
 And hope no troubles will annoy.  
 I hope your children you may rear  
 To serve their God, and you both fear  
 That they may be a blessing to  
 You both, nor give you any woe.  
 I wish your fields may well be till'd  
 Your Barns with choicest Grain be fill'd,  
 And that your strong and fleecy Dams  
 May bring you each Year a Brace of Lambs;  
 That your Red Cows may never fail  
 To fill each Meal a brim-full Pail,  
 Without that common jadish trick  
 To up with foot and down it kick;  
 I wish your horses may be free  
 From Glanders, Spaven, and Farcy,  
 And all disorders that attend  
 A Horse unto his latter end;  
 Nor Chickens of the pipe e'er die,  
 Nor Fox their dwellings e'er come nigh;  
 That fowls and ducks and geese may swarm  
 Within your cultivated farm.  
 I wish the murrain ne'er may kill  
 Your grunting higs against your will.  
 I wish each sow at teeming time  
 May bring forth pigs not less than nine,  
 And that they ne'er may want to each  
 Their pigs by way of dainty treat.  
 I wish you this and ten times more  
 With plenty for yourselves and poor  
 And real contentment at your door.

Stephen Burley

## The Charles Lamb Bulletin

[www.charleslambociety.com/bulletin.html](http://www.charleslambociety.com/bulletin.html)

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*The Charles Lamb Society Bulletin* was published in quarterly issues from 1935 to 1972. Its first editor was the Elian scholar and poet S. M. Rich. The new series began in January 1973 as *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* under the editorship of Basil Savage.

The *Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed journal devoted to the study of Charles and Mary Lamb and their circle. It aims to promote Lamb scholarship and welcomes submissions in the form of essays, reviews, and notes and queries from established academics, new entrants to the field, and those who simply admire the Lambs' writings.

Essays submitted to the journal should be in typescript, and be between 4000 and 7000 words in length. Preferably, submissions should be sent to the Editor as an email attachment in MS Word. Submissions should be double-spaced throughout, including quotations, and should follow MHRA style, with a couple of minor alterations. A full style-sheet is available online at the Society's website.

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