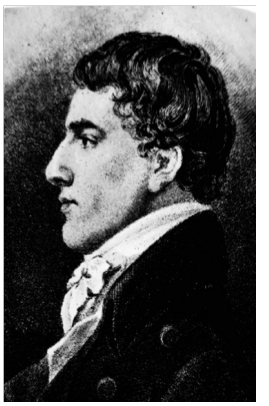
The Charles Lamb Bulletin

Summer 2021

New Series No. 173

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



PUBLISHED BY

THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY

An Elian Bicentenary

Charles Lamb first published 'Imperfect Sympathies' in the *London Magazine*, in August, 1821.

From 'Imperfect Sympathies'

I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair. They cannot like me — and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it. There is something more plain and ingenuous in their mode of proceeding. We know one another at first sight. There is an order of imperfect intellects (under which mine must be content to rank) which in its constitution is essentially anti-Caledonian. The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to, have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretences to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe (to confess fairly) has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth. She presents no full front to them-a feature or side-face at the most. Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they pretend to. They beat up a little game peradventure—and leave it to knottier heads, more robust constitutions, to run it down. The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting: waxing, and again waning. Their conversation is accordingly. They will throw out a random word in or out of season, and be content to let it pass for what it is worth. They cannot speak always as if they were upon their oath-but must be understood, speaking or writing, with some abatement. They seldom wait to mature a proposition, but even bring it to market in the green ear. They delight to impart their defective discoveries, as they arise, without waiting for their full development. They are no systematisers, and would but err more by attempting it. Their minds, as I said before, are suggestive merely. The brain of a true Caledonian (if I am not mistaken) is constituted upon quite a different plan. His Minerva is born in panoply.

Front cover images of Mary and Charles Lamb are taken from the William MacDonald edition of the *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London: Dent, 1903-1908)

The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

New Series, No. 173, Summer 2021

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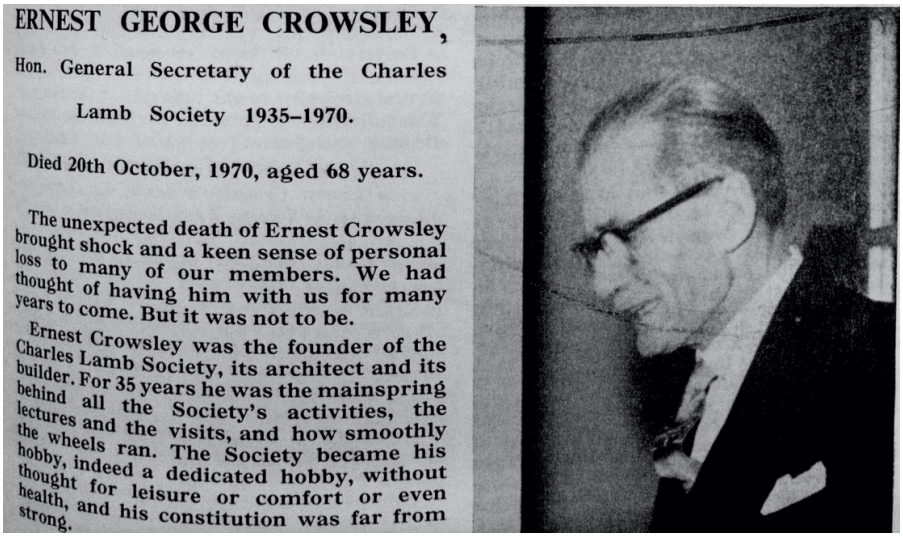
Notes from the Chairs
FELICITY JAMES and JOHN STRACHAN

Elian greetings! The Society's first event of 2021, the Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture, was delivered by Professor Rohan McWilliam, after an Elian reading by CLS stalwart Nick Powell, fresh from his and Cecilia's COVID-19 vaccination at St Thomas's Hospital. Rohan, Professor of Modern British History at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge delivered an excellent talk entitled 'A Pantomime and a Masquerade': The West End of London in the Age of Charles Lamb'. The lecture to some extent emerged from Rohan's recent book: *London's West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800-1914* (OUP 2020). Rohan is currently at work on his second volume of his West End history which will cover the period from 1914 to the present day.

It is now fifty years since the first Crowsley lecture, and we should take this opportunity to pay tribute here to Ernest Crowsley, our Society's founding father. Last October was the 50th anniversary of the death of Ernest George Crowsley (1902-1970), who founded the Charles Lamb Society on 1 February 1935. Crowsley was General Secretary of the Society - a pleasingly Soviet era title that was subsequently retired - from 1935 until his death, at 68 years of age, thirty-five years later. This is one of the few images of Crowsley we have, from his obituary in the *CLB* by H G Smith.



ERNEST GEORGE CROWSLEY,

Hon. General Secretary of the Charles Lamb Society 1935–1970.

Died 20th October, 1970, aged 68 years.

The unexpected death of Ernest Crowsley brought shock and a keen sense of personal loss to many of our members. We had thought of having him with us for many years to come. But it was not to be.

Ernest Crowsley was the founder of the Charles Lamb Society, its architect and its builder. For 35 years he was the mainspring behind all the Society's activities, the lectures and the visits, and how smoothly the wheels ran. The Society became his hobby, indeed a dedicated hobby, without thought for leisure or comfort or even health, and his constitution was far from strong.

Smith writes in that obituary that 'One trait of Ernest Crowsley cannot be too strongly emphasised. At each meeting he had an outstretched warm handshake for everyone on arrival. This created a friendly feeling, so much so that the Society was a band of real friendly folk'. So it continues.

The Crowsley Memorial Lectures were established in the year after Crowsley's death and were intended, and we quote from the *Bulletin* once again, as 'a lasting memorial of his charm and earnest endeavours for the Society'. The first memorial lecture was given to the society in October 1971 by Professor Basil Willey, on Charles Lamb and S . T . Coleridge.

One of the traditions of the Society, from those Ernest Crowsley days onwards, has been the birthday celebration. It was a matter of great pride to the Society to mark the date with a gathering, even through the Blitz, and the tradition has remained unbroken in 2021 – though the format has had to change somewhat. On 13 February, we held the birthday celebration on zoom – a convivial online gathering with reading, toast by our President Duncan Wu, and lecture given by our guest of honour, Dr Jane Moore, Cardiff University. Jane's splendid lecture, 'Mary and the Men: male tribute writing in the Romantic period', reminded us of the importance of Mary Lamb's work, her particular status in the Elian circle, and her ambiguous power as writer, sister, and friend.

The programme for 2020-1 concluded with 'Who's Who: Charles Lamb in conversation with William Wordsworth', from Professor John Williams, Emeritus Professor, University of Greenwich. John's lecture, and his readings from the letters, beautifully brought out the complexity of the friendship between the two men. Although there were moments of testiness, tension, mis-reading and misunderstanding, theirs was a relationship of creative exchange and sympathy.

Our AGM was held following Professor John Williams' lecture – the membership and finances of the society are in a healthy state, and the online lectures have been a real success, allowing international members to join in and recordings to be made available via the website. We now look to expand and develop this work in 2021-2, with an exciting programme of events which evoke the culture of the Lambs' London at the turn of the nineteenth century. We intend to appoint a Digital Events Officer to help organise and publicise our online events in the coming year, and look forward to planning the anniversary celebrations for Charles Lamb's 250th birthday in 2025.

So the work of Ernest Crowsley continues in new ways – online, international, adapting to strange times and pressures – but always maintaining the 'friendly feeling' he sought to cultivate.

Felicity James, University of Leicester

John Strachan, Bath Spa University

Lamb Programme, 2021-22

All meetings will take place through Zoom in 2021/22. We will issue tickets, free for members, through Eventbrite: please check the events page at www.charleslambsociety.com for details in the summer.

25 Sept. 2021, 2pm: 'Towards a New Biography of Elia',
Professor Eric G. Wilson (Wake Forest University).

23 Oct. 2021, 3pm: 'In the Theatre of Romantic Eccentricity: John Thelwall's Covent Garden Childhood', Professor Judith Thompson (Dalhousie University).

20 Nov. 2021, 2pm: '"There goes Tom and Jerry": On a Spree with Pierce Egan's *Life in London*', Dr David Stewart (Northumbria University).

22 Jan. 2022, 2pm: 'Billy Waters and Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture', Dr Mary L. Shannon (Roehampton University).

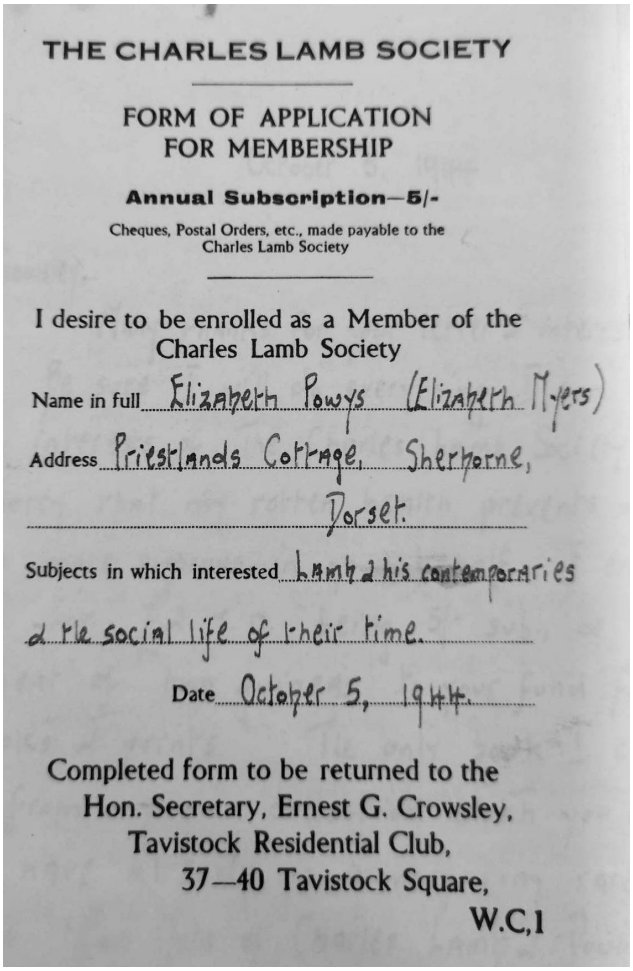
12 Feb. 2022, 2pm: **'**Charles Lamb Birthday Lecture',
Guest of Honour: Professor Duncan Wu (Georgetown University)

19 Mar. 2022, 2pm: '"Blot Out Gentle-Hearted": Charles Lamb, S T Coleridge, and the Ridiculous', Dr Andrew McInnes (Edgehill University)

23 April 2022, 2pm: '"Throw yourself rather, my dear sir, from the Tarpeian Rock": Writing as a Career in the Romantic Period', Dr Matthew Sangster (University of Glasgow)

22 May, 2022, 2pm: 'From chapbooks to classics: the children's literature of Charles and Mary Lamb', Dr Felicity James (University of Leicester). Followed by the CLS AGM.

Editor's Note



THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY

FORM OF APPLICATION
FOR MEMBERSHIP

Annual Subscription—5/-

Cheques, Postal Orders, etc., made payable to the Charles Lamb Society

I desire to be enrolled as a Member of the Charles Lamb Society

Name in full Elizabeth Powys (Elizabeth Myers)

Address Priestlands Cottage, Sherborne, Dorset.

Subjects in which interested Lamb & his contemporaries & the social life of their time.

Date October 5, 1944.

Completed form to be returned to the Hon. Secretary, Ernest G. Crowsley, Tavistock Residential Club, 37—40 Tavistock Square, W.C.1

At the Guildhall Library, in a brief break from Lockdown last December, I visited the Lamb archives for the first time. Sitting at a desk, wearing a mask and unable to move around the library, I was soon in another present through the materials I found. I had gone to look among the collection for pictures of Mary Lamb. There are lots of interesting artefacts including old membership tickets, programmes, *Bulletins* and letters, but not the pictures I looked for. Nonetheless, the letters transported me to another place. Many are between Edmund Blunden, Ernest Crowsley and S. M. Rich, taking breaks from their work, discussing details about their

heroes or how to answer queries. Each warmly addresses the other, often on headed paper from their workplaces, glad of the fellowship.

That friendliness and fellowship comes through in letters from Elizabeth Myers Powys to Crowsley that can be found in the archive. Elizabeth, a young woman writer of novels such as *A Well Full of Leaves* (1944), and short stories, was dying of tuberculosis. Elizabeth's letters to Crowsley show how important the Lamb Society could be in isolation. Too unwell to travel from Devon to London for meetings, the letters and the *Bulletin* became Elizabeth's only links to the Society. Anxious for a cure, Elizabeth's devoted and much older husband, Lyttleton Powys, took her to Arizona for the climate, stopping at New York on the way. In a letter, Crowsley informs Elizabeth that there are Lamb Society members in New York she could meet. Elizabeth replies she is in the outskirts for only a short time and too unwell to travel. Undeterred, Crowsley then writes to tell her there is a single Lamb Society member in Arizona. Elizabeth is amused by the prospect of travelling halfway around the world just to meet a fellow Lamb Society member in person. After Elizabeth's death in 1946, aged thirty-four, Lyttleton continued a long correspondence with Crowsley. Increasingly infirm, and unable to move from his chair he remembers his wife's enthusiasms for the Lambs in letters, until he too died in 1955, aged eighty. Reading these letters reminded me of Charles Lamb's 'Dream Children' in some ways. Here were people, coping with illness and loneliness, compensating for an unsatisfactory reality with their imagination, books, correspondence and remembrances. I did not go to the Guildhall looking for letters from Society members. However, the ones I found attest to the importance of the Society and how its only rules of friendliness and good humour can sustain people in isolation. I hope you enjoy the essays in this issue.

John Gardner,
Anglia Ruskin University

Self-Satire, Social Irony, and the Romantic Periphery: Charles Lamb's Oriental Rhetoric

TSZ TING YAN

Charles Lamb had a difficult relationship with the Orient — not only Charles Lamb the clerk who drudged in the writing of 'Tea & Drugs & Price goods & bales of Indigo' in that 'Company trading to the Orient', but also Charles Lamb the poet and essayist who kept himself afar from that land of fascination where most major Romantic authors had, through their own trails, ventured into.[1] Lamb's attachments, as he told Wordsworth, 'are all local, purely local'; the charms and blemishes of London are all that 'work themselves into my mind and feed me', and he needs no 'mistresses' other than things that have been 'before my eyes all my life'.[2] As if too intense a passion for the local and the familiar is bound to deplete any affection for the exotic, Lamb found, or seemed to find, the Orient too formidable a stranger to embrace. Writing to Southey about *The Curse of Kehama*, Lamb confesses timidity over his 'Oriental Almighties':

> My imagination goes sinking and floundering in the vast spaces of unopened-before systems and faiths […] I have a timid imagination I am afraid. I do not willingly admit of strange beliefs or out-of-the-way creeds or places.'[3]

This 'timid imagination' that prevents him from straying into the unknown and the unfamiliar works itself also into the consciousness of Elia, Lamb's essayistic persona; confessing his 'poor plastic power' in 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears', Elia compares his 'prosaic' and 'never romantic' dreams with Coleridge's fertile dreamland of the East and self-deprecatingly obliges himself to 'subside into my proper element of prose' when he feels 'that idle vein [of poetic ambition] returning upon

[1] Lamb to Mary Matilda Betham, 1815. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. E. W. Marrs, 3 vols (Ithaca, NY, 1975–8), III, 200; Lamb to James and Louisa Holcroft Kenney, October 1816. Marrs, *Letters*, III, 229.
[2] Lamb to Wordsworth, 30 January 1801. Marrs, *Letters*, I, 267.
[3] Lamb to Southey, 6 May 1815. Marrs, *Letters*, III, 154–155.

me'.[4] For Lamb, it seems, the exotic and in particular the Orient represents a threshold of creativity, romanticness, and poeticness that cannot be crossed without a kind of imaginative strength and valour, and it is not without a sense of apologetic defeatism that he claims impotence in the face of Oriental seduction. It seems that Lamb had passively abided by his peripherality and was sorry for it — but there is more about Lamb's unexotic, unromantic vocation than can be thought of as defeatist.

In this paper I want to show that Lamb's unexoticism is undergirded by a keen sense of rationalism that is more critical than self-effacing, and that Lamb's Orient, forged as an embodiment of a state of irrationality antithetical to reason, serves an important rhetorical role in defining the satirical and polemical tenor of his works. The questions I ask are these: What is the Orient to Lamb, and what shape does his unexoticism take? What role does the Orient play in Lamb's works, and for what purpose is it invoked? My attention is specifically drawn to the presence of China in Lamb's essays, which, in its consistent association with forms of obsession and fanaticism, stands out as a particularly vivid specimen of Lamb's instrumentalist use of the Orient in his art of critique. Karen Fang, exploring the relationship between the notion of China and Lamb's magazine writings, situates Lamb's engagement with a commodified East in the context of imperialism and argues for Lamb's identification of his periodical authorship with the imperial interest of the metropolitan *London*.[5] While this view, as David Higgins has persuasively shown, fails to acknowledge the innate ambivalence of Lamb's imperialism, what seems to really problematise an imperialist reading as such is the highly introspective and autocritical nature of Lamb's writings, in which any Oriental critique is underlaid by a latent structure of self-referentiality that deflects his purpose to the self. Higgins, observing in Lamb a localistic spirit that is at once alienated and resists alienation, sees his works as articulating the division and debasement of the civilised English self, which struggles in a world where the local and the global are inseparable; what may be added is that Lamb's uneasy hybridity is also cognate with his narrative art that fuses and transforms self-reflexivity into social criticism.[6] Rather than Lamb's imperialism, the focus of this paper is on Lamb's invocation of the Orient as a rhetoric and,

[4] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears', *London Magazine*, 4 (October 1821), 384–87 (387).
[5] See Karen Fang, *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs: Periodical Culture and Post-Napoleonic Authorship* (Charlottesville, 2010), 31–65.
[6] David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National and Global Selves, 1780–1850* (Basingstoke, 2014), 130–161.

as such, a means to a dialectical end; from this perspective I shall discuss the links between Lamb's Oriental ostracism and his 'prosaic' rationalism, and how Lamb, in his literary engagement with an 'irrationalised' China, makes his self the surrogate target of his own satire, which asserts the realities of modernity to be laughably ironical and unsettling.

To understand how the Orient works for Lamb one must understand what the Orient is to Lamb, and I shall set out by nuancing the exotic- or Oriental-phobia that seems so often to confine Lamb to his local attachments. In his letter to Southey aforementioned, in which he relays his preference for *Roderick* over *Kehama*, Lamb speaks of his abhorrence of the Orient: 'I can just endure Moors because of their connection as foes with Xtians, but Abyssinians, Ethiops, Esquimaux, Dervises & all that tribe I hate. I believe I fear them in some manner'.[7] Lamb's 'sympathies', as Higgins neatly puts it, 'rely on proximity and similarity'; his hatred and fear of the distant and the unfamiliar are rooted in his almost instinctive awareness of the obstruction they cause to his 'anxious parochialism'.[8] There is, however, a contextual anchorage to his xeno-antipathy that tells of another facet of his unexoticism: inasmuch as his endurance of the Moors sustains his reading of *Roderick*, his 'hating' and 'fearing' of that alien tribe of the Orient are tied up with his aversion to the far-fetched mystifying of *Kehama*, of its 'unopened-before systems & faiths' and its 'intangible prototype' of 'Oriental Almighties'.[9] 'I cant believe or with horror am made to believe such desperate chances against omnipotences, such disturbances of faith to the centre' (154) — what underlies Lamb's disapproval is, partly if not wholly, the sheer contrariety between the impossible occultism of *Kehama* and his own realist rationalism. When Elia speaks of his inability to dream of the exotic as Coleridge did in 'Witches, and Other Night-fears', what he facetiously laments is also his almost compulsive rationalising even in the deep recesses of dreams: 'I confess an occasional night-mare; but I do not, as in early youth, keep a stud of them. Fiendish faces, with the extinguished taper, will come and look at me; but I know them for mockeries, even while I cannot elude their presence, and I fight and grapple with them'.[10] It is for his inability to take nightmare as a 'nightmare' — much less a Coleridgian nightmare — rather than a Elian 'night-mare' that can be kept in a 'stud', and to be afflicted by the exotic beings without rationalising their existence 'for mockeries' and to combat them, that Lamb positions

[7] Lamb to Southey, 6 May 1815. Marrs, *Letters*, III, 155.
[8] Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 131.
[9] Lamb to Southey, 6 May 1815. Marrs, *Letters*, III, 154.
[10] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears', 387.

himself as a prosaic and unromantic dreamer. Such wakefulness in dreams, however, embodies precisely the literary aesthetics of Lamb as he expresses in 'Sanity of True Genius':

> The true poet dreams being awake. […] His very monsters are tamed to his hand, even as that wild sea-brood, shepherded by Proteus. He tames and he clothes them with attributes of flesh and blood, till they wonder at themselves, like Indian Islanders forced to submit to European vesture. […] Let the most romantic of us, that has been entertained all night with the spectacle of some wild and magnificent vision, recombine it in the morning, and try it by his waking judgment.[11]

Whether it be the 'wild sea-brood' or the 'Indian Islanders', the exotic has to be 'tamed' in order that the 'disproportionate straining or excess' (519) of any faculties of the mind be balanced, and that the artist, rather than being possessed by the lawless others, dominates over them and 'subjugates them to the law of […] consistency' (519). It is this art of balancing, of reaching an equilibrium state of romanticness by bringing the exotic in control and consistency through sober judgement, that is the artistic touchstone of Lamb. In speaking of Lamb's phobia of the exotic or the Orient, therefore, one must be aware of the destabilising force it exerts not only on his localistic but also on his rationalistic paradigm; Lamb's unexoticism, which often manifests itself as an ostracisation of the Orient, is inextricably linked with his resistance to the phantasmic lawlessness, inconsistency, and fantasy that transgresses the bounds of his *compos mentis* literary equilibrium.

Understanding Lamb's unexoticism from this perspective, we may see why it is often the Orient as an overly fanciful construct that predicates Lamb's predominantly dismissive reception of it. In 'The Old Margate Hoy', Lamb's distrust in the constructedness and delusiveness of both the Orient and the exotic is synthesised into a unitary vision: when Elia, a 'town-bred' and an 'inland-born subject', saw the sea for the first time in the sorry companion of a fellow-passenger who fabled about his adventures in Persia, Egypt, and Rhodes, he discovered the sea to be 'a

[11] The essay, which aims to falsify Dryden's idea that great wits are allied to madness, was among the 'Popular Fallacies' series published in *New Monthly*. It was given the title 'Sanity of True Genius' when collected in *The Last Essays of Elia*. [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'Popular Fallacies', *New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (January 1826), 519–20.

very unsatisfying and even diminutive entertainment', it being nothing like what he 'has been reading of it all his life […] and what he cherishes as credulously from romance and poetry; crowding their images, and exactly strange tributes from expectation'.[12] For Elia, it is not only that the fictitious Orient is aligned to that 'tyranny of a mighty faculty' (23) that confuses his imagination of the sea, but also that the sea — 'a new world' which 'disposed us to the reception of any prodigious marvel whatsoever' (22) — has reduced him to an exploitable gull, a hapless victim of that 'greatest liar I had met with then, or since' (21).[13] Such an awareness of the exotic and the Orient as being constructed, narrated, and performed — and hence deceptively untrustworthy and innately unstable — had always been a part of the rational 'complex' of Lamb. Trying to dissuade Thomas Manning from fancying about 'the Independent Tartary', Lamb broached the unreliability of Oriental narrative and actually enacted his argument by constructing his own Oriental hyperbole:

> Some say, they are Cannibals; and then conceive a Tartar-fellow *eating* my friend, and adding the *cool malignity* of mustard and vinegar! I am afraid 'tis the reading of Chaucer has misled you; his foolish stories about Cambuscan and the ring, and the horse of brass. Believe me, there's no such things, 'tis all the poet's *invention*; but if there were such *darling* things as old Chaucer sings, I would *up* behind you on the Horse of Brass, and frisk off for Prester John's Country. But these are all tales; a Horse of Brass never flew, and a King's daughter never talked with Birds! The Tartars, really, are a cold, insipid, smouchey set. You'll be sadly moped (if you are not eaten) among them. Pray *try* and cure yourself.[14]

While Lamb's fibbing of Tartarian cannibalism may well reflect the insecurity he feels over an Oriental foreignness that threatens to devour his localistic self, his 'role-acting' of an Oriental liar is obviously, and more immediately, an expression of his inability to resign himself to foolish credulity, to be willingly consumed, like Manning did, by

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[12] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'The Old Margate Hoy', *London Magazine*, 8 (July 1823), 21–25 (23).

[13] Notice the pun on 'gull' in the last line of the essay: 'I would exchange these sea-gulls for swans, and scud a swallow for ever about the banks of Thamesis'. [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'The Old Margate Hoy', 25.

[14] Lamb to Manning, 19 February 1803. Marrs, *Letters*, II, 95.

delusion and pure chimera. It is also for his rational sensibility that he admits of the possibility of his frisking off for Asia after Manning had those 'darling things' the ancient poets lied about been true. What he once said to tease Coleridge, that 'ones romantic credulity is for ever misleading into misplaced acts of fool***', is also applicable to Manning, whose foolery is here the object of Lamb's travesty.[15] In Lamb's frame of mind, there is an interesting system of relational concepts at work: the exotic and the Orient are bracketed with chaos and disorder, falsehood and hyperbole, and also with a kind of credulous and irrational romanticness that goes against his rational yet unromantic scepticism. The familiar and the local, to the contrary, hold a natural affinity with truth and order — an association clearly made in a letter he wrote to Manning upon his return to England from China, stopping en route at St. Helena, in which Lamb couples 'unprobably romantic fictions' with the 'remoteness' of Canton because 'the uttermost parts of the earth necessarily involves in it some heat of fancy', but makes the move to 'confine myself nearer to truth as you come nearer home' because 'I can think on the half-way house tranquilly'.[16] Within the grid of binaries Lamb concocts, the Orient sits on a side diametrically oppositional to the localistic, unromantic, and rational conglomerate that Lamb attaches himself to, both as Charles Lamb and Elia; whether it makes its appearance as a flight of fancy or a flame of passion, what it represents, for Lamb, is always a countering force of torsion that is disruptive, distortional, and disabling.

It is thus that, when Elia proclaims his 'almost feminine partiality for old china' in 'Old China', he is describing a dysfunctional relationship that is meant to be conflictual and doomed to failure.[17] The contradiction that exists in his unruly passion for the perspectiveless world of the 'fine Cathay' (270) is, by nature, irresolvable. At the heart of Elia's understanding of his 'partiality' is a paradoxical process of affirmation through negation:

> I HAVE an almost feminine partiality for old china. When I go to see any great house, I inquire for the china closet, and next for the picture gallery. I cannot defend the order of preference, but by saying, that we have all some taste or other, of too ancient a date to admit of our remembering

[15] Lamb to Coleridge, 13 August 1814. Marrs, *Letters*, III, 102.
[16] Lamb to Manning, 26 December 1815. Marrs, *Letters*, III, 207.
[17] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'Old China', *London Magazine*, 7 (March 1823), 269–272 (269).

> distinctly that it was an acquired one. […] I had no repugnance then — why should I now have? — to those little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques, that under the notion of men and women, float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspective — a china tea-cup. (269–70)

Here is a union in antinomy, a partiality consciously flawed and affirmatively a partiality because it is so. Elia is well aware of the eccentricity of his favouritism: he has perceived the need to 'defend' his preference for china over art, and is sensible to the aesthetic heresy a perspectiveless china-world represents — lawless, grotesque, a '*speciosa miracula*' where people are figured 'up in the air […] yet on *terra firma* still', where 'horses, trees, pagodas, dancing the hays' and 'a cow and rabbit couchant, and co-extensive […] through the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay' (270). He cannot adequately explain his weakness for this alien, foreign, and aesthetically illegitimate world except by evasively dismissing it as 'acquired', leaving an uncharted blank on the wide berth between 'partiality' and 'repugnance'. Describing his partiality as a 'feminine' one, Elia evokes the scores of neoclassical texts that associate chinoiserie enthusiasm with female irrationality and frailty; he has, by surrendering his thinking masculinity to misguided passion, become the like of Addison's Mrs. Tradewell, Gay's Laura, and Hawkesworth's Lady Brittle, ladies of the elite class who either sunk or were on the verge of sinking into madness for Chinese porcelain.[18] Elia's 'almost feminine partiality for old china', in other words, is defined by a denial of reason; nullifying his own power of reasoning while maintaining the power to nullify it, he projects his partiality as a stubborn strand of irrationality

[18] Joseph Addison, 'The Lover', *Guardian*, No. 10, 18 March 1714; John Gay, 'To a Lady on Her Passion for Old China' (1725), in *John Gay: Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Vinton A. Dearing, 2 vols (London, 1974), 292–294; John Hawkesworth, *Adventurer*, No. 109, 20 November 1753. For an interesting discussion about the relationship between china and female insanity, see Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, 'Frailty, Thy Name is China': Women, Chinoiserie and the Threat of Low Culture in Eighteenth-Century England, *Women's History Review*, 18 (2009), 659–668. It is worth noting that David Porter has studied the gendering of chinoiserie in England both from a transcultural and domestic perspective; see David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 57–91. The book-length study of Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins provides a useful vantage point from which to look at chinoiserie as culturally, socially, and politically functional; see Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (New York, 2013).

within his dominant rationalism, a destabilising force of chaos that desecrates the otherwise equable force of order and consistency.

Significantly, it is this instability of an irrational streak of unreason that renders Elia's avowed partiality for old china a self-undermining rhetoric. At stake here is what old china represents in 'Old China' — a symbol of material comfort and economic progress that is the catalyst of the contretemps between Elia and Bridget, his cousin and housekeeper. Equating his set of china teacups, 'a recent purchase' he is now 'for the first time using', with the 'favourable circumstances' that allow him and Bridget to 'afford to please the eye sometimes with trifles of this sort' (270), Elia claims as his own a bourgeois consciousness that gratifies in the materialist possession of what had, since the last century, been the emblem of aristocratic luxury and class prestige. It is this consumerist pleasure and bourgeois complacency of Elia that occasion Bridget's admonition: she prefers the 'good old times […] when we were not quite so rich' but 'a great deal happier' (270). Recalling the folio for which Elia scrimped to own, the cheap prints he bought, their walks on holidays, their wedging themselves into the one-shilling theatre gallery, and the days when strawberries and peas were a treat, Bridget argues for the 'pleasure in being a poor man', the only state in which they could 'make much of ourselves' (272). Elia's vindication — that 'we must ride, where we formerly walked; live better, and lie softer' (272) — and his subsequent return to his old china at the end of essay seems to suggest a sense of self-assuring pragmatism, but to see Elia as 'wholly at ease with luxuries', or to see the 'Chinese ideas' contained in china as coming to 'supply familiar pleasures of the imagination', is to let Elia off with his hardened and sometimes mischievous habit of obliquity and irony.[19] What problematises Elia's seeming self-assurance is the very self-doubt that he has already laid down: the unstable, wobbly quality of his alien and indefensible 'partiality' for the foreign, 'lawless', and 'grotesque' symbol of wealth and prosperity, juxtaposed against Bridget's natural, reasoned, and secured preference for the localised and familiar past, a balanced 'middle state' (270), as Bridget says, in which they were in. It is Elia's vulnerable disequilibrium that characterises his implicit self-subordination to what Higgins shrewdly identifies as the 'overwhelming' voice of Bridget in 'Old China'.[20] Rather than a dissension, Elia's response to Bridget is manifestly an elegiac and passive counter-discourse, hamstrung by his distrust of his own self: 'Competence to age is

[19] Fang, *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs*, 41. James Watt, *British Orientalisms, 1759–1835* (Cambridge, 2019), 211.
[20] Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 158.

supplemental youth; a sorry supplement indeed, but I fear the best that is to be had' (272). Elia's regrets are that the 'good old days' Bridget speaks of 'are dreams, my cousin, now' (272) — they could never be young again to do what they did in the past, nor could they bury their wealth to buy back days bygone. Here, as always, Bridget represents the idealistic, sinless, and inviolable side of Elia's double consciousness: 'where we have differed upon moral points; upon something proper to be done, or let alone; whatever heat of opposition, or steadiness of conviction, I set out with, I am sure always, in the long run, to be brought over to her way of thinking', as Elia says in 'Mackery End, in Hertfordshire'.[21] To end his argument, and the essay at large, by returning to his old china is to snatch himself away from 'dreams' back to reality, and yet it is a reality he mockingly pictures as ludicrous, monstrous, and laughable — where a 'merry Chinese waiter holding an umbrella, big enough for a bed-tester, over the head of that pretty insipid half-Madona-ish chit of a lady in that very blue summer house' (272) — where the privileged cosy up to things disproportionately bigger than the purpose they serve, where upper-class snobs, that 'chit of a lady', pose like a saint. What the alien, perspectiveless china-world contains, in the end, is Elia's scepticism towards the mode of life and its attendant values that he satirically claims he is embracing — those that prevail in the society in which he lives in and identifies with as a Londoner.

Apparently, then, 'Old China' describes not only an introspective experience but also a phenomenon of wider social generality and implication. Situated within the larger polemics between excess and moderation and materialism and spiritualism, Elia's self-satirical confession, in effect, scandalises both himself and the no small portion of his elitist, middle-class *London* readers who revelled in the same taste for luxury. Here China, in its commodified form, becomes a metaphor of displacement; the visually anomalistic imagery of 'fine Cathay' is the paradoxical other that defines the defectively 'improved' self of the middling order in a fast-growing and increasingly capitalistic and materialistic society. Claiming partiality for old china and the luxury it represents, Elia enacts the almost obsessive enthusiasm of the rising middle class for material possession and consumerist pleasure pictured as a form of aberrant Oriental fetish; undercutting his own narratorial authority and power of argument by playing up the turbulent irrationality of his passion, he reveals this lived experience of spiritual incarceration as ultimately enfeebling and alienating. The pith of Lamb's

[21] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'Mackery End, in Hertfordshire', *London Magazine*, 4 (July 1821), 28–30 (29).

self-subversive Oriental rhetoric in 'Old China' is best understood in comparison with 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers', in which Elia masks his sympathy and humanitarian appeal for child labours under an affected bourgeois callousness:

> I like to meet a sweep — understand me — not a grown sweeper — old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive — but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek […] I have a kindly yearning toward these dim specks — poor blots — innocent blacknesses — I reverence these young Africans of our own growth […][22]

The child sweeps are here Orientalised and dehumanised into an item of consumption, yearned for and fantasised about; Elia's sickly consumerist craving for the 'young Africans' with their blooming 'nigritude' is, like his diseased partiality for the 'grotesque' old china, a deviational and enigmatic appetite. In analogising the sooty child sweeps with the young Africans, Lamb evokes the commodification of African slaves who, in the eyes of the privileged class, are tradable exotics devoid of human essence; problematising his hungry gaze at the child sweep as a sickly fixation, he pictures, in what Simon Hull calls 'a form of inverse argument', the class hegemony that subjects the innocence to slavery-like exploitation.[23] In 'Chimney-Sweepers' as in 'Old China', Elia projects himself as the object of his own critique, a bourgeois fetishist succumbing to the obsessive grip of his consumerist desire for Eastern commodities; his 'yearning' for the Africanised child-sweeps and his 'partiality' for old china are both a kind of preposterous and self-subversive irrationalism that advertises its own monstrosity and untrustworthiness. Satirising his own capitalist fetishism, Elia holds up a mirror for the likeness of him who takes pleasure in the same freakish 'yearning' and 'partiality'; what this mirror reflects is not only the mental phantasm of a class rising in social and cultural dominance but also the irony of modernisation and economic progress, behind which is hidden a society degenerating into a moral and spiritual wasteland.

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[22] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers: A May-Day Effusion', *London Magazine*, 5 (May 1822), 405–408 (405).
[23] Simon Hull, *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine: Metropolitan Muse* (London, 2010), 121.

I would like to suggest that Elia's well-known infatuation with roast pig is fundamentally and representationally the same as his irrational 'partiality' for old china and his consumerist 'yearning' for child sweep, and that 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig', like 'Old China' and 'Chimney-Sweepers', demands to be read as a self-satirical confessional monologue that is not only self-reflexive but also socially provocative. More specifically, I would like to argue that the metafictional pseudo-Chinese tale of Lamb, which chronicles the discovery of roast pig, foregrounds the satirical undertone of Elia's histrionic panegyric on roast pig by ligaturing modern epicureanism with the ancient — and paganistic — gourmandism of the Chinese. Surely the humorous, and patently ridiculous, Chinese tale of Lamb is susceptible to what Peter Kitson calls an 'orientalized version of China', and this ostensibly deprecating narrative of Chinese barbarity has been one of the grounds that leads Fang to associate the fictional prehistoric chaos in China with the potential wreckage of opium trade.[24] As Higgins has pointed out, however, Lamb's attitude towards China is more ambivalent than such a reading suggests, and in calling attention to how the essay in its entirety problematises the 'othering of […] the Chinese as foolish addicts', Higgins has underscored the importance of understanding Lamb's engagement with the other in 'Roast Pig' as an integral part of the essay as a unified whole.[25] Indeed Lamb's Chinese tale, which is presented as a tale of origin, shares with any aetiological myth the narratological focus of irreversible transformation or metamorphosis that relates the past to the present, and must be seen, therefore, as an essential prelude to the modern man Elia's disquisition of his own gastronomic obsession. What I intend to show is that Elia has pictured himself as the modern descendent of the fanatically gourmandised antediluvian Chinese, and that this lineage of irrationality is instrumental in enacting his critique of the self and of modernity.

It must first be observed that the Chinese tale of origin Elia relates is a story of mania. In Elia's chronicle, which he says is recorded in a Chinese manuscript, this mania started with the discovery of the divine taste of roast pig by an 'antediluvian' Chinese boy called Bo-bo, who, having accidently burnt down a cottage full of new-farrowed pigs, savoured the world's first taste of '*crackling*' as he fumbled about the remnants and tried to cool his scorched fingers by applying them to his

[24] Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, 2013), 169; Fang, *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs*, 62.
[25] Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 160.

mouth.[26] From Bo-bo the mania was spread to Ho-ti his father, who, having tasted the food in the same inadvertent manner as his son, began to set his house on fire as often as his piglets farrowed. It was then spread to the judge and jury in Pekin as they tried Bo-bo and Ho-ti for flouting the religious taboo of 'improving the good meat God had sent them' (246) and were similarly scorched by the 'evidence'. The mania eventually reached each and every person, at which point 'there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction […] until it was feared that the very science of architecture would in no long time be lost to the world' (246). Lamb's story, in short, is a narrative of an epidemic fever of gourmandism — a mass mania for roast pig developed from the mania of an individual, a craving that makes humanity willing to sacrifice religion and civilisation. As Allsop's recollection reveals, this is also where the vision and imagination of Lamb lies, over and above the inspiration he took from Thomas Manning.[27] Bo-bo's discovery of roast pig, as Monsman acutely observes, 'precipitates a threatening breakup of cultural patterns, a dissolution of rational behaviour, a loss of sanity'; but while Monsman considers the ending of the tale, where a sage appeared to affirm that the flesh of animal 'might be cooked' and 'the rude form a gridiron' was invented (245), represents a restoration of order, it is, really, the beginning of another story of mania — that of Elia's — which tells of the perpetuation of the irrationality, insanity, and disorder that had consumed the ancients in the pre-deluge age.[28]

For indeed the pathogen of Elia's almost psychopathic love of roast pig has to be recovered from the story of the Chinese mania, and especially from the case of Bo-bo, the 'patient zero'. Just as the ancient Chinese denied their religiosity and civility for gastronomic desires, so too Elia, in displaying his savage cruelty and sadism in his rhapsodic effusion over the slow death of a humanised suckling, exchanges his guilt

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[26] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig', *London Magazine*, 6 (September 1822), 245–248 (245).

[27] Thomas Allsop, *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols (London, 1836), I, 212–215. As Manning's version of the story goes, roast pig was discovered when an infant, left alone by its mother, escaped an accidental fire and found in its burnt house a pig. Finding the burnt pig very savoury, the infant took the food to his mother, who appreciated it much. She rebuilt the house, put a pig into it, and was about to set fire — when an old man suggested that a pile of wood would do as well. The next pig was killed before it was roasted. Thus ends Manning's story, which, clearly, is no story of a mania, let alone an epidemic one.

[28] Gerald Monsman, *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb Art of Autobiography* (Durham, NC, 1984), 75.

for pleasure and his humanity for barbarism. The thrust of both the ancient and modern gusto lies in the gratification roast pig offers for their palate, which, in Lamb's vision, is acutely sexual and apomictic. As Lamb's aetiology unveils, the genesis of roast pig is also the genesis of a kind of gastro-sexual sensuality: the very first reaction roast pig excites in Bo-bo was the 'premonitory moistening' of his 'nether lip' (245), which culminates in the 'tickling pleasure, which he experienced in his lower regions' (245) that renders him completely senseless to external stimulus and left him only with the ability to babble with his 'barbarous ejaculations' (246).[29] In the form of double entendre, Lamb draws a parallel between the lure of roast pig — the forbidden food in antediluvian China — and the temptation of one of the most primitive forms of human excitement, and it is this raw because savage, and mortal because risqué, 'food orgasm' that predetermines Elia's partiality for roast pig, which is 'no less provocative' than pineapple but does not 'woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her' or 'biteth' 'like lovers' kisses' (247). The mania for roast pig is, like sensual liberation, unitive and procreative; what Bo-bo the ancient epicure feels at the world's first taste of the '*princeps obsoniorum*' is not only akin to but also ancestral to the gastronomic satyriasis that possesses Elia the modern epicure. David Perkins talks of a 'sensual, obsessive, and cruel pleasure, aligned with sexual lasciviousness' in Elia's eulogium; it manifests itself in the Chinese tale as a form of proto-union between food and sex, which begets a genetically defined appetite that is maniacal, compulsive, and incorrigible.[30]

What sabotages Elia's professedly confident epicureanism is precisely this unhinged, paganistically Chinese origin of excess and lasciviousness. In 'Grace Before Meat', Lamb has already made a conjugation of gourmandism with sexual gratification and paganism:

> With the ravenous orgasm upon you, it seems impertinent to interpose a religious sentiment. It is a confusion of purpose to mutter out praises from a mouth that waters. The heats of epicurism put out the gentle flame of

[29] It is suggested that 'nether lip' appears in Shakespeare's *Othello* as the symbol of groin. See Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (Basingstoke, 1989), 170.
[30] David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge, 2003), 129.

> devotion. The incense which rises round is pagan, and the belly-god intercepts it for his own.[31]

In 'Roast Pig', the China-born maniacal desire for good food is inherently subversive not only because it is foreign and ungovernable but also because its wildness is inextricably linked with the 'infectious' paganism of China. Analogising Bo-bo's partaking of the forbidden food with Adam's sin in Eden, Lamb has fabricated a Chinese version of the biblical Fall, which imaginatively relates his fiction to the centuries of controversy over China's position in what the Judeo-Christian tradition reckoned to be universal history. Ever since the discovery of China's antiquity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, China had become a heretic challenge to biblical chronology and the universality it claimed; the knowledge that China had preserved a continuous record of its history that predated the supposed date of the Genesis flood and that contradicted 'the metanarrative of fall and corruption in most European universal histories' had led to innumerable efforts to resystemise the dating of biblical events and to reinterpret the scripture.[32] Lamb's contrivance of the pre-deluge Chinese Fall, and his attribution of it to a Chinese manuscript that records human activities in 'the first seventy thousand ages' (245), evidently engages his essay in dialogue with the Chinese 'pagan error' and the destabilising force it had exerted on Christianity and European self-knowledge. Inasmuch as Enlightenment

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[31] [Charles Lamb] Elia, 'Grace Before Meat', *London Magazine*, 4 (November 1821), 469–472 (470). It is worthy of note that Lamb, at the end of this essay, again refers to the irreligiousness of gastronomic desire, this time in relation to 'roast meat': 'I remember we were put to it to reconcile the phrase "good creatures," upon which the blessing rested, with the fare set before us, wilfully understanding that expression in a low and animal sense, — till some one recalled a legend, which told how in the golden days of Christ's, the young Hospitallers were wont to have smoking joints of roast meat upon their nightly boards, till some pious benefactor, commiserating the decencies, rather than the palates, of the children, commuted our flesh for garments, and gave us — *horresco referens* — trowsers instead of mutton' (472). The structural similarity between this ending and that of the Chinese tale in 'Roast Pig' — 'Thus this custom of firing houses continued, till in process of time, says my manuscript, a sage arose, like our Locke, who made a discovery, that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might be cooked […] without the necessity of consuming a whole house to dress it' (246) — seems to suggest a link between the Chinese mania and the 'low and animal sense' of gastronomic desire, which Elia avows to be his preference.

[32] Eun Kyung Min, *China and the Writing of English Literary Modernity, 1690–1770* (Cambridge, 2018), 20. See her chapter, 'China between the Ancients and the Moderns', for the role China played in the heated quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns in the Enlightenment period (15–46).

thinkers like Francis Bacon, John Webb, and Gottfried Leibniz had gone so far as to speculate that Chinese, rather than Hebrew, was the Adamic language, Lamb's ludicrous tale seems to be a particularly mischievous attempt to parody the all too credulous ancients of the sinophilic age whose belief was but a product of false imagination influenced by Jesuit casuistry.[33] Allusively, therefore, Lamb's parody is also a repartee to Manning's misguided passion for the Orient, his gourmandised Chinese being a modified version of his fiction about the cannibalistic Tartary.[34] Elia's identification with Bo-bo in 'Roast Pig' is, in multiple senses, an artful transposal of his distrust of old China, as narrated and discoursed, onto his self; by tracing his mania back to antediluvian China, he has made himself a confirmed pagan and a traitor to his own rational sensibilities and the Christian and English identities he insists upon.

Clearly, then, the Chinese tale of origin which opens into Elia's frenetic encomium on roast pig also opens into a state of self-denial and negation. The sadistic tendency Elia displays in relishing the way a 'young', 'tender', and 'guiltless' suckling 'twirleth round the string' and 'wept out his pretty eyes' (247) and the callous disregard of life he flaunts in supposing that the victim is 'content to die' in that 'fair sepulchre' of his 'grateful stomach' (247) are undercut and actually ironised by the explicit analogy he makes between a young pig and a human child throughout the essay, as for instance in his adaptation of Coleridge's 'Epitaph on an Infant'. The idea of roast pig, in fact, evokes so forcibly of Swift's recommendation of 'buying the Children alive, and dressing them hot from the Knife, as we do *roasting Pigs*' in *A Modest Proposal* (1729), that the satirical inkling of the essay can hardly be overlooked.[35] Lamb's *modus operandi* in 'Roast Pig' is most visible when, alluding again to 'Chimney-Sweepers', he loudly makes a parallel between the child sweep and the young suckling as like subjects of his consumerist and gastronomic fantasies:[36]

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[33] For a history about the discovery of China and the controversy it engendered, see, for example, David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, 2001), 39–49; J. J. Clark, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London, 1997), 43–50.

[34] Felicity James has discussed about the relationship between Manning and Lamb's 'Roast Pig'. See Felicity James, 'Thomas Manning, Charles Lamb, and Oriental Encounters', *Poetica*, 76 (2011), 21–35.

[35] Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from being a Burthen to their Parents, or the Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick* (Dublin, 1729), 8.

[36] Lamb possibly wrote 'Chimney-Sweepers' and 'Roast Pig' at close interval. 'Roast Pig' was almost the next Elian essay published after 'Chimney-Sweepers',

> I speak not of your grown porkers — things between pig and pork — those hobbydehoys — but a young and tender suckling — under a moon old — guiltless as yet of the stye — with no original speck of the *amor immunditiae*, the hereditary failing of the first parent […]
> ('A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig', 246–247)

> I like to meet a sweep — understand me — not a grown sweeper — old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive — but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek […]
> ('The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers', 405)

'Roast Pig', obviously, operates on the same kind of inverse argument that characterises the self-satirical and socially critical 'Chimney-Sweepers'; like the child sweep, the young suckling is subject to the self-ironic callousness of the bourgeois Elia, whose sentiment is tacitly and subtextually sympathetic and benignant. Perkins, reading 'A Dissertation' against the context of the animal rights movement of the early nineteenth century, considers the essay 'a positive contribution to the campaign against cruelty to animals' that 'falls into the genre of Romantic confession'.[37] This, I think, is the closest to the social imagining and critical awareness 'Roast Pig' raises, given Lamb's private tenderness for animals and his attachment to his late brother John's active involvement in the animal rights campaign, and, perhaps most important, the fact that 'Roast Pig' was published two months after the world's first parliamentary legislation for animal protection, the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act, was passed in the British parliament in July 1822.[38] Lamb's typically egotistic and facetious style of writing may not render his

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save for the interlude of the reprinting of 'Confessions of a Drunkard' (a decade-old essay) when Lamb was abroad in Paris.

[37] Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, 129; 127. See his chapter, 'The Slaughterhouse and the Kitchen: Charles Lamb's "Dissertation Upon Roast Pig"' (116–129), for the arguments he advances.

[38] It is of passing interest to note that 'Roast Pig', together with 'A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People' published in the same issue of the *London Magazine* in September 1822, makes a rejoinder to the domestic intelligence *London* reported a month earlier in August concerning the passing of the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act and the Marriage Act Amendment. See 'Abstract of Foreign and Domestic Occurrences', *London Magazine*, 6 (August 1822), 187–92 (p. 192).

confessional spirit readily perceptible, but if we read 'Roast Pig' as a consistent narrative of iconoclastic mania — if we read the Chinese tale Lamb concocted as a rhetorical proposition that subverts his hyper-epicurean pretension — his apologetic and polemical play-acting of modern savagery becomes immediately transparent. It is this 'Oriental rhetoric' of Lamb that I have been trying to illuminate: a self-undermining rhetoric that is the point of departure for his egotistical writing and our reading of it, and a rhetoric that, being the artifice of 'Elia' (punningly 'a liar'[39]), operates as a marker that points to his own falseness and unreliability.

We have seen how, in 'Old China', 'Chimney-Sweepers', and 'Roast Pig', Elia's self-asserted Oriental fetish signifies a state of chaos, irrationality, and instability that subverts the authority of his master narrative and liberates the satiric and parodic force of his works. In these essays, Elia's critique and scepticism are directed both towards himself and the many selves that form the society he is a part of, and his self-reflexivity overlaps with the consciousness of a social observer who peruses the world about him without disowning his connection to it. Such a merging of the introspective with the commentative, or the inward-turning with the outward-turning, seems a particularly meaningful form of literary expression for a Romantic writer who repeatedly calls attention to his own unromanticness. For in wielding such a hybrid mode Lamb has not only founded his expression upon what is private, self-contained, solipsistic, and ergo expressly Romantic, but he has also engaged himself in what is, in Jones's words, the 'socially encoded, public, profane, and tendentious rhetoric' that is 'bound to be cast in the role of generic other, as *the* un-Romantic mode'.[40] Lamb's treatment of the Orient, likewise, is an unromantic-romantic hybrid: his Orient, rid of the mystic and epic colouring of Southey's nor the dreamy wildness of Coleridge's, is a prosaic, commodified, and almost frivolous unromantic existence, and yet his use of the exotic to mediate upon the domestic, and his use of its symbolic materialism to reflect on the dialectic of spirituality, constitutes a sentimentality that comes as distinctly Romantic. It is this literary

[39] George Barnett's meticulous study on the pronunciation of 'Elia' reveals that Lamb pronounced his pseudonym with an accented *i* and a short *e* — hence a homophone of 'a liar'. See George L. Barnett, 'The Pronunciation of "Elia"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 5 (Autumn 1965), 51–55. It may be noted, too, that 'Elia' is an anagram of 'a lie': 'A Lie; alias Elia' was first mentioned by Leigh Hunt, and it was reported that Lamb had also made the remark, that "'Elia' formed an anagram of "a lie"'. See 'London Magazine — Mr. Stephanoff', *Examiner*, 22 July 1821, 460–61 (461); E. V. Lucas, *Life of Charles Lamb*, 2 vols (London, 1905), II, 42.
[40] Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (New York, 2000), 3.

fusion, this hybridising of the romantic with the unromantic, that characterises Lamb's writing of the Orient; and this, I think, is also what delineates Lamb's essaying as a brand of Romanticism peculiar to him, a brand of unromantic Romanticism.

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The Hare and His Heirs: The Non-Binary Aesthetic of Lamb, Pater, and Wilde

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'[W]hen I meet an unknown person, and try to break off, here at this table, what I call 'my life', it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am—Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs.'
-- Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

'There is a [M]uslim prayer that says, 'Lord, increase my bewilderment,' and this prayer is also mine and the strange Whoever who goes under the name of 'I' in my poems—and under multiple names in my fiction[.]'
-- Fanny Howe, 'Bewilderment'

'Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, *to make the truth laugh*, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from the insane passion for the truth.'
-- Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*

Of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde once wrote that 'The true critic is he who bears within himself the dreams and ideas and feelings of myriad generations, and to whom no form of thought is alien, no emotional impulse obscure.'[1] Charles Lamb has often been dismissed as not 'serious' enough, while attempts to reassert him as a critic and writer have often pushed his 'seriousness' at the expense of his humorous brilliance, instead of handling both at once, in their inextricable complexity.[2] It is easy to feel the temptation to try 'to get a read on him, to know what his jokes and ironies are meant to be countenancing or disavowing.'[3] Yet it is the very inconsistency and multiplicity of the 'true

[1] All references to *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 2000-2019). VII, 244
[2] All references to *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas, 7 vols (London, 1903-5). Abbreviated, where necessary, to *CL*.
[3] Matthew Bevis, 'Charles Lamb… Seriously', in *Thinking Through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe (Oxford, 2018).

critic' that makes Lamb so entertaining and so fascinating. In anatomising, we can only reduce him: 'We murder to dissect.'

The best critical efforts, then, have been those that have remained truest to the ambiguous, inconsistent, plural spirit of Lamb. They do not try to force him into one of the very structures or value systems against which (as we shall see) he rebelled, but instead allow him to exist on his own terms. Usefully, Lamb's essays also *theorise* such an approach, in what can therefore be seen as a proto-queer theory. Viewing Lamb's aesthetic (which is simultaneously an ethic, an epistemology, and a style) as queer in its constant refusal to adhere to either pole of a binary – as what I shall call a 'non-binary aesthetic' – we can then resituate Lamb as the forerunner of two other nineteenth-century writers who also adhered to, as well as theorised, that aesthetic. David Russell has already begun to re-associate Lamb with Walter Pater, chief theorist of the Aesthetic Movement, but a more explicit and conscious connection between them, which Pater certainly felt, is yet to be made.[4] And it is well known that Oscar Wilde was influenced profoundly by Pater, but the striking similarities between him and Lamb, which could be the result of real influence by way of Pater, have gone unremarked. Lamb's non-binary aesthetic was continued by Pater and Wilde, becoming bolder and more *risqué* over time.

I will take the liberty of beginning this essay not with Lamb, nor even with Pater or Wilde, but with a fourth figure who lurks in the background of the lives and work of all three. Like the Colossus of Rhodes, John Keats bridges the nineteenth century from end to end. One of Keats' two most famous ostensible 'art for art's sake' passages (the other is the end of *Ode on a Grecian Urn*) is his formulation of the concept of Negative Capability, in an 1817 letter to his brothers. It is the philosophy explained here – a philosophy of epistemology, ethics, and, most importantly, of *style* – that links these four writers together: a shared philosophy, explained and enacted by each of them in their own, but

[4] Russell's book begins with a study of Lamb and ends with one of Pater. He makes analogies between the two and uses some of Lamb's terminology to elucidate Pater's ideas, but a really conscious genealogy from Lamb to Pater is left implicit. Similarly, Joseph Bristow notes that Pater's esteem for Lamb 'bears close comparison with Wilde's comments on [Thomas Griffiths] Wainewright', but with emphasis on Lamb and Wainewright's art criticism, and again no explicit line is drawn from Lamb to Wilde. See David Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton, 2017); Joseph Bristow and Rebecca Nicole Mitchell, *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery* (New Haven, 2015), p. 219.

recognisably familial, ways. Keats defined Negative Capability as the state:

> when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.[5]

One way of looking at Keats' well-known formulation is in light of queer theory as expounded by Judith Butler. Negative Capability is itself a non-binary aesthetic. To exist in 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts' is to exist outside of logic. In a world of noughts and ones, it is to be a nought-point-five, or a two, or to switch continuously from nought to one and back again. Logic being derived from 'logos', which is both 'reason' and '*word*', to exist outside of logic is to resist labels, to resist classification. 'To define is to limit.' A person who exists in such a state, as regards *gender*, causes trouble – 'gender trouble' – for those who 'irritably reach after fact and reason'. Butler explains that:

> the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility … [The] very notion of 'the person' is called into question by those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.[6]

Normative ideas of personhood might be more *visibly* disrupted by incoherence or discontinuity of gender, but it follows that incoherence or discontinuity of *any* sort in a personality can have an analogous effect. This non-binary aesthetic was practised by Lamb, Pater, and Wilde. 'In the making of prose,' wrote Pater in 1882, Lamb 'realises the principle of art for its own sake, as completely as Keats in the making of verse.'[7] It was specifically the traces of a non-binary aesthetic that Pater recognised and most admired in Lamb's work, and Wilde in Pater's. Wilde learnt the

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[5] John Keats, 'Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, ?27 December 1817' in *The Major Works*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford, 2001), 369-70 (370).
[6] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London, 1999), 13.
[7] All references to *The Works of Walter Pater*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, 2012). V, 109

foundations of his non-binary aesthetic, at least in large part, directly from Pater. Keats and Lamb I believe to be more a case of what biologists call 'convergent evolution' – by which I mean that the two arrived at a near-identical conclusion independently, without significant (if any) influence upon each other. Pater and Lamb are harder to judge: possibly Pater approved of Lamb and his non-binary aesthetic because he learnt it from him; possibly simply because he felt an affinity, having developed a similar style and philosophy to him by other means.

If Lamb and Keats developed their non-binary aesthetics independently, it seems that they shared some common determining conditions, and here I am inclined to follow David Russell, who suggests that the 'social confusion' of the beginning of the nineteenth century, as people poured into urban centres and 'social valuation' became increasingly uncertain, could be addressed by becoming either 'more or less knowing'. Attempts to become more knowing produced the nineteenth-century preoccupation with taxonomy, exemplified in the 'exact and exacting utilitarian systems of James Mill' or in the 'positivism and scientism' that followed.[8] The non-binary aesthetic, conversely, escaping the need to know and be known, to reason and be reasonable, finding instead the potential in 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts', and privileging above all else the pleasingly non-rational 'Beauty', was a 'less knowing' alternative. It was the same impulse that, a little later, generated the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne; it was the embracing of incoherence, discontinuity, and (very closely related) multiplicity that Walt Whitman would memorably espouse:

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
> (*Leaves of Grass,* III.51)

Russell rightly associates all this with the burgeoning liberalism of the early nineteenth century. Indeed, Linda Dowling points out that JS Mill himself lauded the virtues of those who deviated from societal norms – in *On Liberty*, he proclaimed:

> In this age the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. … [T]he amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the

[8] Russell, 5-6.

> amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained.[9]

It was this impulse, then, that Lamb and Keats both felt, and responded to in understandably similar ways, each independently producing a non-binary aesthetic of his own. It may be, furthermore, that certain elements of the non-binary aesthetic are a hallmark of Romantic writing in general. There are troubled traces of it in Coleridge's anxieties of (dis)unity: in Chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria*, he writes to himself as an anonymous 'friend' to both praise and query his own philosophy; while in *Christabel*, the shape-shifting Geraldine suggests both the allure and fear of discontinuity. Wordsworth, similarly, feels he has 'Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself / And of some other Being' (*Prelude*, II.32-3), and praises Coleridge for being

> no slave
> Of that false secondary power, by which
> In weakness we create distinctions, then
> Deem that our puny boundaries are things
> Which we perceive, and not which we have made. (220-24)

Regardless, it is the non-binary aesthetic of Lamb, essayist, that came to be most vital to Pater and Wilde as essayists.

What exactly do I mean by Lamb's non-binary aesthetic? It is centred in the structural properties of his essays. David Lazar observes that:

> [t]o read through the history of essays on the essay is to a large and fascinating extent to see practitioners of the form struggling to articulate what the form is and refusing to keep the form stable, refusing to narrow its sense of possible performative and formal dimensions, frequently inverting commonly accepted conventions[.]

On this basis he posits an inherent queerness in the essay form, with its almost unique potential to play with both sides of a binary and ultimately – if the essayist so desires – explode and dismantle that binary

[9] Quoted in Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 123.

altogether.[10] It has often been observed that Lamb, especially as Elia, 'sets up a firm conflictual binary, only to perform an evasion of its terms … introduc[ing] instead a style that is at once impersonal and rich in idiosyncrasy, spectral yet embodied, chronically evasive yet ardent in civility.'[11] In his 1823 essay, 'Imperfect Sympathies', Lamb/Elia appears to theorise his own style. He describes two antithetical sorts of mind. First, the 'comprehensive' mind, which will 'never admit [one] to see his ideas in their growth – if, indeed, they do grow, and are not rather put together upon principles of clockwork'. Second, the mind like *his*, that is 'suggestive merely', able to wander the 'border-land' between 'the affirmative and the negative', to 'hover … upon the confines of truth', to 'compromise' and to 'understand middle actions' (II, 59-60). The 'suggestive' mind is (as Russell fleetingly observes) a negatively capable one, existing on the 'border-land' or in the 'middle' of two definite options.[12] He demonstrates the 'suggestive' mind stylistically in this essay which, like many of his (that is, Elia's), is presented as a series of 'random word[s] in or out of season'. His non-binary aesthetic here is perhaps at its clearest when he describes its opposite, the aforementioned 'comprehensive' mind:

> You never witness his first apprehension of a thing. His understanding is always at its meridian—you never see the first dawn, the early streaks.—He has no falterings of self-suspicion. Surmises, guesses, misgivings, dim instincts, embryo conceptions, have no place in his brain, or vocabulary. The twilight of dubiety never falls upon him. Is he orthodox—he has no doubts. Is he an infidel—he has none either. Between the affirmative and the negative there is no border-land with him. You cannot hover with him upon the confines of truth, or wander in the maze of a probable argument. He always keeps the path. (II, 60)

The ideas presented here are, individually, clear enough, but they tumble over each other in his eagerness to release them to the world. This rapid flow of almost miscellaneous ideas, bordering on stream of consciousness, does make us feel we are 'witness[ing] his first apprehension of a thing', or at least his first attempted articulations of it. Secondly, he says that the 'comprehensive' mind 'stops a metaphor like a suspected person in an enemy's country' (II, 60): in this short passage alone, Elia uses two

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[10] David Lazar, 'Queering the Essay', *The Essay Review* (2013), <http://theessayreview.org/queering-the-essay/> [Accessed: 24/05/20].
[11] Russell, 22.
[12] Russell, 23.

extended metaphors, the first of light ('meridian', 'first dawn', 'early streaks', 'twilight'), the second of physical space ('border-land', 'confines', 'wander in the maze', 'path'); and of course one has to laugh at his use of a metaphor (simile) – and an excellent one at that – to express how the 'comprehensive' hates the things. Likewise, he is characteristically allusive. The phrase 'wander in the maze' appears to be a nod to Milton: to those fallen angels who 'reasoned high … And found no end, in wandering mazes lost' (*Paradise Lost,* II.558-61). Thirdly, he ventriloquises, using something like free indirect discourse, asking questions of the 'comprehensive' mind and answering them on 'his' behalf: 'Is he orthodox—he has no doubts. Is he an infidel—he has none either.' And these stand out as ventriloquism partly because of the absence of the hedging, qualifications, and parentheticals that usually predominate. The metaphors, allusions, and ventriloquism create a conceptual density, a thickness of possibilities, that, in varying forms, is the great practical hallmark of the non-binary aesthetic. Elia does not 'keep the path'. Or, he does, but he is constantly glancing left and right, at his surroundings and at alternative paths, as he strolls down it.

In this essay – despite all that – Elia claims to buy into the hegemonic notion that the 'comprehensive' mind is superior, referring with humility to his own 'suggestive' mind as part of 'an order of imperfect intellects' (II, 59). Elsewhere in Lamb's work, however, there is a glimmer of outright support for the power of the negatively capable, suggestive, non-binary mind. In 'On the Genius and Character of Hogarth' (1811), Lamb extolled the power of leaving ambiguities intact rather than trying to encompass a subject – with all its contradictory or multiplex intricacies – as a whole. It is a mark of artistic genius, Lamb writes, to 'extend … interest beyond the bounds of the subject' and 'ma[ke] a part stand for a whole', 'trust[ing]' the 'spectators or readers' to 'meet the artist in his conceptions half way.' Paradoxically, a deliberately incomplete representation reveals more *meaning* (or 'interest', as Lamb puts it) than one that tries (and necessarily fails) to show every part of a subject, to encapsulate it in its totality. Borrowing from Shakespeare, Lamb calls this 'imaginary work' (I, 74).

This concept fits neatly into Keats' description of Negative Capability, in which he rebukes Coleridge for 'being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge'. It is clear from Keats' unabashed forthrightness that a generation after Lamb's – and with much less attachment to Coleridge – it was possible to affirm the superiority, or at least to deny the *inferiority*, of the non-binary mind. Lamb's loyalty to Coleridge, despite the ups and downs of their relationship, was too

complete to be overcome. He admired his comprehensive mind, feeling his own to be insubstantial, a sense gestured at frequently in his letters. In one from 1800, he berates himself: 'My letter is full of nothingness. I talk of nothing. But I must talk. I love to write to you. I take a pride in it—. It makes me feel less meanly of myself' (VI, 84). Later the same year, writing from the 'Land of Shadows, Shadow-month', he responds to Coleridge's 'dismal homily upon "Realities"': 'We know, quite as well as you do, what are shadows and what realities. You, for instance, when you are over your fourth or fifth jorum … are the best of realities. Shadows are cold, thin things, that have no warmth or grasp in them.' After punning on Coleridge taking 'no umbrage' at his letter, he signs off with 'C. LAMB, *Umbra*' (VI, 162-3).

Lamb would not firmly avow the power of the non-binary mind. Several decades later, however, Walter Pater would continue Lamb's legacy but with the boldness, the confidence and certainty, of Keats. Traces of it are visible in essays as early as that mysterious one on 'Diaphaneitè', read to the Old Mortality Society in 1864 though only published in 1895, the year after his death.[13] Here he first sets out his vision for renewal in the nineteenth century, based on a personality type he calls 'diaphanous', 'A majority of [which type] would be the regeneration of the world' (VIII, 254). The diaphanous type, he explains, exists outside of those 'categories' 'recognise[d] by the world', which 'regards whatever falls within them as having a right to exist.' 'The world has no sense fine enough for these evanescent shades, which fill up the blanks between contrasted types of character' – that is, they exist in the spaces between categories, the infinitely divisible chasm between nought and one, the epistemological abyss (and it is no coincidence that 'abyss', etymologically, is the opposite of 'substance') (247-8). In 1800, Lamb disparaged himself as a shadow. Sixty-four years later, Pater praised the semi-divinity of 'evanescent shades' – 'shade' being the more useful, because more versatile word, encompassing both Lamb's meaning of 'shadow' as 'an unsubstantial image of something real', *and* a 'minutely differentiated degree or variety', like the fine scale between the two poles of a binary.[14] Curiously for my association of the non-binary aesthetic with queer theory, in the same essay, Pater strays into the very domain of Butler, declaring:

[13] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford, 2010), note to 'Appendix B: Diaphaneitè', 182.
[14] *shade*, n., senses II.5.b. and I.4.b, *OED Online* (1989), [accessed 26 August 2020].

> The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty; the statues of the gods had the least traces of sex. Here [in the diaphanous character] there is a moral sexlessness, a kind of impotence, an ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a divine beauty and significance of its own. (253)

Denise Gigante notes that in later life, in place of Elia, Lamb adopted the pseudonym 'Lepus', which 'plays on the Latin *lepores*, which can mean either the plural of *lepus* (hares) with a short *o*, or 'delicate' with a long'. 'Myths about hares abounded,' she explains, 'suggesting variously that this timid, panicky creature … changed its sex every year, that its male sex could also give birth, and that it was hermaphroditic.'[15] It is well known that Lamb did not like to be called 'gentle', as he repeatedly was: '[T]he meaning of gentle is equivocal at best,' he snaps at the offending Coleridge, 'and almost always means poor-spirited, the very quality of gentleness is abhorrent to such vile trumpetings' (*CL*, VI, 172). Using a persona identified with the similar quality of delicacy, then, smacks of self-deprecation. As evident in the above-quoted passage, Pater, like Lamb, recognised the association of insubstantiality with weakness, 'a kind of impotence' or, in Lamb's words, 'poor-spirited[ness]'. In a move bordering on paradox, however, Pater also associates it with the *divine*. 'Delicate' is a very Paterian adjective. It is always used approvingly – its six appearances in his essay on Lamb being no exception. His frequent use of it to describe Lamb and his work suggests that he exhibits something of that prized quality. Pater defines the style of Lamb's essays in words that are his own, but which by now should look strikingly familiar: his essays are full of:

> glimpses, suggestions, delightful half-apprehensions, profound thoughts of old philosophers, hints of the innermost reason of things, the full knowledge of which is held in reserve; all the varied stuff, that is, of which genuine essays are made. (V, 117)

Is Pater conscious that in describing Lamb's brilliance, he is echoing Lamb's own words – 'suggestions' recalling the 'suggestive' mind; 'half-apprehensions … the full knowledge of which is held in reserve' the meeting 'half-way' of imaginative work? A few pages earlier he has said that 'in the making of prose, [Lamb] realises the principle of art for its own sake, as completely as Keats in the making of verse' – is he also (or alternatively) remembering Keats' words on Negative Capability,

[15] Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven, 2005), 114.

praising Lamb for his capacity to work with 'half-knowledge' as Coleridge, in Keats' eyes, could not?

We have seen that Pater enshrined delicate, diaphanous unsubstantiality into his philosophy. He does the same with imaginative work. In his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, first published in 1873, Pater discusses the apparently unfinished sculptures of Michelangelo:

> Many have wondered at that incompleteness, suspecting however that Michelangelo himself loved and was loath to change it, feeling at the same time that they too would lose something, if that half-hewn form ever quite emerged from the rough hewn stone: and they have wished to fathom the charm of this incompleteness. Well! that incompleteness is Michelangelo's equivalent of colour in sculpture; it is his way of etherealising pure form, relieving its hard realism, communicating to it breath, pulsation, the effect of life. (I, 68)

Once again, we have a case of, put simply, less being more. In disavowing thoroughgoing precision, in hewing only 'half', something is *gained* rather than lost. Pater is confident in what exactly that effect is: it is to 'etherealise'; in other words, to make diaphanous, unsubstantial, delicate – and thus more convincingly imbued with '*life*'.

The 'Conclusion' to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, often seen not only as *Pater's* manifesto, but as that of the Aesthetic movement as a whole, is essentially an explanation of how to be always as *alive* as possible.[16] To achieve a 'quickened, multiplied consciousness', one must be constantly seeking new experiences, 'for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte or Hegel, or of our own' (I, 237-8). Pater seeks the 'multiplied' consciousness of Lamb (with his many personae), the category-defying non-binary aesthetic. He favours 'impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent' over systems static, prescriptive, stifling; the 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts' of Negative Capability, the 'suggestive' mind and essays of Lamb (235). 'Of this wisdom,' he famously concludes, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the

[16] Russell usefully describes *The Renaissance* a work of 'self-help', the 'Conclusion' as a bridge from the examples in the book, into our execution of the Aesthetic ethos in real life. Russell, 111-141.

highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake. (239) And it is a 'complete[] realis[ation]' of 'art for its own sake' that makes Lamb, for Pater, the prose Keats, and Keats the verse Lamb.

For Oscar Wilde, his most illustrious disciple, Pater achieved this non-binary aesthetic as perfectly as did Lamb for Pater. Yet again, when Wilde, in his 1890 review of *Appreciations*, describes the merits of Pater's essays, it is for the same reasons, and in much the same language, as we have seen from Lamb, Keats, and Pater himself. He enthusiastically defends the sometimes 'cumbersome' style of Pater's long sentences, so often (and often so unfairly) decried as 'purple prose', as the result of

> those side-issues suddenly suggested by the idea in its progress, and really revealing the idea more perfectly; or from those felicitous after-thoughts that give a fuller completeness to the central scheme, and yet convey something of the charm of chance; or from a desire to suggest the secondary shades of meaning with all their accumulating effect, and to avoid, it may be, the violence and harshness of too definite and exclusive an opinion. (VII, 245)

Here again is that ubiquitous word 'suggest(ed)'; here again 'shades', with all its apposite ambiguity, flexibility, of meaning. The slight difference in Wilde's analysis of Pater from Pater's of Lamb and Michelangelo, and Lamb's of Shakespeare and Hogarth and perhaps of himself, is that Wilde suggests a 'completeness' to the Paterian essay, achieved not through the withholding of detail but the near-*over*loading of it. Yet it has really a similar effect, as those crucial last words indicate. The 'violence and harshness of too definite and exclusive an opinion' is the violence of the 'more knowing', taxonomical urge, the 'comprehensive' mind. And an elusive half-ness, or a superabundant multiplicity, are equally effective ways of avoiding the perpetration of such violence, and of avoiding having that violence inflicted upon oneself. Being a nought or a one can be avoided by being a *two* as much as by being a *nought-point-five*.

Pater made Lamb's non-binary aesthetic into an artistic-philosophical movement. The *avant-garde* of a generation were inspired by it, and Oscar Wilde was at its perfectly-coiffed head. It is surprising that so little has been written on the similarities between Lamb and Wilde, when Wilde seems in many ways like the Second Coming of Lamb. Wilde took the non-binary aesthetic to its consummation. Michèle Mendelssohn describes the way that Wilde, during his 1882 lecture tour,

fascinated and troubled America with his 'sexual and ethnic ambiguities. *What is he?* Americans wondered.' This had the immediate effect of encouraging hordes of imitators who mocked him on the stages of the United States to far larger audiences than he himself had garnered.[17] Before long, however, he had found a way of dealing with critics and capitalising on his apparent contradictions – as well as his always-ready wit. '[I]rony says one thing, but it signals another', notes Mendelssohn: 'when we speak with irony, we speak in two voices simultaneously.'[18] Such a polyvocality mirrored his multiplex identity (as, at least, it was perceived by the masses), and Wilde learned to employ it with increasing idiosyncrasy.

Repeatedly, as with Lamb, critics have attempted to get to the bottom of what Wilde 'really' meant, to dig through the complex strata of irony and flippancy and other modes for which we scarcely have names, until eventually they will reach, they believe, the golden, perfectly single, perfectly consistent, neatly and clearly outlined *core*: Wilde said this, but he meant *this*. But 'in a net they seek to hold the wind.' Of course, it is easy to understand the critical temptation. In the work of a dazzling intelligence like Wilde's, we are taught that there must be a *system*. Yet it is possible to conceive of an intelligence that revolts against systems: an intelligence of a suggestive mind. 'Gilbert Ryle once observed that it is a fiction encouraged by historians of ideas that philosophers have certain doctrines or tenets; real philosophers think continuously, and the "tenets" in the history books are obtained by artificially arresting their thought.'[19] This is surely part of what Merlin Holland refers to as 'the Wildean puzzle'.[20] But there is more, specific to Wilde. An unorthodox but instructive view has been put forward by Matthew Kaiser, who posits that the nineteenth century was characterised by 'play', which was (paradoxically, one may think) often taken very seriously – very *earnestly* – indeed. However, Wilde, Kaiser argues, rebelled against the philosophy of play, actively attempting to 'transcend … the psychological and spiritual violence of competition'. To this end, in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1890), he:

> envisions an anticommunitarian communism, where people have no desire to compete with difference, or to enforce uniformity, and

[17] Michèle Mendelssohn, *Making Oscar Wilde* (Oxford, 2018), 150-52.
[18] Mendelssohn, 159.
[19] A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (London, 2007), 124.
[20] Merlin Holland (ed.), 'Introduction to the Essays', *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, 5th edn. (London, 2003), 907-12 (909).

> where energy is not 'wasted in friction', the garden growing tall with unclassifiable, individualistic flowers, artistic self-creations, oblivious to popular opinion. Artists play for no team.[21]

A utopian vision of unclassifiability; of acceptance born of universal Negative Capability; a dream of overarching non-binarism, never having to choose a team. Like Lamb and Pater, Wilde cultivated a character and a voice that, through their very unknowability, forced commentators (and still force them today) to confront their heavy-handed and presumptuous use of categories, to exercise their own Negative Capability.

From Dorian Gray to Sir Robert Chiltern, Wilde's fictional writings are full of characters with double, or even multiple, lives, epitomised, of course, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In Wilde, everyone is a perfect Dr. Jekyll. The beauty of character is that it allows the writer to be all their selves at once, in their natural opposition, and to speak in all their voices but through other mouths than their own, with each voice equally loud and no solitary one having to be prioritised. Characters can represent different parts of oneself. Declan Kiberd argues that:

> In the final analysis of the play it becomes clear that the multiple self is Wilde's own and that the stage space contains the field of force that is the Wildean mind. All of the characters in *The Importance of Being Earnest* talk alike, which is to say like Wilde. What the play asks us to endorse in the end is not so much this person or that as an attitude of mind – the morality of the fluid or multiple self.[22]

There may have been in Wilde something not only of the obvious Algernon and Jack, but also of Gwendolen, Cecily, Dr. Chasuble, Miss Prism, even Lady Bracknell. Perhaps, indeed, the *whole play* is a prism, and Wilde the white light dispersed into the many colours of his characters.[23] More striking still, however, are his essays. 'The Truth of

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[21] Matthew Kaiser, *The World in Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept* (Oxford, 2012), 149-50.
[22] Declan Kiberd, 'Oscar Wilde: The Resurgence of Lying', in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge, 1997), 276-294 (284).
[23] The possible objection of the plays being satires is easily answered by Kaiser, who points out that to be able to laugh at oneself gives one a special sort of imperviousness to the derisive laughter of others, laughing also at his own competitiveness (the attack inherent in satire), and so undermining it as is his constant aim. Kaiser, 153.

Masks' (1886) ends with a spectacular display of the non-binary aesthetic in action, *as that non-binary aesthetic is theorised*. It is brilliant because it forces its reader to use their own Negative Capability, or to depart in disgruntlement, with the sense of one cheated. Wilde writes:

> Not that I agree with everything I have said in this essay. There is much with which I entirely disagree. The essay simply represents an artistic standpoint. For in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true. (IV, 228)

It is no coincidence that two of Wilde's finest essays – 'The Critic as Artist' and 'The Decay of Lying' (both 1891) – are written in dialogue. As Merlin Holland observes, 'There is a deliciously subversive quality about both of them and presented in dialogue form he is able to take as many stances as he wishes, to argue with himself and still remain unaligned.'[24] There is no more emphatic way of avoiding 'the violence and harshness of too definite and exclusive an opinion'. Although more pointed than *The Essays of Elia* – more actively and obviously political, and subversively so at that – these dialogues of Wilde are still essentially Lambish – recall, for instance, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', in which Elia responds to 'Mr. Lamb's "Works"', giving 'the other side of the argument' (II, 12). Wilde's dialogues are Lamb's non-binary aesthetic *mechanised*, employed purposefully to shake the bedrock of the late-Victorian establishment. Or perhaps more to 'tickle' it, as Pope said of *The Rape of the Lock*.[25] Wilde's revolutionary essay style he termed the 'Oxford temper', an antinomian 'free play of ideas', putting Darwin into conversation with Hegel, Plato in argument with Herbert Spencer.[26] Whether with the voices of his multiple self, or with the ventriloquised voices of others altogether, Wilde's works are polyvocal in a way that proves the intellectual power, and (antithetical to what we are so often expected to believe) perhaps the *honesty*, of presenting multiple points of view and refusing to settle on one conclusive, crisply delineated, doctrine: of the non-binary aesthetic.

We have seen the confusion caused by Wilde's multiplicity – how his 'incoherence' and 'discontinuity', according to rigid Victorian categorisation, threatened precisely the kind of 'trouble' described by

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[24] Holland, 910.
[25] Alexander Pope, cited in Matthew Bevis, *A Very Short Introduction to Comedy* (Oxford, 2013), 80-1.
[26] Dowling, 119.

Judith Butler. Indeed, there *is* something troubling about a person who brazenly professes self-contradictory opinions. Perhaps that is why we are inclined to laugh at them. And obviously Wilde and laughter go hand-in-Medieval-hand. He wrote social comedies which still bring the house down today. He alleviated those could-be sombre essays with sudden unexpected bursts of levity, like the bright sun breaking through black clouds. In brief, 'The power of humour to engage his audience, no matter how serious the subject matter, becomes a Wildean trademark'.[27] And in combining his non-binary aesthetic with humour – *in generating humour from his non-binary aesthetic* – Wilde reveals himself to be, consciously or not, the great heir of Charles Lamb. For of course Lamb courted laughter just as much as Wilde, perhaps more. Who, having once read it, can forget De Quincey's report of him 'soliloquizing' 'Diddle, diddle dumpkins'?[28] Lamb knew well the entertainment value of unconcealed inconsistency – of incoherence, of discontinuity. He plays with it even on the finest stylistic level. Take, for example, the start of 'The Two Races of Men' (1820): the very first sentence is a characteristic disarming blend of certainty and uncertainty. 'The human species', he begins with what sounds like *conviction* – perhaps it is the combination of the definite article and the Latinate (and so vaguely scientific-sounding) 'species'. Thus, it is in full expectation of a firm declarative (what else could follow such conviction?) that we are instead proffered the hilariously equivocal 'according to the best theory I can form of it' (*CL,* II, 22). We are perfectly set up by Lamb to be caught off-guard, and through variations on this exuberant formula (such as the sudden switch, after four high-spirited paragraphs, to pathos with 'Reflections like the foregoing were forced upon my mind by the death of my old friend…' (23) and then immediately back again as he begins to describe that old friend), we are kept guessing, and laughing, throughout the rest of the essay.

Lamb as Elia theorises, and enacts, such comic performativity in his 1822 essay 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century'. The marked artificiality of eighteenth-century comedies meant, he argues, that one did not have to constantly employ one's rigid moral sense while one watched, as had come to be required by the didactic comedy of the early nineteenth. Lamb writes:

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[27] Holland, 908.

[28] Quoted in Adam Phillips (ed.), 'Introduction' to Charles Lamb, *Selected Prose* (London, 1985), xi-xxviii (xvi).

> All the neutral ground of character, which stood between vice and virtue; or which, in fact, was indifferent to neither, where neither properly was called in question; that happy breathing-place from the burthen of a perpetual moral questioning—the sanctuary and quiet Alsatia of hunted casuistry—is broken up and disfranchised, as injurious to the interests of society. The privileges of the place are taken away by law. We dare not dally with images, or names, of wrong. We bark like foolish dogs at shadows. (II, 142)

The visible unreality, performativity, of the old comedies created for Elia a liberating non-binary 'breathing-place' in which usual (moral) classifications were all but meaningless. A fine example of his non-binary aesthetic in action, he demonstrates such performativity for us as he explains it. Here, for instance, are his ubiquitous parentheticals, his minute qualifications which paradoxically both increase his precision and intellectually dazzle us (to which editorial disagreement over how to punctuate that first sentence is testament): those 'felicitous after-thoughts' that in Pater's prose 'convey[ed]' to Wilde 'something of the charm of chance'. Here his usual vivid metaphors: the old plays as an 'Alsatia', a criminal underworld and yet a safe space; the characters mere 'shadows', on their own plane of existence. At times, as if talking as a character (beyond Elia), he employs a semi-legalistic register, like a forthright political opinion piece, using such apparently disproportionate vocabulary as 'disfranchised', 'interests', 'privileges', 'law'. And throughout, read aloud, we find alliteration, reinforcing that lively, mock-biting, theatrical style.

Yet all the critics who are desperate to work out just how 'serious' Lamb and Wilde are, are testament to the paradoxical *naturalness* of their theatrical styles. One is forced to consider what is the difference between them; whether, when it comes down to it, there *is* a difference at all. All those things, all those ideas, we take, implicitly, to be natural – *are* they? And thus we return to Judith Butler, who speculates on the subversive potential of (gender) parody: 'Just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalised performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself.'[29] The gender trouble caused *accidentally* by the (gender)queer person is caused *intentionally* by the drag artist. It is gender trouble mechanised – joyously. To the spectator whose identity appears to fall into those categories 'recognised by the world', it says, 'but what is the legitimacy of those categories when I can do *this*?' It says, 'We

[29] Butler, 164.

both know that *I* cannot be classified… but are you sure that *you* can?' And it winks.

This is the effect of the non-binary aesthetic when taken to its furthest possibilities, when it embraces and uses the humour that is inherent in apparent nonsense. This is humour which marks trouble, which marks, as Pater says, revolutionary potential – but all, always, with a grin. For the non-binary aesthetic to thrive, one has to be able to accept it in its strangeness, to indulge it and to indulge *in* it – and thus to take on something of its creative, liberating power. It is as useful for the critic as for the artist – and why, as these three both say and demonstrate, must there be a distinction? The non-binary aesthetic is the delicate power of declaring 'I don't know'. Not the 'I don't know' of the ignorant: of having not sufficiently thought about the matter: but the 'I don't know' of one who has done all that, and is intelligent enough, honest enough, and courageous enough to say it still, to conclude inconclusively.

Heather Love writes that '[r]ather than trying to draw Pater out, contemporary queers find themselves wanting to borrow the obliqueness – as well as the beauty and the glamour – of Pater's diaphanous position.'[30] The appeal need not end at matters of gender and sexuality, nor need it end with Pater. He, Lamb, and Wilde all demonstrate non-binary aesthetics of radical half-ness or multiplicity, a deliberate incoherence and a revelry in uncertainties. In their *enaction* of it they anticipate modernists such as Virginia Woolf, with her frequent reflections on the plurality of the self: 'how many different people are there not – Heaven help us – all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? Some say two thousand and fifty-two.'[31] In their *theorisation* of it, they anticipate such as Butler herself, and as critics there is much to be gained from doing unto them as they did unto others. In 'Edax on Appetite' (1811), Lamb as Edax considers the 'horrible suggestion!' of being dissected to discover the cause of his 'original peculiarity of constitution': 'as I have been cut up by the sarcasms of my friends, so I shudder when I contemplate the probability that this animal frame … may be cut up also' (124). When we avoid anatomising these

[30] Heather Love, 'Exemplary Ambivalence', *The Pater Newsletter*, 52 (2007), 25-30 (26).

[31] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Ware, 1995), 152. It is certainly notable that Woolf was taught Greek by Clara Pater, Walter's sister, who inspired the character of Miss Craye in her 1928 short story 'Slater's Pins Have No Points'. See Colleen Lamos, 'Virginia Woolf's Greek Lessons', in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture*, ed. by Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York, 2006), 149–164.

three, and instead embrace their inconsistencies, multiplicities, incoherencies, and discontinuities, we find a liberating democratic force of creativity, of exciting literary and critical possibility.

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Wordsworth's Spenserian Poem

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Wordsworth's variety in narrative verse and narrative forms is extraordinary. It is perhaps more extraordinary if we consider this variety from the summer of 1793 to the spring of 1799. In this period of a little more than half a decade, Wordsworth's productions in narrative verse developed from neoclassical first-person tour poetry, to radical revision of Spenserian romance, to reworkings of medieval ballads and their eighteenth-century reinterpretations, to blank-verse tales like *The Ruined Cottage,* and finally to blank-verse autobiographical epic in the two-part *Prelude*. Over the past decade, I have spoken at the Winter School on some of my favourites among these narrative poems, especially 'The Idiot Boy' and *Peter Bell*—narratives that offer new delights and surprises with each re-reading.

The list of Wordsworth's narrative forms from 1793–1799 suggests one point worth further exploration. Blank verse came to dominate Wordsworth's poetic production, along with the sonnet form after 1802. Nevertheless, for the rest of his writing life, Wordsworth produced new narrative poems, of variable power, in all of the abovementioned forms except for one. Probably around 1795–6, Wordsworth stopped writing narrative poetry in the Spenserian stanza. He published what was then the soldier's widow's tale as 'The Female Vagrant' in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), and revised *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* into *Guilt and Sorrow* for publication in *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842). Yet after finishing *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* and perhaps making some attempts to expand it in 1795–6, Wordsworth never wrote another long Spenserian narrative. We have only limited evidence, and from decades later, to suggest why Wordsworth stopped writing Spenserian narrative.[1]

[1] In 1829, Wordsworth wrote to Catherine Grace Godwin that 'The Spenserian stanza is a fine structure of verse' but 'also almost insurmountably difficult' *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt and Alan G. Hill, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Oxford, 1978), II, 58. Later in the same letter he adds that 'One great objection to [Spenserians] (an insurmountable one, I think, for circumstantial narrative) is the poverty of our language in rhymes.' Yet between these objections come high praise for Spenser's narrative:

However, we can examine how this one Spenserian narrative, and its uses of Spenser's epic, relate to the development of Wordsworth's narrative poetry in other directions.

This question is worth considering simply on the grounds of Wordsworth's enduring love for Spenser's poetry, although there are other reasons to ask it, such as what it tells us about Wordsworth's engagement with British literary antiquarianism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Two quotations about Wordsworth reading Spenser are often repeated in Wordsworth criticism. The first is from the *Memoirs* of Christopher Wordsworth, Jr.:

> the Poet's father set him very early to learn portions of the works of the best English poets by heart, so that at an early age he could repeat large portions of Shakspeare, Milton, and Spenser.[2]

As Duncan Wu notes, 'These "portions" might have been learned from such anthologies as' Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts in Verse and Prose*.[3] The second quotation is Wordsworth's remark to Henry Crabb Robinson, also recorded in Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs:*

> When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction, that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton. These I must study, and equal *if I could;* and I need not think of the rest.[4]

This comment exaggerates the narrowness of Wordsworth's reading; he had a wide and deep knowledge of classical and English poetry, and he knew the work of many now obscure poets by heart. Nevertheless, these anecdotes demonstrate the value Wordsworth placed on Spenser's work. In 1833 we find him quoting *Faerie Queene* Book 2 (1590) from memory, as he looks back to his childhood on the banks of the Derwent[5].

'In him the stanza is seen in its perfection' and 'you will observe that Spenser never gives way to violent and conflicting passion, and that his narrative is bare of circumstances…'

[2] Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, 2 vols (London, 1851), I, 34.

[3] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge, 1993), 99.

[4] Christopher Wordsworth, *MWW*, II, 470.

[5] De Selincourt and Hill, II, 640. We may assume from memory, since Wordsworth slightly misquotes *FQ* 2.12.75, writing 'So in the passing of a day, doth pass / Of mortal life the bud, the leaf, the flower.' Spenser writes, '"So

This article will focus on Spenserian verse as an important variety of Wordsworth's narrative, and attempt to answer three questions: (1) How does Wordsworth's Spenserian narrative differ from other eighteenth-century Spenserian narratives? (2) How does Wordsworth's Spenserian narrative employ language, imagery, character, incident, and style from *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) to serve its own arguments and themes? And (3) how do Wordsworth's uses of Spenser's epic relate to the cessation of Wordsworth writing Spenserian narrative around 1796, and the shift to blank-verse narrative through *The Ruined Cottage* and into the 1799 *Prelude?*

Spenser in the Eighteenth Century

Before discussing Wordsworth and Spenser, we must remember that the reputation of Spenser in the eighteenth century was not the same as it is now. Earl Wasserman's 1947 study *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* remains unsurpassed as a comprehensive survey of how critics and poets in the generations before the British Romantics read early modern poetry; it is worth summarising some relevant background on Spenser in the eighteenth century before considering the influences of *The Faerie Queene* on the Salisbury Plain poems.

Critics writing in the century before Wordsworth's birth generally agreed that early modern poetry from Chaucer to Milton demonstrated great 'strength' (as Dryden termed it—meaning imaginative power) but little technical skill (Wasserman 25–6). Modern poetry was superior to Elizabethan, and modern poetry began with the restoration of Charles II in 1660. John Dryden lauded Edmund Waller (1606–1687) as the father of English verse, and Dryden's opinion became canon. Dryden was not blind to the power of Elizabethan verse; he 'recognised two aspects of great literature, the fire and brilliance of genius and the correctness of conscious artistry' (Wasserman 15). The trouble was that he and his contemporaries—and the Augustans who followed them—could not often accept 'the fire and brilliance of genius' as more important than technical precision.

Ignorance of early modern poetry after the Restoration added to this prejudice, although editions of even minor Elizabethan poets were available. Because the language of early modern texts, including

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passeth, in the passing of a day, / Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flower…' Wordsworth's transpositions suggest the small errors that creep into verses memorized decades earlier.

Shakespeare's, confounded many neoclassical readers (even, on many occasions, Samuel Johnson), fewer editions were printed than we might expect. For a readership that struggled to understand Shakespeare, Spenser presented an even more esoteric challenge. Thus,

> Whereas Shakespeare's collected plays appeared approximately fifty times during the century, and *Paradise Lost* well over a hundred, the eighteenth century was satisfied with but nine printings of the *Faerie Queene*.[6]

Dryden founded his critical opinions about the Elizabethans mostly on his knowledge of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson, although he had probably read Spenser, Chapman, Massinger, and perhaps Samuel Daniel. In these authors, he 'recognised the value of sheer imagination and enthusiasm'; in his epistle to Congreve, he writes (in language that chimes nicely with the antiquarian imagery of the Salisbury Plain poems):

> Strong were our sires, and as they fought, they writ,
> Conqu'ring with force of arms, and dint of wit;
> Theirs was the giant race, before the Flood…

He continues:

> Our age was cultivated thus at length;
> But what we gained in skill we lost in strength.
> Our builders were with wont of genius curst;
> The second temple was not like the first…[7]

Other neoclassical authors, with the exception of Pope, shared Dryden's limited knowledge. Defoe knew only Shakespeare and Jonson, and no Chaucer. Swift knew Chaucer, Shakespeare and Jonson, but not well; he wrote to John Gay: 'I have heard of the Wife of Bath, I think it is

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[6] Earl Reeves Wasserman, *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* (Urbana, Illinois, 1947), 92.

[7] John Dryden, 'Epistle the Twelfth. To My Dear Friend Mr. Congreve, on His Comedy Called The Double Dealer', in *The Works Of John Dryden: Illustrated With Notes, Historical, Critical, and Explanatory, and a Life of the Author, by Sir Walter Scott... Revised and Corrected By George Saintsbury*, ed. by Walter Scott and George Saintsbury, Literature Online - English Poetry (London, 1882), 55–57 <https://search.proquest.com/books/epistle-twelfth-my-dear-friend-mr-congreve-on-his/docview/2147974051/se-2?accountid=10105>. The first three lines are quoted in Wasserman, 26.

Shakespeare.'[8] Even the Edinburgh Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Dr. Hugh Blair, writing in his *Lectures on Rhetoric* (a text that exerted enormous influence on the theoretical development of the *Lyrical Ballads),* stated:

> The present form of our English Heroic rhyme in couplets, is a modern species of Versification. The measure generally used in the days of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and King Charles I was the stanza of eight lines, such as Spencer employs, borrowed from the Italian; a measure very constrained and artificial.[9]

Blair is incorrect on three counts here: that English rhyming couplets are a modern invention (unless he includes Chaucer and Gower as moderns); that the Spenserian stanza was the dominant early modern verse form; and that the Spenserian is an eight-line stanza. Fortunately, Wordsworth may not have seen this comment, written as it was for the second edition of 1785; otherwise, he may have felt less confident in Blair's more general opinions on poetry 'in its ancient original condition'.[10]

Despite this century-long critical gulf, Wordsworth could draw on a range of eighteenth-century precursors when he chose Spenserian form and narrative for *Salisbury Plain*. The work of James Thomson heavily influenced Wordsworth's poetic development from his Hawkshead days to the publication of *An Evening Walk*, and he had read Thomson's Spenserian poem *The Castle of Indolence* (1748) by 1787–9, based on an allusion in an early sonnet.[11] The first canto of Thomson's poem occasionally shows flashes of skill in employing Spenser's voluptuous language and fanciful imagery, yet on the whole *The Castle of Indolence*, begun as a burlesque, veers between the intentionally ludicrous and the didactic. If it served as any inspiration for *Salisbury Plain*, it would have been to show Wordsworth that imitation of Spenser's luxurious language *was* possible in a late-eighteenth-century idiom—but, more importantly, that imitation of form and language alone did not make for a good story.

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[8] Swift to Gay, 20 November 1729, in Pope *Works* VII, 167. Quoted in Wasserman, 30.
[9] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Second, 3 vols (London, 1785), III, 112. Quoted in Wasserman, 32–3.
[10] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols (London, 1783), II, 322; Wu, *WR 1770-1799*, 181–82.
[11] Wu, *WR 1770-1799*, 137; *An Evening Walk*, ed. by James Averill (Ithaca and London, 1984), 52.

Similarly, William Shenstone's *The Schoolmistress* (1737), which Wordsworth mentions in 1799, but likely read at Hawkshead, occasionally rises to a pleasurable, sincere adaptation of Spenser.[12] Shenstone, following Pope, meant to use Spenser's perceived simplicity of feeling, and obscurity of language, to treat the 'low' subject of a country schoolmistress in a ludicrous style, rather than risk ridicule by writing his poem in proper heroic couplets. The expanded second and third editions of the poem present an odd mix of the bombastic and the sadistic, since the poem is mostly about a schoolmistress caning a boy:

> For brandishing the rod, she doth begin
> To loose the brogues, the stripling's late delight!
> And down they drop; appears his dainty skin,
> Fair as the furry coat of whitest Ermilin.[13]

Yet, Shenstone's additions show flashes of his sincere affection for Spenser's prettiness. The poem's descriptions of schoolboy games and sweets suggests its mild influence on the domestic and schoolday pleasures of the *1799 Prelude;* other stanzas suggest the purity of representations of rural life, husbandry, and the ever-present shadow of poverty in the *Lyrical Ballads:*

> One ancient hen she took delight to feed,
> The plodding pattern of the busy dame;
> Which, ever and anon, impell'd by need,
> Into her school, begirt with chickens, came;
> Such favour did her past deportment claim:
> And, if Neglect had lavish'd on the ground
> Fragment of bread, she would collect the same;
> For well she knew, and quaintly could expound,
> What sin it were to waste the smallest crumb she found.
>
> Herbs too she knew, and well of each could speak
> That in her garden sipp'd the silv'ry dew;
> Where no vain flow'r disclos'd a gaudy streak;
> But herbs for use, and physick, not a few,
> Of grey renown, within those borders grew:

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[12] Wu, *WR 1770-1799*, 126.

[13] William Shenstone, 'The School-Mistress. A Poem, in Imitation of Spenser', in *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands*, ed. by Robert Dodsley, 6 vols (London, 1763), I, 241–55 (ll.168-71) <https://www.eighteenthcenturypoetry.org/works/o5152-w0320.shtml>.

The tufted Basil, pun-provoking Thyme,
Fresh Baum, and Mary-gold of cheerful hue;
The lowly Gill that never dares to climb;
And more I fain would sing, disdaining here to rhime.[14]

Shenstone's expanded poem was so successful that it inspired a long list of imitators, most of whom used Spenserian narrative, often for the worst, to treat subjects 'suggesting rustic humbleness and domestic simplicity'.[15] This plethora of imitators, traced back to Shenstone, raises a barrier to critical understanding of the relationship between Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain poems and Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* because poets such as Henry Pye, Thomas Ager, and John Bidlake wrote Spenserian narratives in imitation of Shenstone, probably without reading Spenser. Indeed, Robert Burns wrote 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'—a poem that likely influenced the Salisbury Plain poems—in Spenserian stanzas, having read Shenstone's poem, but not Spenser's.[16] With this background in mind, let us look briefly at the eighteenth-century Spenserian narrative considered by contemporary criticism to have had the greatest influence on the first draft of *Salisbury Plain:* James Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771).

The narrative influences of Beattie's *Minstrel*

Beattie's *The Minstrel, or, the Progress of Genius* is a two-part poem written in Spenserian stanzas. Unlike Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* and Shenstone's *Schoolmistress,* it lacks any touch of the ludicrous, though contemporary readers, unlike Wordsworth, may find its earnestness unintentionally humorous. Wordsworth first encountered the poem at Hawkshead, thanks to his teacher Thomas Bowman.[17] Ernest de Selincourt emphasizes the influence of the poem on Wordsworth's development years before *Salisbury Plain;* Wordsworth draws on Beattie's gothic imagery for *The Vale of Esthwaite,* demonstrating that he likely knew parts of the poem by heart by 1787. Duncan Wu notes that in 1793 Dorothy Wordsworth 'identified her brother with Beattie's protagonist'.[18]

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[14] Shenstone, ll.82-99.
[15] Wasserman, 114.
[16] Wasserman, 115.
[17] Thomas William Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead*, ed. by Robert S. Woof (London and New York, 1970), 344.
[18] Wu, *WR 1770-1799*, 12, 11; *Descriptive Sketches*, ed. by Eric Birdsall (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 86; *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. by Ernest De Selincourt and Chester L. Shaver, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1967), 100–101.

It is easy to understand why, especially in 1793. Beattie's protagonist, Edwin, is an aspiring young bard who, guided by nature—and a long-winded hermit—shuns the 'fretful stir unprofitable / and the fever of the world' and embraces rural life and idyllic poverty. The text describes Edwin's childhood in rural Scotland:

> You guess each circumstance of Edwin's birth;
> The parent's transport, and the parent's care;
> The gossip's prayer for wealth, and wit, and worth;
> And one long summer-day of indolence and mirth.[19]

The last line anticipates the beginning of the two-book *Prelude:*

> Beloved Derwent! fairest of all Streams!
> Was it for this that I, a four year's child,
> A naked Boy, among thy silent pools
> Made one long bathing of a summer's day?[20]

Similarly, *The Minstrel's* description of Edwin's mountain-climbing anticipates the ascent of Snowdon that would ultimately conclude the *1805 Prelude:*

> And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
> When all in mist the world below was lost.
> What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
> Like shipwreck'd mariner on desert coast,
> And view th'enormous waste of vapour, tost
> In billows, lengthening to th'horizon round,
> Now scoop'd in gulfs, with mountains now emboss'd!
> And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound,
> Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound![21]

These examples show the influence of Beattie on Wordsworth's blank verse, rather than his Spenserian verse. How does Beattie's poem compare to Wordsworth's own Spenserians?

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[19] James Beattie, 'The Minstrel', in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1776), I, xv.132-5.

[20] *The Prelude, 1798-1799, by William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, 1977), I, 16–19.

[21] Beattie, I, xxi.181–89. In this stanza, the simile comparing mountain-climbing above a sea of cloud and 'shipwreck'd mariner on desert coast' also suggests the 'Analogy Passage' from Wordsworth's account of climbing Snowdon, a passage excised around March 1804 when the ascent of Snowdon comprised the fifth book of a five-book *Prelude*. See *The Five-Book Prelude*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1997), 201–4, ll.74–140.

It is possible to overstate the influence of *The Minstrel* on the Salisbury Plain poems. *Salisbury Plain* (the first version of the poem) turns to the climax of Beattie's poem in order to find a suitable conclusion. However, the Salisbury Plain poems demonstrate that, at 23 and 25 years old, Wordsworth possessed a deeper understanding of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* than his neoclassical precursors. Furthermore, I suggest that the differences between the 1793 and 1795 versions of Wordsworth's poem show that his understanding of, and confidence in using, Spenserian narrative develops rapidly—before his abandoning of the form sometime between 1796–1799.

Beattie and Spenser in *Salisbury Plain*

We can begin with examining the relationship between Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the first version of Wordsworth's poem, referred to as 'A Night on Salisbury Plain' or, in criticism since 1975, simply as *Salisbury Plain* (1793). Tom Duggett makes a convincing argument that *Salisbury Plain* demonstrates Wordsworth participating in a Gothic revival that runs deeper than merely 'adapting the conventions of Gothic horror to a poetic articulation of the antiquarian stance of British radicalism in the early 1790s'.[22] Hallucinatory, graphic images of druidic sacrifice in the poem invert the neoclassical identification of Gothic culture with barbarity and Celtic/Druidic culture with refinement. The text's incomplete denouement follows both the structure of *The Minstrel,* and the personifications and imagery of the *Faerie Queene.* The evidence suggests that Wordsworth draws on a deep knowledge of both texts, rather than simply adapting the *Faerie Queene* through Beattie's eighteenth-century Spenserians. A good example to support this hypothesis occurs in the penultimate stanza of *Salisbury Plain:*

> Insensate they who think, at Wisdom's porch
> That Exile, Terror, Bonds, and Force may stand:
> That Truth with human blood can feed her torch,
> And Justice balance with her gory hand
> Scales whose dire weights of human heads demand
> A Nero's arm. Must Law with iron scourge
> Still torture crimes that grow a monstrous band
> Formed by his care, and still his victim urge,

[22] Tom Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (New York, 2010), 71.

With voice that breathes despair, to death's tremendous verge?[23]

This stanza contains eight personifications, including that of female Justice. Excessive undeveloped personifications—rather than Spenser's more careful rendering of personifications, such as 'Despayre', into significant characters—align this stanza more closely to neoclassical poetry than to Spenser.

On the other hand, the stanza contains a personification of 'Law with iron scourge'. Scholars such as Duncan Wu have noted the allusion to *Faerie Queene* Book 5 here, in which Artegall, the knight representing the virtue of justice, receives as his squire the iron man Talus, armed with an iron flail:

> But when she [Justice] parted hence, she left her groome
> An yron man, which did on her attend
> Alwayes, to execute her stedfast doome,
> And willèd him with Artegall to wend,
> And doe what ever thing he did intend.
> His name was Talus, made of yron mould,
> Immoveable, resistlesse, without end.
> Who in his hand an yron flale did hould,
> With which he thresht out falshood, and did truth unfould.[24]

Though ostensibly Artegall's faithful servant in the *Faerie Queene*, Talus is a morally ambiguous character: 'To what extent Talus is the justifiable arm of the law, and to what extent he embodies police brutality, is one of the fundamental questions of social justice in the poem.'[25]

In comparison, *The Minstrel* contains a stanza strongly reminiscent of the penultimate stanza of *Salisbury Plain,* and in a similar position in that poem's argument:

> 'What cannot Art and Industry perform,
> 'When Science plans the progress of their toil!
> 'They smile at penury, disease, and storm;

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[23] *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Ithaca and London, 1975), 37, ll.514–22.
[24] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by Abraham Dylan Stoll (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 2006), V, 1.12.
[25] Spenser, V, intro. xvii. For example, in the first canto of Book 5, Talus demonstrates his relentless nature when he captures the profiteering Munera in her castle. Talus hurls her over the castle walls, and she falls to her death.

'And oceans from their mighty mounds recoil.
'When tyrants scourge, or demagogues embroil
'A land, or when the rabble's headlong rage
'Order transforms to anarchy and spoil,
'Deep-versed in man the philosophick Sage
'Prepares with lenient hand their phrenzy to asswage.'[26]

Beattie's stanza does not allude to Talus directly, despite its use of the word 'scourge'. However, these lines may demonstrate Beattie's understanding of Spenser, and Beattie's use of Spenser's incidents to further an eighteenth-century argument. Here the 'tyrant', rather than a personification of justice, wields the scourge. In the next two lines, 'the rabble's headlong rage' recalls the same moment in *Faerie Queene* Book 5, Canto 2 to which *Salisbury Plain* alludes, in which Artegall and Talus encounter the 'Egalitarian Giant' or the 'Giant with the Scales', accompanied by a mob who admire his false equivalences and promises of redistribution, 'In hope by him great benefite to gain, / And uncontrolled freedom to obtaine'.[27] Artegall debates and defeats the giant and Talus kills him. Beattie's stanza shows more wariness of democratic action than Wordsworth's; yet even so, like Spenser's Guyon, Beattie tempers Spenser's fantasy of retribution against the mob, envisioning a philosopher-king who will calm the crowd with 'lenient hand', rather than subject it to brutality.

This example demonstrates that while it is difficult to distinguish between Wordsworth drawing on Spenser and on Beattie, *Salisbury Plain* seems to respond to both texts. Wordsworth's image of the 'Law with iron scourge' comes directly from Spenser. Wordsworth's stanza also demonstrates a more subtle reading of the social and political realities framed by Spenser's episode; the stanza does not replace Hobbesian authoritarianism with lenient rather than brutal justice, but evokes the interrelations of discipline and punishment and their role in fostering the crimes to which they respond. Whether Wordsworth recalls *Faerie Queene* Book 5 after turning to Beattie's apostrophe to Science, or whether Spenser's poem lives as vividly in Wordsworth's mind in 1793 as *The Minstrel* does, is less important than the fact that Wordsworth does go back, repeatedly, to the Spenserian original, unlike so many of his eighteenth-century precursors. And Wordsworth goes back to Spenser's epic not only to draw on form, language, and imagery, but to critique its arguments.

[26] Beattie, II, liii.469–77.
[27] Spenser, V, 2.33.

Furthermore, I would hazard that the *Salisbury Plain* stanza not only alludes to *Faerie Queene* Book 5, but also shows an implicit understanding of Spenser's narrative. Wordsworth's stanza concludes:

> Must Law with iron scourge
> Still torture crimes that grow a monstrous band
> Formed by his care, and still his victim urge,
> With voice that breathes despair, to death's tremendous verge?[28]

The image of a 'monstrous band' fomented by unequal laws, gathering on 'death's tremendous verge', once again evokes the 'Egalitarian Giant' episode. After Artegall disputes with the giant, Talus pushes the giant off the high ground. His body shatters on rocks and drowns in the sea, here literally 'death's tremendous verge'. Talus then scourges the mob, who attack him in their fury. If Wordsworth knew Book 5 as well as he knew Book 1, this anti-democratic episode may have stayed with him from his early reading; it makes a fitting allegory for the political and economic injustices of 1793. *Salisbury Plain* inverts the heroism of Spenser's Elizabethan fable of natural order, making Talus the villain; the unruly mob are, as Wordsworth writes, 'Formed by his care'. This example demonstrates how Wordsworth's knowledge of Spenser informs the text of his own Spenserian poem more deeply than mere allusion. As a final point of comparison between *Salisbury Plain* and *The Minstrel,* we can note that little happens in *The Minstrel.* There is no plot, and little incident, apart from Edwin encountering a hermit in Book 1 and returning to talk with him in Book 2. Wordsworth draws directly on Spenser when he creates his own Spenserian poem: one of dozens written during the eighteenth century, but one of the very few that actually bothers to tell a story.

And yet, the narrative of *Salisbury Plain* itself seems relatively slight, when we read the surviving text of the second version of the poem. *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* follows Spenser's example even more closely by greatly increasing the number of characters and incidents in the poem. Furthermore, it diverges from other eighteenth-century Spenserian narratives by returning to Spenser's visceral Elizabethan language—what neoclassical critics considered Spenser's 'revolting portraits of loathsome vices'—in order to represent actual human suffering rather than to personify the good and evil in human nature, or to allegorize religious

[28] *SPP*, 37, ll.519–22.

and sociopolitical conflict.[29] The next section examines just one stanza of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* in detail, in order to suggest that many others in the poem illustrate rapid developments in Wordsworth's use of Spenserian narrative from 1793–5.

Spenserian narrative in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*

Even in the last decades of the eighteenth century, when, following Shenstone's success, a number of poets wrote contemporary Spenserian narratives, these poets felt hard-pressed to justify using Spenser's form. For example, from February to August 1795, as Wordsworth was rewriting and expanding *Salisbury Plain* into *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* he had a look at his friend William Mathews's copy of John Bell's *Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry,* volume ten: *Poems in the Stanza of Spenser* (1789). Bell's volume contains a number of Spenserian narrative poems including *The Minstrel*. It also includes the poem *Sir Martyn* (also called *The Concubine)* by William Julius Mickle. Like *The Minstrel,* Wordsworth may have known this poem at Hawkshead. Although *Sir Martyn* is a didactic poem it is also, alongside *Salisbury Plain,* one of the few examples of eighteenth-century Spenserian narrative that actually tells a story.[30]

This research by Wordsworth shows him seeking out contemporary examples of Spenserian poems as he revises *Salisbury Plain.* What he read may have disappointed him, but also emboldened him; he must have realised that his adaptation of Spenser was taking him beyond what anyone in the century had accomplished in Spenserians, even Pope. Based on its archaic diction, its excessive personifications, and its gruesome depictions of druids burning sacrificial victims alive inside a giant wicker man, *Salisbury Plain* might seem at first glance to be the more 'Spenserian' of the two early versions of Wordsworth's poem. However, I suggest that *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* shows Wordsworth more skilfully modernising *The Faerie Queene* to serve contemporary concerns. This version of the poem draws on Spenser's epic more consciously for narrative, as well as its syntax and imagery. In other words, Wordsworth's revised text seems more comfortable acknowledging its debt to Spenser, and more confident in drawing on, and experimenting with, Spenserian narrative. Evidence suggests this occurs throughout the second version of Wordsworth's poem, right from the opening stanza.

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[29] Wasserman, 98.

[30] *Bell's Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry*, ed. by John Bell, 18 vols (London, 1789), X, 63–126.

The beginning of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* dispenses with the British antiquarianism of the five-stanza introduction of *Salisbury Plain*. That section, as Samuel Schulman points out, structures the poem as a 'formal complaint'—a mode that appears occasionally in Spenser's cantos but more often in eighteenth-century Spenserian poems. Wordsworth deploys it differently from these recent imitators:

> These poets use the complaint not only to introduce their theme, but in order to establish their seriousness. Having made a gesture toward a didactic justification for his poem, the poet may proceed to do exactly what he pleases…. Shenstone, Beattie, and Burns proceed simply to prove their complaint or to ignore it, but Wordsworth depends on his complaint to point out a unifying theme in the somewhat uneven plan of *Salisbury Plain*.[31]

Salisbury Plain demands that the reader continuously looks backward to antiquity, 'to make the connection between ancient religious and modern political kinds of tyranny'.[32]

In contrast, Wordsworth's revised text dives straight into the story. British antiquity serves less as a frame of reference for comparing barbarisms, and more as a reminder of the English chivalric ideal—and its hollowness in war. The first stanza of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* closely parallels the first stanza of *The Faerie Queene*, which Wordsworth doubtless knew by heart. Wordsworth's new draft of his poem begins:

> A Traveller on the skirt of Sarum's Plain
> O'ertook an agèd Man with feet half bare;
> Propp'd on a trembling staff he crept with pain,
> His legs from slow disease distended were;
> His temples just betrayed their silver hair
> Beneath a kerchief's edge, that wrapp'd his head
> To fence from off his face the breathing air.
> Struck miserably o'er with patch and shred
> His ragged coat scarce showed the Soldier's faded red.[33]

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[31] Samuel E. Schulman, 'Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain Poems and Their Spenserian Motives', *Journal of English and German Philology*, 84 (1985), 221–42 (227–28).
[32] Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', 228.
[33] *SPP*, 123, ll.1–9.

We can compare this to the first stanza of *The Faerie Queene,* Book 1, Canto 1:

> A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
> Ycladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
> Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
> The cruell markes of many a bloudy fielde;
> Yet armes till that time did he never wield:
> His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
> As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
> Full jolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
> As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.[34]

The similarities in these stanzas are striking, and their differences indicate how Wordsworth's project both relates to, and diverges from, Spenser's. The first line of each poem, and Wordsworth's retention of Spenser's 'a' rhyme, urge a comparison between Wordsworth's unnamed 'Traveller' and Spenser's 'Gentle Knight'. Both stanzas give an initial physical description of a character, including their attire and their means of motion; both lines show some relation to war or its effects.

Yet while Spenser's stanza fixes its gaze steadily on its subject, the Redcrosse Knight, Wordsworth's text from the second line swerves from subject to object, from the poem's protagonist to the first character he meets: the old soldier. The protagonist moves into the background and the reader's image of him becomes defined by his benevolence towards the old soldier; we do not learn the protagonist's profession of sailor, or his own tragic history, until stanzas 9–11. This unusual beginning deftly anticipates the poem's main argument: the power of sympathy in response to individual suffering. This opening both diverges from Spenser and draws on Spenserian allegory. As Schulman argues about a later incident in the poem:

> Wordsworth here makes specific use of Spenserian allegoric technique, such as we see deployed at moments of encounter in *The Faerie Queene*, when for example the Redcrosse Knight meets Fradubio or Despair, and gains or fails to gain insight into his own plight. The incident of the beaten child offers a similar challenge to the sailor; it tests his principles, his self-knowledge, and his sense of his own righteousness.[35]

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[34] Spenser, I, 1.1.
[35] Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', 237.

From the first act of sympathy ('Come, I am strong, and stout, come lean on me') to the final calmness in the face of death, the sailor knight-errant of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* demonstrates the gaining of virtue through experience, in contrast to Spenser's knights in whom *a priori* virtues are exhibited, then corrected.[36]

Wordsworth may have second-guessed himself in his letter to Coleridge in February 1799, suggesting that in his revisions to the poem he will cut the character of 'Robert Walford'—a name most logically identified with the old soldier. The old soldier's presence in the poem—confined to the first five stanzas—may show a weakness in narrative unity which Wordsworth wanted to excise a few years later. Yet regardless of whether or not Wordsworth intended this character to play a larger role later in the poem, the first stanza shows keen narrative instinct—and, despite its divergence from Spenser, a Spenserian strategy. *The Faerie Queene* develops character almost exclusively through external incident rather than introspection, following the mode of Elizabethan drama before Marlowe. Wordsworth's text employs this technique alongside eighteenth-century Gothic sensibility, to draw out the interplay of human suffering and sympathy in the poem. Unlike *Salisbury Plain,* which includes only two principle characters (apart from those in the female vagrant's story) the landscape of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is, ironically, replete with human life among the narrator's descriptions of oppressive solitude.[37]

Finally, the description of the old soldier in the first stanza offers a counterpoint to Spenser's knight of holiness, and his horse. Wordsworth's text shows that the age of chivalry is dead; the warriors wandering on Salisbury Plain or spoken of by their widows are all foot soldiers or common sailors, as wasted by disease and poverty as the 'pitiful rascals' pressed by Falstaff in *1 Henry IV:*

> my whole charge consists of… slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton's dogs licked his sores; and such as indeed were never soldiers… A mad fellow met me on the way

[36] Schulman makes a convincing argument that stanzas altered for the worse between *Salisbury Plain* to *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* show the 'newfangled style' of Godwin and novels like those by Thomas Holcroft; see Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', 234–35.
[37] *SPP*, 130, ll.226–34.

> and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies. (*1 Henry IV* 4.2)

The old soldier, 'with feet half bare; / Propp'd on a trembling staff' and with 'legs from slow disease distended' offers a grotesque parody of a living creature halfway between a man and a horse: not a mounted cavalier, but a three-legged beast that has been ridden half to death by a wartime government.[38] The 'patch and shred' of his ragged redcoat alludes more specifically to Shakespeare: Hamlet's accusation that his uncle is a 'king of shreds and patches' (*Hamlet* 3.4). This allusion draws in the theme of corrupt authority from *Salisbury Plain;* Claudius, unlike his brother, the elder Hamlet, prefers court intrigue and assassination to open warfare, so is, by the creaking standards of chivalric virtue in Shakespeare's time:

> A murderer and a villain;
> A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
> Of your precedent lord; a vice of kings;
> A cutpurse of the empire and the rule… (*Hamlet* 3.4)

Thus, these differences in narrative and language between the opening stanzas of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and *The Faerie Queene* demonstrate not only the text's invitation to comparisons with Spenser, but a conscious reorienting of Spenser's early modern ideas of chivalric virtue (and Shakespearean attacks on the hypocrisy of hollow virtue) to respond to the Anglo-French war of 1793.

Spenserian modes in Wordsworth's autobiographical narrative

The next section of this article returns to the theme of Wordsworth's variety, and the question of how the poet's extraordinary early achievements in Spenserian narrative shaped his later narrative verse. A wider-ranging study would trace the Spenserian themes and

[38] The old soldier's 'distended' legs, suggesting rickets, bringing to mind the next line of Falstaff's speech: 'the villains march wide betwixt the legs, as if they had gyves on; for indeed I had the most of them out of prison.' Wordsworth revisits the same image of a poor old man in *1805 Prelude* Book 7, in which the wartime reality of the opening stanza of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* metamorphoses into stage artifice. The *Prelude* image describes Wordsworth's memory of an elderly character in a Shakespeare play: '[a] mumbling Sire, / A scare-crow pattern of old Age, patch'd up / Of all the tatters of infirmity, / All loosely put together, hobbled in, / Stumping upon a Cane, with which he smites, / From time to time, the solid boards…' (*1805 Prelude* VII, 455–62).

images in the Salisbury Plain poems through later narrative poetry including 'The Idiot Boy', *Peter Bell, The White Doe of Rylstone,* and Wordsworth's late Arthurian narratives 'Artegal and Elidure' and 'The Egyptian Maid'. But maintaining a narrow focus on the period 1795–99, let us consider the question: how did Wordsworth's understanding of *The Faerie Queene,* linked with his confidence from having finished his own two-part Spenserian narrative, influence the development of the epic, autobiographical narrative of the *Prelude?*

Adventures on Salisbury Plain seemed destined for rapid publication around March–April 1796, and then again from March–May 1798. *Lyrical Ballads,* not *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, ultimately became the volume that partly funded the Wordsworths' travel to Goslar. But Wordsworth's letter to Coleridge in the spring of 1799 indicates that he still intended to publish his Spenserian poem. By this time, he had produced a significant number of narrative episodes towards what would become the *1799 Prelude*. Let us examine just one of these episodes, the first of the 'spots of time', in the context of what Wordsworth has learned from Spenser—and learned from writing like Spenser.

As the prefatory poem to *The White Doe of Rylstone* (completed 1807, published 1815) suggests, *Faerie Queene* Book 1 remained one of Wordsworth's favourite parts of the poem throughout his life—in particular Canto 3, and possibly Canto 6, in which Una searches for her Redcrosse Knight after the machinations of Archimago separate them in Cantos 1–2. Wordsworth likely memorised parts of Book 1 as a child; he continued to return to it and to draw on it throughout his life. He was reading Book 1 with Dorothy from late 1801 and through 1802, in the months leading up to his marriage to Mary Hutchinson.[39] More than a

[39] William and Dorothy were reading *The Faerie Queene* from 16 November 1801 in Robert Anderson's *The Works of the British Poets* (13 vols., London and Edinburgh, 1792–5). They read Book 1, Canto 1 on 16 June 1802 and William perhaps continues reading through 1 July; see Pamela Woof, *Dorothy Wordsworth: The Grasmere Journals* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 38–39, 41, 79, 110, 117; Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 201–2; Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1975), pp. 153–81. Schulman demonstrates how this reading informs the composition of three Spenserian-like poems related to Wordsworth's impending marriage to Mary, and the changes this would bring to his relationships with Dorothy and Coleridge: 'Between May 12 and June 7, Dorothy Wordsworth sent at least two packets of her brother's poems to the Hutchinson sisters in Yorkshire. They included three recently completed poems: in order of probable composition, 'The Leech-Gatherer' (an early version of 'Resolution and Independence'), 'Stanzas

decade later, Wordsworth still associates Spenser's epic with married life, as he records in 'In Trellis'd Shed' (1815):

> When years of wedded life were as a day
> Whose current answers to the heart's desire,
> Did we together read in Spenser's Lay
> How Una, sad of soul—in sad attire,
> The gentle Una, born of heavenly birth,
> To seek her Knight went wandering o'er the earth.[40]

The wanderings of Una and her guardian Lion in the first part of Canto 3 resonate with the wandering and suffering of the soldier's widow in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain:*

> Nought is there under heav'ns wide hollownesse,
> That moves more deare compassion of mind,
> Then beautie brought t'unworthie wretchednesse
> Through envies snares or fortunes freakes unkind:
> I, whether lately through her brightnes blynd,
> Or through alleageance and fast fealty,
> Which I do owe unto all womankynd,
> Feele my hart perst with so great agony,
> When such I see, that all for pitty I could dy.
>
> […]
>
> Yet she most faithfull Ladie all this while
> Forsaken, wofull, solitarie mayd
> Far from all peoples preace, as in exile,
> In wildernesse and wastfull deserts strayd…[41]

Una, like the soldier's widow, is a 'weary Dame' searching for shelter in a wilderness. She asks to spend the night in the cottage of a blind old woman and her deaf-mute daughter. In Spenser's allegory, Una

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Written in My Pocket-copy of Thomson's Castle of Indolence,' and 'A Farewell.' Each of these poems addresses itself to some aspect of the impending revolution in Wordsworth's domestic affairs; all of them are written in some variant of the Spenserian style.' In Samuel E. Schulman, 'The Spenserian Enchantments of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence"', *Modern Philology*, 79.1 (1981), 24–44 (p. 26).

[40] *The White Doe of Rylstone; or The Fate of the Nortons*, ed. by Kristine Dugas, Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca and London, 1988), p. 78, ll.1–8.

[41] Spenser, p. I, 3.1, 3.

represents the true English church; in contrast, the mother and daughter, Corceca and Abessa, represent, respectively, blind devotion to the Catholic church, and the unthinking passivity, or 'absence' of the Catholic laity.

Wordsworth's expanded text dispenses with adapting Spenser's anti-Catholic allegory into an allegory of 'the vices of the penal law' in the same way he did in *Salisbury Plain*.[42] What Wordsworth takes from Spenser's characters is the frankness and specificity of representations of suffering—qualities of *The Faerie Queene* which pre-Revolution readers often missed beneath the poem's ethereal settings and apparent lack of inwardness. The Spenserian mode of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is a diametric response to eighteenth-century didactic Spenserian poems including *The Minstrel,* in which the narrator avoids naturalistic representations of suffering, preferring to shelter in the safety of abstractions:

> But why should foresight thy fond heart alarm?
> Perish the lore that deadens young desire!
> Pursue, poor imp, th'imaginary charm,
> Indulge gay Hope, and Fancy's pleasing fire:
> Fancy and Hope too soon shall of themselves expire.[43]

In contrast, the expansion of the soldier's widow's tale links Spenser's Elizabethan frankness to naturalistic descriptions of the ravages of the Anglo-French war. For example, Wordsworth's poem describes disease ravaging an army and its followers:

> ''Twas a hard change, an evil time was come;
> We had no hope, and no relief could gain.
> But soon, with proud parade, the noisy drum
> Beat round, to sweep the streets of want and pain.
> My husband's arms now only served to strain
> Me and his children hungering in his view:
> In such dismay my prayers and tears were vain:
> To join those miserable men he flew;
> And now to the sea-coast, with numbers more, we drew.
>
> 'There foul neglect for months and months we bore,
> Nor yet the crowded fleet its anchor stirred.

[42] *SPP*, p. 7.
[43] Beattie, p. ll.275-9.

Green fields before us and our native shore,
By fever, from polluted air incurred,
Ravage was made, for which no knell was heard.
Fondly we wished, and wished away, nor knew,
'Mid that long sickness, and those hopes deferr'd,
That happier days we never more must view…[44]

The journalistic clarity of this description suggests its basis in first-hand accounts gathered during Wordsworth's wanderings of 1793. Alistair Fowler argues that *The Faerie Queene* 'seldom poeticises detailed particulars of modern war' and that Spenser, '(like Erasmus) is concerned as much with the causes as the effects of war.'[45] Similarly, Michael Murrin writes that Spenser's poem, for all its duels and battles, represents an English tradition of 'peaceful epic'.[46] Yet Spenser, rather than Beattie, gives Wordsworth an early modern model for linking more blunt language of the body, physical and mental suffering, and the cruelty of punishment, to this stanza form.

In *The Faerie Queene* this language is often allegorical, but *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* brings it into the world of wartime strictures, dearth, and harsh justice. For example, the sailor encounters his own guilt and despair in the shape of a gibbet on Salisbury Plain:

For as he plodded on, with sudden clang
A sound of chains along the desart rang:
He looked, and saw on a bare gibbet nigh
A human body that in irons swang,
Uplifted by the tempest sweeping by,
And hovering round it often did a raven fly.

It was a spectacle which none might view
In spot so savage but with shuddering pain
Nor only did for him at once renew
All he had feared from man, but rouzed a train
Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain.

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[44] *SPP*, pp. 136–37, ll.352–68.
[45] Alistair Fowler, 'Spenser and War', in *War, Literature and the Arts in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, Warwick Studies in the European Humanities (Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 147–64 (pp. 151, 153–54).
[46] Michael Murrin, *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago and London, 1994), p. 240; quoted in Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser*, Studies in Renaissance Literature (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England), 17 (Cambridge, 2006), p. 98.

The stones, as if to sweep him from the day,
Roll'd at his back along the living plain;
He fell and without sense or motion lay…[47]

The text juxtaposes this encounter with the sailor's arrival at Stonehenge, which has seen 'the giant Wicker rear / Its dismal chambers hung with living men'.[48] These stanzas, followed by the sailor's arrival at the 'dead house of the Plain' together rework images and ideas from a number of dismal settings in *The Faerie Queene*. One example that Wordsworth likely knew well was the Cave of Despair in Book 1, Canto 9, where Redcrosse's pride almost leads to his death. The barren setting of the Cave of Despair includes images that also occur in Wordsworth's revised poem, including an uninhabitable landscape ('No tree was there, no meadow's pleasant green'), dead bodies, and the terror of those who encounter such sights:

Ere long they come, where that same wicked wight
His dwelling has, low in an hollow cave,
Far underneath a craggy clift ypight,
Darke, dolefull, dreary, like a greedy grave,
That still for carrion carcases doth crave:
On top whereof ay dwelt the ghastly Owle,
Shrieking his balefull note, which ever drave
Far from that haunt all other chearefull fowle;
And all about it wandring ghostes did wayle and howle.

And all about old stockes and stubs of trees,
Whereon nor fruite, nor leafe was ever seene,
Did hang upon the ragged rocky knees;
On which had many wretches hanged beene,
Whose carcases were scattred on the greene,
And throwne about the cliffs. Arrived there,
That bare-head knight for dread and dolefull teene,
Would faine have fled, ne durst approchen neare…[49]

Wordsworth's text does not allude directly to these stanzas, but their imagery and language present parallels to stanzas 6–28 of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* Gothic tropes in both texts notwithstanding. The key points are firstly, that the early modern text provides Wordsworth's poem with more concrete and grotesque language of suffering than its

[47] *SPP*, p. 126, ll.112–25.
[48] *SPP*, p. 127, ll.158–59.
[49] Spenser, p. I, 9.33-4.

eighteenth-century imitators; and secondly, that Wordsworth's Spenserian language is probably imbued thoroughly enough with *The Faerie Queene* that the Salisbury Plain poems can deploy images from its allegorical landscapes as faithful topographical descriptions of Salisbury Plain in 1793—such as transposing the commonplace of Spenser's 'ghastly Owle, / Shrieking his balefull note' onto the 'mournful shriek' of the bustard and the accurate description of its 'thick unwieldy flight.'[50]

Wordsworth's text also plays on the flight of one of Despair's victims, Sir Trevisan, who has been lucky enough to escape: 'Still as he fledd, his eye was backward cast,/As if his feare still followed him behind'.[51] As he walks into evening, the sailor on Salisbury Plain looks behind him for the reassurance of the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, but eventually the distant spire 'That fix'd at every turn his backward eye/ Was lost, though still he turn'd, in the blank sky.'[52] Spenser's Sir Trevisan flees Despair and looks backward for its pursuit; the sailor looks backward for the literal reassurance of a point of reference for navigation, and the metaphorical reassurance of the forgiveness of the Christian church. Nevertheless he, like Sir Trevisan, is fleeing despair, wearing the invisible noose of his capital crime around his neck, just as Sir Trevisan wears his:

> Nigh as he drew, they might perceive his head
> To bee unarmd, and curld uncombed heares
> Upstaring stiffe, dismaid with uncouth dread;
> Nor drop of blood in all his face appeares
> Nor life in limbe: and to increase his feares,
> In fowle reproch of knighthoodes fayre degree,
> About his neck an hempen rope he weares,
> That with his glistring armes does ill agree;
> But he of rope or armes has now no memoree.[53]

While Wordsworth's revised poem resembles *The Faerie Queene* in that both might be termed 'peaceful epics', more concerned with the causes and effects of war than representations of war itself, Wordsworth's text also draws on the visceral imagery used to represent Spenser's allegories and personifications.

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[50] *SPP*, p. 127, ll.151, 153.
[51] Spenser, p. I, 9.21.
[52] *SPP*, p. 124, ll.48–50.
[53] Spenser, p. I, 9.22.

Yet even in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* the degree of allegory and personification is not uniformly less than in Spenser's epic and other Spenserian narratives. This is a poem in draft, and we imagine that Wordsworth is still reading and studying both Spenser and Beattie as models for Spenserian language while making his own. A good example of this unevenness appears in the soldier's widow's tale, published as 'The Female Vagrant' in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Here the text's description of war and rape resort to personification of the sort mistakenly considered a trope of *The Faerie Queene,* but actually more common in Beattie and other eighteenth-century imitators:

> 'Yet does that burst of woe congeal my frame,
> When the dark streets appeared to heave and gape,
> While like a sea the storming army came,
> And Fire from Hell reared his gigantic shape,
> And Murder, by the ghastly gleam, and Rape
> Seized their joint prey, the mother and the child![54]

In contrast, Spenser gives an unflinching account of the near-rape of Una by Sansloy in *Faerie Queene* Book 1, Canto 6. Una is rescued by Satyrane, but not before the reader experiences her terror:

> Yet for to feed his fyrie lustfull eye,
> He snatcht the vele, that hong her face before;
> Then gan her beautie shyne, as brightest skye,
> And burnt his beastly hart t'efforce her chastitye.
>
> So when he saw his flatt'ring artes to fayle,
> And subtile engines bett from batteree,
> With greedy force he gan the fort assayle,
> Whereof he weend possessed soone to bee,
> And win rich spoile of ransackt chastitee.
> Ah heavens, that doe this hideous act behold,
> And heavenly virgin thus outraged see,
> How can ye vengeance just so long withhold,
> And hurle not flashing flames vpon that Paynim bold?
>
> The pitteous mayden carefull comfortlesse,
> Does throw out thrilling shriekes, and shrieking cryes,
> The last vaine helpe of wemens great distresse…[55]

[54] *SPP*, p. 140, ll.442–47.

Una's terror in this episode is abated, for the reader, by the safety nets of romance: providential chance and supernatural machinery. But this example shows that Wordsworth's longstanding aesthetic preference to avoid the direct horror of incident, and focus on psychological causes and effects, is already at work in 1793–5.[56] In this example, abstract personification provides the means. Unlike in Spenser, the personifications of both early versions of the Salisbury Plain poem deflect from the specificity of individual suffering, in a way that runs contrary to Wordsworth's praise of Spenser decades later, in the 1815 Preface. Wordsworth's blank verse after 1795 avoids this pitfall; and the decrease in rapid-fire eighteenth-century personifications between *Salisbury Plain* and *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* suggest that Wordsworth may have eliminated this weakness had he revised the poem further for publication before the end of the century.

In other instances, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* comes closer to directly alluding to *The Faerie Queene* in both incident and language. In these instances, Wordsworth's text seems so well informed by Spenser's that allegorical images carried into Wordsworth's text sometimes persist while seeming irrelevant. Landing in England, alone and destitute, the sailor's widow cannot or will not resort to begging. After three days without food, she collapses, and is carried to a hospital:

> 'So passed another day, and so the third:
> Then did I try, in vain, the crowd's resort,
> In deep despair by frightful wishes stirr'd,
> Near the sea-side I reached a ruined fort:
> There, pains which nature could no more support,
> With blindness linked, did on my vitals fall;
> Dizzy my brain, with interruption short
> Of hideous sense; I sunk, nor step could crawl,
> And thence was borne away to neighbouring hospital.[57]

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[55] Spenser, p. I, 6.4-6. A more sustained example occurs in *FQ* Book 6, with the long abduction of Pastorell by the Brigants.

[56] In terms of his narrative poetry, this tendency culminates in 1807 in the composition of *The White Doe of Rylstone,* a ballad haunted by Spenserian contexts and language even as it dispenses with the Spenserian stanza. In that poem, the problems of the place of action and supernatural incident in nineteenth- versus sixteenth-century poetry play out in the foreground.

[57] *SPP*, p. 142, ll.477–86.

The next stanza begins, '"Recovery came with food…'—the unadorned language of suffering and necessity common to Wordsworth's portraits of poverty. Here the language of suffering parallels the swoons experienced by a number of characters in *The Faerie Queene*. For example, Guyon collapses after he spends three days in the underworld, in the palace of Mammon:

> And now he has so long remained theare,
> That vitall powres gan wexe both weake and wan,
> For want of food, and sleepe, which two upbeare,
> Like mightie pillours, this frayle life of man,
> That none without the same enduren can.
> For now three dayes of men were full outwrought
> Since he this hardy enterprize began…
>
> The God, though loth, yet was constraynd t'obay,
> For lenger time, then that, no living wight
> Below the earth, might suffred to be to stay:
> So backe againe, him brought to living light.
> But all so soone as his enfeebled spright,
> Gan sucke this vitall ayre into his brest,
> As overcome with too exceeding might,
> The life did flit away out of her nest,
> And all his sences were with deadly fit opprest.[58]

Both Guyon and the soldier's widow are deprived for food for three days before collapsing. In Spenser, the reader takes this as an allegory for the entombment of Christ; in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* an allegorical reading is possible (unlike the sailor-protagonist, the soldier's widow suffers innocently)—possible yet insignificant, compared to representations of the physiological processes of her post-traumatic stress and starvation.

Similarly, when the sailor-protagonist crossing Salisbury Plain encounters the gibbet containing a human body, the image of Gothic horror is not allegorical, as is the description of the Druids' wicker men in the first version of the poem. Wordsworth takes from Spenser's allegory the language of suffering, and weds it to his observations of wartime injustice, in the philosophical context of Godwinian necessity. The sailor's first encounter with the gibbet foreshadows his own punishment in the poem's final stanza, a punishment to which he submits willingly: 'he

[58] Spenser, p. 2.7.65-6.

comes progressively to understand his own wrongdoing and finally to reform himself.'[59] The Falstaffian grotesquerie of capital punishment frames the poem's sombre, circular final lines:

> They left him hung on high in iron case,
> And dissolute men, unthinking and untaught,
> Planted their festive booths beneath his face;
> And to that spot, which idle thousands sought,
> Women and children were by fathers brought;
> And now some kindred sufferer driven, perchance,
> That way when into storm the sky is wrought,
> Upon his swinging corpse his eye may glance
> And drop, as he once dropp'd, in miserable trance.[60]

Spenser's Tudor conceptions of justice and punishment differ starkly from Wordsworth's, especially the Wordsworth of the summer of 1794 and 1795, at the height of his commitment to the ideas expressed in the first edition of Godwin's *Political Justice*.[61] Nevertheless, Wordsworth's familiarity with the images, incidents, and Protestant virtues of Spenser's epic gave him frequent opportunities to reframe Spenser's unsympathetic representations of mobs, criminals and social outcasts, and the poor. Both early versions of the Salisbury Plain poems redirect Spenser's harsh critiques of democratic clamour and resistance to aristocratic authority back on themselves, at the 'gory hand' of Justice; *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* accomplishes this redirection as a more confident response to, rather than imitation of, *The Faerie Queene*.

Una and a spot of time

Finally, the gibbet in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* brings us back to *The Faerie Queene* Book 1, Canto 3. In the wanderings of Una, which

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[59] Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', p. 241.
[60] William Wordsworth, *SPP*, p. 154, ll.820–28.
[61] Wu, *WR 1770-1799*, pp. 66–67; Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford, 1987), p. 11; Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', p. 234. Schulman contrasts Wordsworth's attraction to the sympathetic, individual-focused Godwinian necessity expressed in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* with the more abstract personification of Reason in *Salisbury Plain*. He notes, in response to the argument of T. J. Gillchrist, that 'there is no evidence that Wordsworth had read *Political Justice* in 1793 when he wrote *Salisbury Plain*. See Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', pp. 239, n23; T. J. Gillchrist, 'Spenser and Reason in the Conclusion of "Salisbury Plain"', *English Language Notes*, 7 (1969), 11–18.

Wordsworth refers to specifically in 'In Trellis'd Shed', we find at least one example of how Wordsworth's experience of completing a sustained Spenserian narrative influences his first epic. The *1799 Prelude* introduces the idea that our childhood memories contain 'spots of time' which retain a 'fructifying virtue'. The first example of these, which immediately follows the definition, is powerful—yet, perhaps more than any other 'spot of time', resists interpretation:

> I remember well
> ('Tis of an early season that I speak,
> The twilight of rememberable life)
> While I was yet an urchin, one who scarce
> Could hold a bridle, with ambitious hopes
> I mounted, and we rode towards the hills.
> We were a pair of horsemen: honest James
> Was with me, my encourager and guide.
> We had not travelled long ere some mischance
> Disjoined me from my comrade and, through fear
> Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
> I led my horse, and, stumbling on, at length
> Came to a bottom where in former times
> A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
> In irons; mouldered was the gibbet-mast,
> The bones were gone, the iron and the wood,
> Only a long green ridge of turf remained
> Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot
> And, reascending the bare slope, I saw
> A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
> The beacon on the summit, and, more near,
> A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
> And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
> Against the blowing wind. It was in truth
> An ordinary sight, but I should need
> Colours and words that are unknown to man
> To paint the visionary dreariness
> Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
> Did at that time invest the naked pool,
> The beacon on the lonely eminence,
> The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
> By the strong wind.[62]

[62] *1799 Prelude*, p. I, 296–327.

The first 'spot of time' is literally chivalric; Wordsworth's narrator and his agèd servant, like Redcrosse and Una, are mounted, although the character of 'honest James' (Wordsworth's 'encourager and guide') more closely resembles Redcrosse's dwarf-squire, or Sir Guyon's Palmer from Book 2, both of whom go on foot.[63] The temporal setting, in the 'twilight of rememberable life' suggests the ethereal and liminal setting of *The Faerie Queene*. Wordsworth, doubling as both the knight and his lady, is 'Disjoined' from his companion by some 'mischance'. He encounters the mouldering 'gibbet-mast', as if the text conflates not only Wordsworth's childhood memories and their adult recollection in 1798–9, but also the wanderings of the protagonist of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain:* and through that text, the wandering Wordsworth of 1793, and the wandering Una.

Ascending the hill, as Una ascends 'Under the steepe foot of a mountaine', the Wordsworthian child of the *Prelude* encounters 'A girl who bore a pitcher on her head'. The 'visionary dreariness' of this scene vividly recalls Una's encounter with Abessa:

> Long she thus traveiled through deserts wyde,
> By which she thought her wandring knight shold pas,
> Yet never shew of living wight espyde;
> Till that at length she found the troden gras,
> In which the tract of peoples footing was,
> Under the steepe foot of a mountaine hore;
> The same she followes, till at last she has
> A damzell spyde slow footing her before,
> That on her shoulders sad a pot of water bore.
>
> To whom approching she to her gan call,
> To weet, if dwelling place were nigh at hand;
> But the rude wench her answerd nought at all,
> She could not heare, nor speake, nor understand…[64]

David Chandler notes the resemblances between these passages, suggesting that 'Wordsworth's "spot of time" seems extraordinarily close

[63] Jonathan Wordsworth notes the chivalric setting of this spot of time when he describes the tone of the passage as 'a knight setting out on a quest with his trusty squire'; in Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), p. 59.
[64] Spenser, p. I, 3.10, 11.

to the Spenser episode; indeed, Wordsworth's knowledge of the Spenser passage may be as old as the "spot" itself.'[65]

Just how this moment represents the relationship between Spenserian allegory and Wordsworthian memory and rewriting has, like the 'visionary dreariness' of the moment itself, brightened and faded in scholarly consciousness for almost a hundred years. James Schulman analyses it in his 1978 doctoral dissertation, hazarding that 'Wordsworth's memory may well "allude" to this Spenserian passage, or he may be (whether deliberately or not) alluding to it in his retelling'.[66] Schulman notes that this allusion is mentioned in modern criticism at least as early as 1934, when Janet Spens observes that, 'there is an unconscious memory of a passage from Book I of *The Faerie Queene* "in the hinterland of Wordsworth's memory"'.[67] Like another spot of time, the Drowned Man of Esthwaite, critical responses to the play of *The Faerie Queene* in Wordsworth texts seem to rise up periodically, a 'spectre-shape' that demands reassessment—justifiably, considering that the *Prelude* stresses, in response to frightening formative experiences, that the poet's

> inner eye had seen
> Such sights before, among the shining streams
> Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance… [68]

Critical reading should not privilege Spenser's 'Forests of Romance' over the 'firsthand' experiences related in the poetry, but they should work to position the reading in relation to the experience and *vice versa*—just as Wordsworth does by placing the Drowned Man spot of time in *1805 Prelude* Book 5, 'Books'.

Twentieth-century scholarship has trained us not to accept the *Prelude* as autobiography, and not to equate its chronology with biographical fact; nevertheless, the reader trusts that the first 'spot of time' in the two-part *Prelude* represents a 'true' memory to Wordsworth, as much as does the experiences of the stolen boat or ice skating. Yet just

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[65] David Chandler, 'Wordsworth's "Visionary Dreariness" and Spenser's Abessa: A Note', *Romanticism*, 1.1 (1995), 141–43 (p. 142).
[66] Samuel E. Schulman, 'Wordsworth's Spenserian Voice', *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (unpublished Ph.D., Yale University, 1978), p. 193, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 302925828 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/302925828?accountid=10105>.
[67] Janet Spens, *Spenser's Faerie Queene*, 1967 reprint (New York, 1934), p. 59.
[68] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by Mark L. Reed, The Cornell Wordsworth, 2 vols (Ithaca and London, 1991), p. V, 472, 475–77.

as Wordsworth has carried Spenser's verses in his heart since childhood, so too the experience of completing *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* may have 'carried far into his heart' an adaptation of Spenser's narrative mode which exerts its influences on the *Prelude*.[69] Spenser's allegories offer to Wordsworth's text strategies for allowing experiential images to exist as both images and symbols. The narrator's commentary on the first spot of time takes on new possibilities in the context of *The Faerie Queene:*

> It was in truth
> An ordinary sight, but I should need
> Colours and words that are unknown to man
> To paint the visionary dreariness
> Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
> Did at that time invest the naked pool,
> The beacon on the lonely eminence,
> The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
> By the strong wind.

In a process that shows not allegory itself at work, but the narrator's reflection on the possible creation or operation of autobiographical allegory in the *Prelude,* the 'ordinary' sight becomes extraordinary, 'visionary', as both the boy Wordsworth and the adult poet 'invest' the pool, the beacon, and the woman with the pitcher with significance. This is manifold significance that by its very openness, its symbolic instability, works its 'fructifying virtue' through the stages of the remembering poet's experience, and the experience of the poem's reading and re-reading.

The use of allegorical images, each without a specific allegorical referent, shows, in the context of Spenser, the early *Prelude* not only adapting Spenserian style to blank verse, but also reading Spenserian allegory more sensitively than other eighteenth-century readers. As Wasserman describes, eighteenth-century readers praised the greatness of Spenser's epic imagination, but felt more comfortable using his form and

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[69] Similar, if often less striking, examples of this sort of allusion to *The Faerie Queene* recur throughout Wordsworth's work; studies that trace a number of such allusions and attempt to assess Wordsworth's uses of Spenser include the unpublished dissertations of Charles E. Mounts and Samuel Schulman; see Charles Eugene Mounts, 'The Influence of Spenser on Wordsworth and Coleridge', *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (unpublished Ph.D., Duke University, 1941), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 301852494 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/301852494?accountid=10105>; Schulman, 'Wordsworth's Spenserian Voice'.

style for burlesque or parody. Wordsworth disagrees that Spenser's use of allegory diminishes its powers of characterization. The 1815 Preface excuses Spenser for the faults of the 'bondage of definite form' found in classical literature:

> Spenser… maintained his freedom by aid of his allegorical spirit, at one time inciting him to create persons out of abstractions; and, at another, by a superior effort of genius, to give the universality and permanence of abstraction to his human beings, by means of attributes and emblems that belong to the highest moral truths and the purest sensations,—of which his character of Una is a glorious example.[70]

Reading Spenser again in preparation for the belated publication of *The White Doe,* Wordsworth makes a critical insight into the humanism of Spenser's epic, an insight which also applies to the characters in the Salisbury Plain poems (but *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* in particular) and unnamed figures in the *Prelude* such as the girl with the pitcher and the drowned man.

Conclusion

Wordsworth's narrative poetry in the 1790s develops from a serious commitment to the Spenserian stanza and its incident-filled style of storytelling, into a two-pronged strategy of ballad poetry on the one hand, and autobiographical, narrative blank verse on the other. A final illustration of the importance that Spenser plays in this development occurs in the two extraordinary fragments that probably date from the period of Wordsworth's rapid development between the time he finished *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and the writing of narrative blank-verse fragments including *The Discharged Soldier* (late January 1798), *The Ruined Cottage* (June 1797 – March 1798) and *The Pedlar* (February – March 1798). Stephen Gill prints the two fragments as an appendix to the Cornell *Salisbury Plain Poems*. The fragments make a useful study because they present similar content in two different forms—content likely intended to expand the *Salisbury Plain* narrative, or possibly even to rework the whole poem into blank verse. The first, printed as fragment (a), uses blank verse, and adds vivid details to a traveller's account of being lost on Salisbury Plain, probably drawn from Wordsworth's experience of 1793. For example:

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[70] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford, 1974), p. III, 35.

My course I slanted, when at once winds rose
And from the rainy east a bellying cloud
Met the first star and hurried on the night.
Now fast against my cheek and whistling ears
My loose wet hair and tattered bonnet flapped
With thought-perplexing noise, that seemed to make
The universal darkness that ensued
More dark and desolate.[71]

Based on the date of composition for these fragments, suggested by Carol Landon, Stephen Gill remarks that this fragment 'makes [Wordsworth's] first significant use of blank verse, which was to become his medium for sustained poetry.'[72]

The second fragment, printed as fragment (b), starts with this same account of crossing Salisbury Plain, but uses a variant of the Spenserian stanza. The narrative perspective shifts from the first-person voice of the blank-verse fragment (a) into third-person voice, describing the wandering of a female character. We might assume, if the proposed date of composition is accurate, that these approximately eleven stanzas narrate the wandering of the soldier's widow onto Salisbury Plain, in a second narrative strand that gives an account of her movement up to the moment that she meets the sailor in 'the dead house of the Plain'.[73] Caught in the same storm as the sailor, the soldier's widow takes refuge in 'a dwelling wild', a hovel occupied by a starving mother and her three-year-old son.[74] These eleven stanzas are rich in incident suggestive of *The Faerie Queene,* such as the origins of Guyon's quest in the deaths of Sir Mordant and his wife Amivia in Book 2. The mutual sympathy between the two women encourages the mother to tell her own story: 'Then while the stranger warmed her torpid feet,/ So willing seemed her ear, she gan her tale repeat.'[75] The fragment ends without the addition of the mother's tale.

In terms of the variety and development of Wordsworth's narrative verse, then, what do *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, its surviving unpublished manuscript, and the two fragments tell us? They suggest that late 1795 to 1796 represent an important fork in the road of

[71] *SPP*, p. 289, ll.16–23.
[72] *SPP*, p. 288.
[73] *SPP*, p. 128, ll.189.
[74] *SPP*, p. 291, ll.36, 37–63.
[75] *SPP*, p. 292, ll.80–81.

Wordsworth's development. By taking the path towards psychological explorations of character motivation in *The Borderers*, and the blank-verse narrative of *The Ruined Cottage*, Wordsworth left the path of a more sustained development of a remarkable and innovative Spenserian narrative—Spenserian work of a kind almost unique in the eighteenth century. The surviving manuscript of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, in DC MS. 16, intersperses Dorothy's fair copy of the poem with lines from *1805 Prelude* Book 5, the end of Book 1, and the 'abortive opening of Book II.'[76] Wordsworth still intended, as of spring 1799, to publish *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, but from that point on it appeared represent a finished experiment in Spenserian narrative.

Wordsworth's Spenserian narrative in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* brings together richness of character and exciting incident—elements sorely lacking from almost every other eighteenth-century Spenserian poem, including Beattie's *Minstrel*—with realistic geographical and social settings, and moral ambiguities of the sort broadly lacking in *The Faerie Queene*. Contrary to what Wordsworth wrote self-deprecatingly decades later, regarding the difficulties of the Spenserian stanza, the texts of 1793 and 1795 (or what we have of the 1795 poem, in MS. 2) demonstrate that not only had he mastered Spenser's art of using a digressive, overflowing stanza form to tell a good tale, but that he had married these to an eighteenth-century naturalism of diction, imagery, and character—particularly in the second version of the poem. Yet both versions of the poem resist a binary eighteenth-century response to Gothic and antiquarian texts: the impulse either to romanticise them on the one hand, or subject them to Enlightenment critiques of reason on the other. As Samuel Schulman writes, the Salisbury Plain poems treat 'Spenser—and the ideal world that he represents—not as a history of departed things, a temptation to be resisted or indulged, but as a resource for the present.'[77] Among all the variety of Wordsworth's narrative poetry, we may perhaps regret that he did not publish (and perhaps expand) *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, although we have received, 'for such loss, I would believe, / abundant recompense'. Despite the challenges posed by the manuscript history, it is difficult to overstate the power of Wordsworth's only Spenserian narrative poem. These brief comparisons to Spenser's epic, and to a few eighteenth-century

[76] *SPP*, 10.
[77] Schulman, 'Spenserian Motives', 226.

imitations, have hopefully offered a glimpse of the significance of the achievement of the twenty-five-year-old poet.[78]

Perhaps there is a parallel universe in which Joseph Cottle published *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* in the summer of 1796—to acclaim, the groundwork of its reception having been laid by the popularity of *The Minstrel*. Wordsworth, having found in Spenser's form a medium for radical protest safer than the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, rapidly writes and appends a third canto following the last days of the old soldier from stanzas 1–5, whose impoverished daughter dies, like Lear's Cordelia, in his arms. Canto four tells the tragedy of the innkeeper and his wife, who, giving all they can to the poor vagrants of Salisbury Plain, eventually die in debtors' prison. By the time the Wordsworths and Coleridge sail for Germany in 1798, William feels that war with France, and his personal and professional crises of 1793, have, providentially, ended up securing his and Dorothy's financial future—and his own fame, at the age of twenty-eight. But as in all tales of parallel worlds, we must be careful what we wish for. For this William and Dorothy Wordsworth have a good bit of money, and do not hesitate to accompany Coleridge to Göttingen for the winter. As a result, Wordsworth's deep dive into the wellsprings of his childhood memories and creative powers, and work on the *Prelude*, do not begin until the summer of 1799—if at all.

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[78] Both Coleridge and Joseph Cottle recognised the importance of the unpublished poem's achievement; see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols (London, 1817), I, 82–85; Joseph Cottle, *Early Recollections; Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, during His Long Residence in Bristol*, 2 vols (London, 1837), I, 314n. Quoted in *SPP*, 3, 9 n25.

Bringing Wordsworth 'closely to the eye'

CECILIA POWELL

A lecture delivered at the Wordsworth Winter School, February 2020

The Country of the Lakes in 1820, published by the Wordsworth Trust at the end of 2019,[1] celebrated one of Wordsworth's finest prose works. It marked the bicentenary of the first publication, under his name, of the essay that became his famous *Guide*; and it was a 'first' in its own right. The 1820 version of the essay had never been published in a dedicated volume; and no version of the essay had been accompanied by images from the Fine Art Collection of the Wordsworth Trust. The book was the joint work of Stephen Hebron, a former staff member of the Trust, and myself. As with our previous three collaborations, our work and the book itself were generously funded by the W.W. Spooner Charitable Trust. Stephen acted as editor and designer, wrote a short piece about the history and nature of Wordsworth's essay, and composed notes identifying quotations and references. I, as an art historian, selected the images and arranged them in groups that I hope readers will find stimulating and interestingly matched with Wordsworth's ideas; I also wrote a note about the reasoning behind my choices. It was not our intention simply to produce 'an illustrated edition' of Wordsworth's essay, but rather to demonstrate the parallels between his thoughts on 'the Country of the Lakes' and the responses of artists. I hope that readers will find that the extracts from the essay elucidate the images just as much as the images help to illuminate Wordsworth's text.

In publishing this book we had several aims. First, we wanted to contribute to the Trust's 'Reimagining Wordsworth' programme by focusing on his prose. This is Wordsworth's book, not ours! We wanted to keep our own presence, as editors, as unobtrusive as possible, so our essays are actually at the back. We want to encourage people to read the essay and see what a masterpiece it is. As Stephen Gill wrote of the 1835 version, 'It is by far Wordsworth's most attractive and accessible prose and were it not for the utilitarian connotations of "guide" it would be

[1] *The Country of the Lakes in 1820*, ed. Stephen Hebron and Cecilia Powell (Grasmere, 2019). Page references to Wordsworth's essay in the text of this article relate to this edition.

recognized more freely for what it is, a gem of Romantic writing.'[2] I thought I was familiar with the essay, but the challenge of matching text and images made me read it more closely; and this was a most rewarding experience. A third aim is to alert the outside world to the riches of the Fine Art Collection owned by the Trust; to inspire readers to study watercolours, to 'read' them, and get immersed in what is shown.

One of the problems faced by art galleries today is that visitors don't always look at the exhibits very closely. They walk around and enjoy the ambience; they talk to their companions, often on topics unconnected to art; or they pore over the labels, carefully reading every word but without looking up to study the pictures themselves. Not long ago the National Gallery in London held an event at which, in order to get people to look at Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed* – a world-famous painting already, if ever there was one – they enlarged it on three monster screens and played music on a special sound system. The NG obviously felt it takes all that 'immersion' to get people to look properly! I hope that in our book people will both read Wordsworth's text and look at the images, sometimes separately, sometimes together; and they will go on to explore the Trust's constantly expanding Fine Art Collection in its own right.

I should start by providing a brief outline of the successive versions of the essay that became a famous book, in order to put our book in context. These versions have been listed in many places, in print and now online, including the invaluable wide-ranging bibliographical study of illustrated books on the Lake District by Peter Bicknell.[3] However, it is only when you see the physical reality of the successive publications that the journey of transformation really hits you.

The first version was published in 1810, as the letterpress to accompany a set of 48 large etchings of *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*. The prints followed some rather tame drawings by Joseph Wilkinson, a clergyman and amateur artist who had

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[2] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford, 1989), p. 285; 2nd edn (Oxford, 2020), p. 325.

[3] W.J.B Owen and J.W. Smyser, ed., *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford, 1974), II, 123–35, followed by the various texts and related material on 136–465; Peter Bicknell, *The Picturesque Scenery of the Lake District 1752–1855: A Bibliographical Study* (Winchester, 1990), pp. 95–8, 115–18; an excellent comprehensive online treatment, including texts and historical analysis, can be found on the Romantic Circles website.

lived near Keswick till 1804 and with whom Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were all acquainted. The title-page made no mention of the essay or its author, so readers would have assumed it was by Wilkinson himself. The prints were initially published by subscription, in monthly parts from January to December, each part costing half a guinea, so the entire set cost a total of six guineas. The letterpress also appeared in instalments, accompanying the prints. The individual subscriber would later have sent the prints and text to be bound in a single folio volume and, once Wordsworth's authorship had become known, his name would sometimes have been included on the spine. Large and expensive books of this nature were, self-evidently, intended for gentlemen's libraries.

Wordsworth didn't think much of Wilkinson as an artist and accepted his invitation to write an essay partly, it is thought, as a gesture of goodwill but also for the fee. He didn't think much of the etchings either. He wrote to Lady Beaumont on 10 May 1810: 'The drawings, or Etchings, or whatever they may be called, are, I know, such as to you and Sir George must be intolerable. You will receive from them that sort of disgust which I do from bad Poetry.'[4] Wordsworth's phrase – 'drawings, or Etchings' – is easily explained. The etchings reproduce Wilkinson's drawings by a process that itself involves the act of drawing rather than the more laborious work of engraving; etchings are thus very faithful to the original drawings on which they are based.

Wordsworth soon set about revising his essay (his annotated copy and related manuscripts are in the Wordsworth Library in Grasmere). Ten years later, in 1820, it reappeared as an annex to an octavo volume of poems with his name firmly attached: *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: and other Poems. To which is annexed, A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes, in the North of England*. It occupied over 100 pages, about a third of the whole book, and was conspicuous as a block of solid prose after the spaciously displayed poems. It was specifically mentioned on the title-page. This was a coherent volume in that a sense of the Lake District pervaded many of the poems that precede the essay. In the *Duddon Sonnets* Wordsworth traced the course of that river lovingly and thoughtfully – just as he traced the geography and history of 'the Country of the Lakes' in the essay. Longman's ledger of accounts for the volume, preserved in the Special Collections at the University of Reading, shows entries in April and May for the postage for half a dozen review copies, as well as for nine copies

[4] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. II. The Middle Years, Part I*, ed. Ernest De Sélincourt, rev. Mary Moorman (Oxford, 1969), p. 404.

for the 'Author' and others that include Dorothy Wordsworth and Thomas Clarkson. By June 1820, 340 of the 500 copies printed had been sold; and by 1834 only 30 copies were left. The ledger also shows that, as of June 1820, the expenses of publication left a profit of only £14 10s. 4d., to be split 50:50 with the author, so Wordsworth earned peanuts from the volume. However, it was widely praised by the reviewers, an event which acted as a spur to further revision.

In 1822 the essay was re-issued as a duodecimo pamphlet entitled *A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in the North of England*. It now had an independent existence; more importantly, it was pocket-sized and easily portable by visitors to the Lakes. Besides 'additions' and 'illustrative remarks upon the Scenery of the Alps', it also had a fold-out map facing the title-page. As in 1820, it had a very small print run (500 copies) which was exhausted within a year. In 1823 it was revised and enlarged, and – over-optimistically – 1,000 copies were printed.

1835 saw the publication of the 'fifth edition' in small octavo format, of which 1,500 copies were printed. The book was now declared to be *A Guide through the District of the Lakes … with a Description of the Scenery, &c*. Published locally, by Hudson & Nicholson in Kendal, rather than in London and designated as 'for the use of tourists and residents' on its title-page, this became the definitive version of Wordsworth's text. It has been used as the basis for many modern editions, including the two described below. From 1842 onwards, there were many further editions, with diverse texts added and these became the staple companion for Victorian visitors to the Lakes.

Turning now to the essay itself, we should ask: what is Wordsworth's so-called 'Guide'? As Stephen Gill indicated, it is not a guidebook! Wordsworth made slight variations in its title over the years, revising this like everything else that he wrote. In 1820 he called it a 'Topographical Description' but it's far less mundane than those words suggest; it's lovingly crafted and presented with a heartfelt sense of urgency; it's specifically addressed to 'persons of taste' who are required not merely to look at the area but to study it closely and attentively. Wordsworth's aim can be seen in his opening words (p. 3) where he praised the three-dimensional, coloured model of Alpine scenery at Lucerne, which, he said, provided

> an exquisite delight to the imagination, which was thus tempted to wander at will, from valley to valley, from mountain to mountain, through the deepest recesses of the

> Alps…. the sublime and beautiful region, with all its hidden treasures, … was thereby comprehended and understood at once…. Something of this kind (as far as it can be performed by words, which must needs be inadequately) will here be attempted in respect to the Lakes in the north of England, and the vales and mountains enclosing and surrounding them.

We should note, in passing, Wordsworth's reference to the inadequacy of words; perhaps artists (or, rather, some artists) can respond to the challenges of the Lake District just as well as writers, or even better?

The essay consists of four sections. Wordsworth begins with the work of nature (mountains, valleys, lakes, islands, tarns, rivers, woods: pp. 3–40), followed by the work of man from ancient times until his own era (pp. 40–68). He then describes recent changes in the area, dwelling on the ways in which the intervention of man has impinged on both landscape and society, to the detriment of both (pp. 68–72). This leads into recommendations on the future management of the region, to prevent further damage (pp. 72–96). Finally, he adds a few pages of hints 'to promote the enjoyment of the Tourist' (pp. 97–109). The variety of subjects in the essay means that it fits well into the theme of this year's Winter School, 'Wordsworth's Variety', but this is not all. Not only is there variety in the scenery discussed, and in the visual effects produced by the weather; Wordsworth himself writes in many different modes. By turns he is descriptive, scientific, elegiac and polemical. He analyses form; notes minute colour distinctions in rocks or water; notices sounds. He makes judgments on architecture, economics, horticulture and arboriculture as passionately as Ruskin – born in 1819 – was to do later in the century. He sees beauty in both violence and serenity; elegance in nature as well as sublimity.

In the month the volume was published, April 1820, Wordsworth reached the age of fifty; perhaps not surprisingly 'fifty years' is a recurrent phrase in his essay (updated from the 'forty years' benchmark in 1810). He may have seen his age as a milestone, reflecting that his father had died at 42, his mother when barely in her thirties. In the essay he repeatedly uses 'fifty years' as a measure by which to comment critically on perceived change (pp. 52, 55, 57, 68). Non-native trees – such as larches – have been introduced, he says, 'seldom with advantage and often with great injury to the appearance of the country'. He claims that both 'the face of the country' and the state of society 'underwent no material change' 'till within the last fifty years'. One can't help wondering

if some of this is nostalgia and wishful thinking, a projection of his inner feelings onto the outside world.

How did Wordsworth regard his work on the essay? This is a subject on which there's conflicting evidence. On their way to Scotland in 1807, Lord and Lady Holland spent a couple of days in the Lakes and invited Wordsworth to join them at the Lowood Hotel. In her journal, Lady Holland recorded that, 'He is preparing a manual to guide travellers in their tour amongst the Lakes'. She goes on to say that they had completely different opinions on picturesque subjects, but 'He seems well read in his provincial history.'[5] We might well believe her statement about the 'manual', but for a statement by Wordsworth himself. In October 1808 he wrote to the Vicar of Skipton and Kildwick, the Rev. John Pering, that he had tried to write a description of the area the previous autumn (i.e. *after* the meeting with Lady Holland) but 'could make no progress'. He said that 'an insuperable dullness' came over him and that he would be 'utterly at a loss' were he to attempt a 'formal delineation' of his native country.[6] A 'delineation', however, is quite different from a 'guide' and it is very likely, as David Chandler has suggested, that Wordsworth *did* think of writing a guide in 1807, stimulated by conversations with Southey who had recently incorporated a Lakes tour in his *Letters from England*.[7] Perhaps his difference of opinion with Lady Holland had quenched his enthusiasm?

Moving on to 1809: having accepted Wilkinson's invitation, Wordsworth clearly enjoyed writing his essay – at least to begin with. On 18 November Dorothy wrote to Catherine Clarkson that he had finished 'the general introduction', which Sara Hutchinson had transcribed, and she goes on, optimistically: 'I think, if he were to write a Guide to the Lakes and prefix this preface, it would sell better, and bring him more money than any of his higher labours. He has some thoughts of doing this.'[8] On an equally positive note, in May 1810 Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont (who had just enjoyed reading the Introduction to the *Select Views*):

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[5] *The Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland (1791–1811)*, ed. The Earl of Ilchester (London, 1909), II, 231.
[6] *The Letters*, p. 271.
[7] David Chandler, 'The Influence of Southey's *Letters from England* on Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*', *Notes and Queries*, vol. 248 (new series 50), no. 3, September 2003, 288–91.
[8] *The Letters*, p. 372.

> I thought the part about the Cottages well-done; and also liked a sentence where I transport the Reader to the top of one of the Mountains, or rather to the Cloud chosen for his station, and give a sketch of the impressions which the Country might be supposed to make on a feeling mind…. But what I wished to accomplish was to give a model of the manner in which topographical descriptions ought to be executed…. In this I think I have not wholly failed.[9]

Later, however, he found his work relating to the etchings 'a most irksome task' (in Dorothy's words); she warned Catherine Clarkson that she would find 'the latter part very flat'.[10]

To return to the edition for 2020: Our first challenge was to design and produce an attractive, readable book where the essay is clearly presented. Wordsworth's prose is very dense and many previous editions of the *Guide* have not addressed this problem at all or failed to overcome it satisfactorily. The edition of 1906, produced by the Wordsworth scholar and editor Ernest De Sélincourt, has often been reprinted (most recently in an edition with a preface by Stephen Gill[11]). De Sélincourt presents the reader with forbidding masses of text; a paragraph may go on for pages with no respite, something that many modern readers find off-putting. He also provides a long section of reference notes, explaining and enlarging upon the text, plus a handful of engravings; all these have been invaluable for generations of students – but it has to be said that they contribute to the visual density of the book. By contrast, Peter Bicknell's edition[12] breaks up Wordsworth's prose by interrupting it with a succession of images and long captions; I can't surely be alone in finding these distracting! But here again, we must give the editor his due. In 1984 there were few books, if any, that included such a rich array of depictions of the Lake District, derived from multiple sources and mostly in colour. The Wordsworth Trust, under Robert Woof, had mounted two pioneering exhibitions in the early 1980s, which brought the story of 'the discovery of the Lake District' under the public gaze, but the accompanying catalogues

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[9] *The Letters*, p. 404. Wordsworth's passage on cottages appeared in the fifth instalment (published in May) but it is possible that Lady Beaumont had read a manuscript copy sent to her earlier.
[10] *The Letters*, p. 449 (12 November 1810).
[11] William Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*, ed. E. de Sélincourt, with a preface by Stephen Gill (London, 2004).
[12] *The Illustrated Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes*, ed. Peter Bicknell (Exeter, 1984).

(with notes and commentaries by Peter Bicknell and Robert Woof) were modest in terms of visual images.[13] There was an understandable hunger for more.

Stephen and I wanted the text to be easily readable and we also felt that readers need a certain amount of prompting. In 1820 Wordsworth's four sections ran on continuously, with new topics occasionally introduced in capital letters. Our edition follows this style, adding colour for such words, to make the changes of subject more conspicuous. Wordsworth includes occasional poetical quotations (to which I'll return); apart from these, the only textual break in the 1820 edition was between the main essay (some 95 pages) and the 'Few Words' addressed to tourists that begin abruptly on page 310. In our edition, breathing space is provided by sections of illustrations.

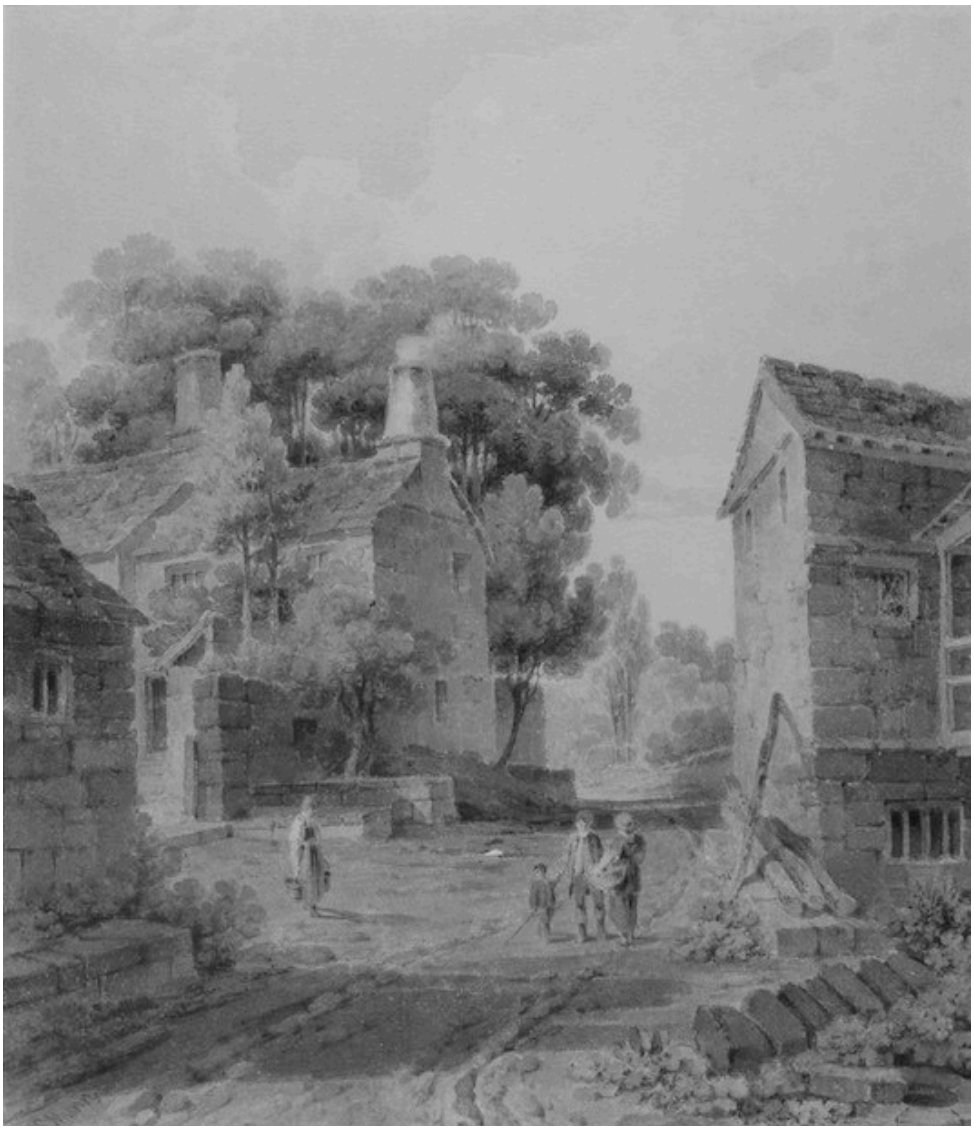
My own work consisted of selecting and arranging the images. It was all about making choices and involved constant revisions, in true Wordsworthian fashion. Initially, I just searched for images to match the nuances of the text; but it wasn't quite as simple as that. It soon became clear that it would be impossible to place the images immediately next to the relevant passages: some descriptive parts of the essay (such as the section on mountains) called for a rapid succession of diverse images; some subjects were treated very briefly; and the extended polemical parts were difficult to illustrate at all. We decided on an arrangement in which the images formed separate sections; they were seen in pairs, and each image was accompanied by a quotation from the text. I thus needed to set up meaningful pairs of images while at the same time following the sequence of the text as far as possible. For example, one very poignant pair (pp. 60–1) illustrates part of the long passage on cottages with which Wordsworth was so pleased. He writes:

> Nor will the singular beauty of the chimneys escape the eye of the attentive traveller…. Others are of a quadrangular shape, rising one or two feet above the roof; which low square is often surmounted by a tall cylinder, giving to the cottage chimney the most beautiful shape in which it is ever seen. (p. 54)

One image depicted the farmhouse at Troutbeck that belonged to the Brown family for generations and is now looked after by the National

[13] *The Discovery of the Lake District 1750–1810: A Context for Wordsworth* (Grasmere, 1982); *The Lake District Discovered 1810–1850: The Artists, The Tourists, and Wordsworth* (Grasmere, 1983).

Trust. The companion drawing included the same beautiful chimney design but on a wretchedly dilapidated house that had not been not so lovingly maintained. Wordsworth writes (p. 52): 'from the union of the two crowns, … various tenements would be united in one possessor; and the aboriginal houses, probably little better than hovels, … would many of them fall into decay, and wholly disappear.'



Paul Sandby Munn (1773–1845), *At Troutbeck, Westmorland*, watercolour, 1809 © The Wordsworth Trust

Thomas Jameson (1789–1827), *Derelict Cottage in Ambleside, with Wansfell in the Distance*, pencil, *c.*1808–10 © The Wordsworth Trust

One of my main challenges was getting it right for Wordsworth, especially in view of his critical comments in 1810! I didn't want to be tediously topographical, just showing 'a view of such and such a place'. I wanted to capture the emotion of the text, in all its twists and turns and contrasts. I wanted – in the words of my title – to bring Wordsworth 'closely to the eye'. The phrase comes from William Gilpin and describes his own practice of interspersing his prose *Observations* with passages of verse that reinforce the point being made, without laborious repetition.[14] This is something that Wordsworth himself does on many occasions in 1820. In our edition I hope the reader will find that the images reinforce Wordsworth's words in the same way as his own quotations – in an evocative and lively way.

In some cases, such as rural bridges, it was easy to match text and image (pp. 62–3); but we must note the variety of levels on which Wordsworth writes on this apparently simple subject (p. 56): he

[14] William Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England; particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland* (London, 1786), I, xix.

interweaves social history; design; craftsmanship; and that elusive quality 'taste'.

> Likewise to the smallness of the several properties is owing the great number of bridges over the brooks and torrents, and the daring and graceful neglect of danger or accommodation with which so many of them are constructed, the rudeness of the forms of some, and their endless variety.
>
> But when I speak of this rudeness, I must at the same time add that many of these structures are in themselves models of elegance, as if they had been formed upon principles of the most thoughtful architecture… sufficient specimens remain to give a high gratification to the man of genuine taste.

The elegiac and polemical parts of the essay were far more difficult. How can one capture Wordsworth's disgust at the appearance of larch trees? He discourses at length on their repulsive appearance (pp. 90–2); and, perhaps not surprisingly, artists didn't show them much! However, larches do feature in one of the Trust's watercolours of Belle Isle on Windermere (p. 79) which also includes another of Wordsworth's 'pet hates': 'the introduction of discordant objects' that 'disturb the peaceful harmony of form and colour' (p. 70). The 'pepper-pot' villa on Belle Isle was widely regarded as an eyesore, more suited to an Italian lake than an English one, from the moment it was built in 1774.

Wordsworth's third 'pet hate' was conspicuous white buildings on the sides of the hills. This was a subject on which he and Lady Holland had differed in 1807. She maintained that white buildings produced 'a cheerful effect'. 'He, on the contrary, would brown, or even black-work them; he maintained his opinion with a considerable degree of ingenuity. His objection was chiefly grounded upon the distances being confounded by the glare of white.'[15] This fact had long been known to artists and writers on aesthetics (and in his remarks on this subject Wordsworth makes a nod in the direction of William Gilpin). It is beautifully expressed in William Mason's translation of a seventeenth-century Latin verse treatise, Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica*: 'White, when it shines with unstain'd lustre clear / May bear an object back or bring it near.' In the art of the Romantic period the classic example of a conspicuous white building is Girtin's watercolour, *White House at Chelsea* of 1800 (Tate). It is said that Turner fretfully described this watercolour as being way beyond his own capabilities.

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[15] *The Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland*, II, 231.

In 1820 Wordsworth rarely mentions artists but, while on the subject of buildings, he draws on the advice of one of the greatest British painters of his day, the first President of the Royal Academy. He writes (p. 80): 'Sir Joshua Reynolds used to say, "if you would fix upon the best colour for your house, turn up a stone, or pluck up a handful of grass by the roots, and see what is the colour of the soil where the house is to stand, and let that be your choice."' In 1851 Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs* of his uncle described Rydal Mount in the poet's own words (p. 83): 'something between a cream and a dust colour'.[16] Wordsworth almost certainly heard Reynolds' precept from Sir George Beaumont, who would also, doubtless, have repeated to him Gainsborough's famous words on Reynolds, which apply equally to Wordsworth: 'Damn the man, how various he is!'

There was certainly no shortage of choice in the Fine Art Collection from which to make my selection, but some notable works were surprisingly difficult to place! I had, obviously, to include the beautiful Turner of *Ullswater*, painted around 1835, but it doesn't actually reflect any of Wordsworth's references to that lake. It's notable for an almost tangible sense of heat and the typical Turner sunlight that's so brilliant that it virtually destroys the features of the landscape. In the end I placed this watercolour, rather cheekily perhaps, with Wordsworth's disparaging remarks on summer weather with 'the monotony of midsummer colouring' and the 'glaring atmosphere of long, cloudless, and hot days' (p. 97). I paired it with another view of Ullswater, in a very different guise and by a less famous artist, which I think Wordsworth would actually have preferred (pp. 100–1). As he pointed out (p. 97), in September and October 'the scenery is, beyond comparison, more diversified, more splendid, and beautiful.' John Glover's drawing is full of recognisable features, including Patterdale church; and there are countless subtle variations in the colouring of the trees and foliage that Wordsworth would have appreciated.

One of the joys of the project was finding perfect parallels between text and image. A ravishing watercolour by John White Abbott acquired by the Wordsworth Trust in 1977 (and often used in publicity material over the years) shows the lake that everyone instantly associates with Wordsworth's name: it's the quintessential view of the Vale of Grasmere in the 1790s when William and Dorothy settled in Dove Cottage. There were then no visible 'improvements', no jarring buildings to mar the

[16] Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth, Poet-Laureate, D.C.L.* (London, 1851), I, 453.

landscape; just the vale, the lake, the hills and the church. It is the perfect accompaniment to words in his essay (p. 18): 'a body of still water under the influence of no current; reflecting therefore the clouds, the light, and all the imagery of the sky and surrounding hills'.

It was also good to demonstrate how timeless Wordsworth's remarks were and match them with works that range from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. In one section, relating to ancient stone circles, I was able to select works depicting Long Meg and the Castlerigg circle from the 1760s, the 1850s and the 1940s (pp. 44–6). Another bonus was to discover, simply by browsing, works I had not known before; and, sometimes, to make discoveries. Several of these works were by women artists, already known to me to some extent through my ongoing research into the Trust's holdings in this area. 'The Country of the Lakes' project enabled me to explore their work in greater detail.

One such discovery was the authorship of an enchantingly naïve work depicting the tiny church at Buttermere (p. 65). This had previously been regarded as anonymous but can now be associated with a famous Victorian writer steeped in Wordsworth. In the online data about the Trust's collection I noticed that a cataloguer had recorded the initials 'L.P.' under an area of dense hatching. The initials rang bells in my head, since my list of women artists to be researched included Lydia Penrose (1787–1842), sister of the wife of Dr Thomas Arnold, who built himself Fox How, under Loughrigg, as a holiday home in the 1830s. She was certainly worth investigating, being a member of a family who were extremely well known to the Wordsworths; she was an aunt to Matthew Arnold and his many siblings. The Trust holds a variety of Arnold and Penrose material, bequeathed by the Wordsworth scholar Mary Moorman in 1984, but the Buttermere drawing arrived more recently, via a different route. A quick exchange of emails resulted in my receiving photos of another work in the Trust's collection, also initialled 'L.P.' in similar fashion; and I was satisfied that the drawing of Buttermere church was, indeed, the work of Lydia Penrose.

Lydia Penrose (1787–1842), *Buttermere Church*, pen and ink, 1839

We should, I think, let Wordsworth have the last word, so I will end with part of his passage on the chapel, which beautifully sums up his reflections on the fragility of human life within the awe-inspiring 'Country of the Lakes':

> A man must be very insensible who would not be touched with pleasure at the sight of the chapel of Buttermere, so strikingly expressing by its diminutive size how small must be the congregation there assembled, as it were, like one family; and proclaiming at the same time to the passenger, in connection with the surrounding mountains, the depth of that seclusion in which the people live, that has rendered necessary the building of a separate place of worship for so few. (p. 56)

Dr Cecilia Powell,
London

Book Reviews

Rick Allen on *George Meredith: The Life and Writing of an Alteregoist* by Richard Cronin

RICHARD CRONIN, *George Meredith: The Life and Writing of an Alteregoist* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019),ISBN 978-3-030-32447-6 £64.99 hardback. E-Book 978-3-030-32448-3. £39.99.

Richard Cronin's distinguished body of work includes several books focusing on the Romantic era. Readers of the *CLB* may have particularly enjoyed *Paper Pellets*, with its arresting opening (which has an unlikely link with George Meredith's fiction, as we shall see): 'I begin with two duels, both of them fatal'. Later in this account of an often violently divided literary culture, Cronin remarked that 'Lamb clings tenaciously to a sense of his own in-betweenness'.[1] The subject of his latest book is also presented as an 'in-between' figure: ashamed of his origins as the son of a tailor, Meredith often set his fictions in aristocratic or genteel circles without, as a self-proclaimed Radical, feeling he belonged there himself. This is just one of numerous ways in which both the man and the writer are characterised by ambiguities, contradictions and self-divisions: 'Meredith's strongest work in prose and in verse is produced by violently conflicting impulses…it was the condition of his whole existence to be divided against himself' (17, 237). In large part a product of experience before his mid-thirties, culminating in the traumatic events surrounding his first marriage, the self-divisions give Meredith's writings, through a long and productive career, their distinctive character. It is only the experiences of that first phase of his life that Cronin is interested in as a biographer; his main tasks are to demonstrate their pervasive impact in the novels and poetry Meredith subsequently wrote and to present the case for the lasting significance of a writer not infrequently described as 'unreadable'.

[1] Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture After Waterloo* (Oxford, 2010), 1, 140.

Having acquired such a reputation, Meredith could hardly secure a more ideal champion than Cronin, who writes with elegance, lucidity, wit, and narrative zest. Not that he ignores his subject's deficiencies as a writer and even less those of the man himself. In his closest relationships, Meredith's behaviour often appears less than exemplary. However, no one was more aware of such shortcomings than the man himself: 'Meredith, unlike most of us, was capable of exercising a pitiless self-knowledge' (274). This capacity, and an associated gift for 'alteregoism,…the ability to write about himself as if he were another person' (xii), are, in Cronin's view, key factors in his literary achievement. They are discernible in all the novels and also in his greatest poetic work, *Modern Love*. While providing 'the rawest account in all of English literature of what it feels like to live through a failed marriage,…Meredith alternates between a third person that repudiates the husband and a first person that acknowledges the husband as a version of himself' (121, 128). Cronin's selective close analysis here includes several felicitous touches, as when the four-quatrain form of each poem, 'four symmetrical parts that can never be fused into one', is seen as analogous to 'the bodies of husband and wife…who stay separate even as they lie in bed together' (121). In the 21st poem, the couple put on a show of unity in the presence of a friend: 'Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine' (l.16). Cronin aptly describes it as 'a line in which almost every word seems to repel its neighbour' (123).

The shame Meredith felt about being 'the son of a snip'; the humiliation of a cuckolded and abandoned husband; and the shame of then taking complete possession of his and Mary's son, denying her any sight of the boy until she was on her deathbed: Cronin shows these to be emotional drivers in novel after novel, yet at a fictional remove they were alchemised into comedy, or perhaps more often alloyed into tragi-comedy.

George Meredith is thematically organised. An opening chapter establishes the fundamental self-division between 'concealing' and 'revealing'. The second covers family background and schooling, the foundations of Meredith's conflicted class attitudes. Then we have 'Courtship', the meeting and falling in love with Mary Ellen, the widowed daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, followed by 'Marriage', at the book's centre in more senses than one (and on its front cover, adorned by the famous charcoal sketch of Mary, drawn by Henry Wallis, for whom she had left Meredith not long before giving birth to her child with the artist). Later chapters are concerned with reading (that of Meredith, Mary Ellen, other novelists and their audience – 'novel people' as Cronin

punningly calls them in one of the book's most innovative sections); 'Sons' (in the plural because Meredith had two, but also because he strangely used that word to refer to the first one he had with Mary); 'Marie', his second wife, and his not unblemished record as a *soi-disant* 'philogynist'; and finally, the 'Meredithian' style. The thematic approach entails illustrative darts from novel to novel, but Cronin proves just as adept in close reading of the fiction. For example, he offers a brilliant and entertaining commentary on the first chapter of *One of Our Conquerors*, 'widely regarded as the most Meredithian of Meredith's novels….It was known by then that Meredith liked to supply his novels with a first chapter that functioned as a warning, a chapter designed to deter the reader rather than to offer a polite invitation to proceed' (268). In this case, the chapter tracks the inner life of Victor Radnor, a rich financier, a character with whom on the face of it the novelist has very little in common. Yet a deep 'complicity' emerges: 'If Radnor is a man with a private history that he dreads becoming public, so is Meredith, and if Meredith can trace so accurately the lineaments of a man uncomfortable in his own skin, it is because he knows very well that he suffers himself from the same condition' (273). Cronin's sprightly commentary is an invitation rather than a warning to any potential readers of the novel.

Admirers of Cronin's wide-ranging literary-cultural studies such as *Paper Pellets* and *Romantic Victorians* (2001) should be assured that there is no lack of breadth here either. In addition to detailed command of Meredith's extensive writings, public and personal, there is illuminating attention to what he read in English and in French, persuasively arguing that 'his biggest debt of all' (167) was to the writings of Stendhal. More widely, Cronin discusses the significance of the novel-reading of a whole generation, boldly claiming that in the later nineteenth century 'the novel was not just describing human nature, it was changing it' (145). As an implicit test case, he follows up in fascinating detail the evidence of Mary Ellen's reading supplied by passages she transcribed prior to leaving her husband. The sources include French novels of adultery and others where women are choosing between two kinds of men. More broadly still, through regular reference to such contemporaries as Hardy, Gissing and James, Cronin treats Meredith, for all his acknowledged oddities, as a representative novelist of his age, and in doing so, advances interesting generalisations about late, as distinct from earlier, Victorian literature and society. The argument that characters acquire more fluid identities than in the novels of, say, George Eliot is certainly persuasive; others I found less so. For example, while it *might* be true that '[i]n the later nineteenth century, social life was narrower than it had ever been. British society was divided…above all by class' (148), it is hard, even allowing for a

distinction between perception and actuality, to reconcile this with the earlier proposition that 'it was becoming increasingly difficult to tell the different classes apart. All classes seemed to be converging towards the middle' (32).

Regarding the most salient biographical facts, *George Meredith* is at times unnecessarily repetitive. No less than four times in two pages (74-5) we are reminded that Mary Ellen was 26 when she met the 19-year-old Meredith, twice that she was a widow, and twice that she had a three-year-old daughter. Twice within the next few pages we learn that Meredith proposed six times before being accepted. In 1860 Meredith was appointed to succeed John Forster as principal reader at Chapman & Hall at a salary of £250 a year. It was an event of financial and literary importance in his career, but the information did not need to be relayed verbatim on two separate occasions (163, 184). Other reiterations are understandable and even desirable given the shifting thematic focus from chapter to chapter. They become part of a pleasing musicality in the style and structure of Cronin's discourse.

What of that link to the duels in *Paper Pellets*? Cronin's discussion of Meredith's ambivalence about the life of action as opposed to the contemplative life prompts him to note 'the extraordinary prominence allowed in the novels to the practice of duelling' (97). No better example, surely, of Meredith's oddity as a celebrated novelist of contemporary life in the late nineteenth century? But Richard Cronin has refuted the charge of unreadability; the fault lies with the rest of us if Meredith remains unread.

Rick Allen,
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Felicity James on Wanderers: A History of Women Walking by Kerri Andrews

KERRI ANDREWS, *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking* (Reaktion Books, 2020), ISBN: 9781789143423, £14.99 hardback.

This is an exhilarating adventure through the history of women's walking, from Elizabeth Carter in the eighteenth century to the contemporary writers Cheryl Strayed and Linda Cracknell. We journey alongside Dorothy Wordsworth, Ellen Weeton, Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt and Harriet Martineau, and into the twentieth century with authors as diverse as Virginia Woolf, Nan Shepherd and Anais Nin.

It begins with Kerri Andrews herself striding out to show us the way, describing a walk tackling the Aonach Eagach, or 'notched ridge' running high above Glencoe. It's a tricky scramble in the Scottish mizzle, and Andrews beautifully evokes the laborious pleasure of the difficult walk, the concentration of mind and body required to tackling the 'shifting three-dimensional puzzle' of a rocky clamber. Thus, she stakes her practical and intellectual claim to the subject matter – and the 'creative power of recognizing and drawing on a female tradition of walking' (p. 36). Andrews gives us some wonderful examples of this tradition, who bound off the page in their own words, as in Elizabeth Carter's 1746 description of being 'half roasted with the full glare of sunshine upon an open common, then dragged through a thread-paper path in the middle of a cornfield, and bathed up to the ears in dew' (p.37). She and her companion make, by the end of the walk, 'such deplorable ragged figures, that I wonder some prudent country justice does not take us up for vagrants, and cramp our rambling genius in the stocks' (p.38). It's a full-bodied, high-spirited description, relishing bad weather and the buffeting of the elements, and taking pride in walking outside the constraints of social and gender norms. Carter's scholarly drive is echoed by her compulsion to walk, which seems to have been essential for her creativity to flourish.

This becomes a common theme through the book, forming a connection with Harriet Martineau in the next century, for instance, and emphasising the connection between intellectual and physical determination. For Martineau, indeed, walking became an intellectual tool in its own right, as she used 'pedestrianism as a methodological tool

for sociologists' (p. 137). In quite a different creative mode, we see a similar interdependence of writing and walking in the example of Virginia Woolf. Andrews brings out the way Woolf viewed 'working on a novel *as* a form of walking' (p. 165), sustained by her visionary experiences of wandering the streets of London, 'a tawny coloured magic carpet' (p.271). These are women writers revelling in the physical: whether that is the 'clear deeps of air' of Nan Shepherd's Cairngorms, or the sensuous Parisian spring-time enjoyed by Anais Nin, who looks down the Champs Elysees feeling 'as if I were biting into a utopian fruit, something velvety and lustrous and rich and vivid' (p. 209). Walking can also be physically punishing, as in the trials endured by Cheryl Strayed on her hike of the Pacific Coast Trail: it can be lonely and debilitating, but through this can come strength and mental solace.

This larger tradition forms a good context for a re-reading of three figures from the Romantic period: Dorothy Wordsworth, Ellen Weeton, and Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt, who emerge from these pages as valiant and resourceful walker-writers. We are reminded of the ways in which Dorothy and William created a shared past in words and walks, 'making and exchanging memories, especially by retracing the same paths over and again' (p. 63). But we also see the ways in which Dorothy interrogates her own walking practice, as when she meets a poor woman on Loch Lomond, walking in search of work with her husband and small child, for whom 'every step was painful toil' (p.69). By contrast, Dorothy is acutely aware of her own walking as pleasure, 'at least […] in the remembrance' (p.69). Through the rhythms of Dorothy's walking, Andrews delicately calls attention to the rhythms of Dorothy's prose, and her empathetic sensitivity. This interconnection between prose style and walking is nicely picked up in her discussion of Ellen Weeton, a Lancashire governess who left extensive diaries from the 1810s and 1820s describing her walks. Weeton's prose has a lively immediacy, as when she pictures herself 'perched on a ridge like a crow on the point of a pinnacle' (p. 89); the description is imbued with, as Andrews writes, 'a twitchy energy,' aligned 'imaginatively with the crow'. Her walks seem to have been a source of profound joy and pride for Weeton, who narrates feats of bravery and great endurance, such as a 35 mile walk she undertakes powered by '3 boiled eggs and a crust of bread'. Walking was 'release, remedy and restoration, sanctuary and solace' (p. 205) in the face of constraining work and domestic violence.

The emotional and physical resilience of women walkers is another leitmotif of the book, and comes particularly to the fore in the discussion of Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt. Stoddart Hazlitt emerges from the

wonderful 'journal-like' letters of Mary Lamb as an energetic, enthusiastic friend, ready for confidences, match-making, urban rambles and mischief. In a letter of December 1802, for instance, Mary yearns for her friend's company, and remembers 'bustling down Fleet-Market-in-all-its-glory of a saturday night, admiring the stale peas and co'lly flowers and cheap'ning small bits of mutton and veal for our sunday's dinner's' before being scolded for not laying the table and for 'laughing in an unseemly manner' (Marrs, ii, 89-90). Yet, with some few exceptions, Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt has not attracted much attention in her own right: Andrews gives us a welcome and original insight into her writing and walking life. Her chapter focusses on the spring and summer of 1822, when Stoddart Hazlitt journeyed to Scotland in order to facilitate her divorce to William, and draws on the journals she kept during that time. Here, her navigation of tangled legal proceedings is set alongside her punishing, physically exhausting expeditions through forlorn moorlands and pathless swamps in the Highlands, her mileage meticulously noted in the journals. While she courts fatigue, she also finds solace in her mountainous scrambles: 'These walks always make me more religious and more happy, more sensibly alive to the benevolence and love of the Creator than any books or church' (p. 119). The 'apprehension of the divine is understood physically and instinctively', writes Andrews, and gives a deep comfort in difficult and vulnerable times, as the divorce is finalised. Sarah 'was as brave in the face of an uncertain and unknowable future as she had been on the dangerous pass between Lochs Katrine and Lomond' (p.121). The stubborn, head-strong, lonely courage of Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt comes vividly from Andrews' writing: we have a real insight into her strength and unconventionality, and what might have brought she and Mary Lamb close.

These three chapters, at the heart of this wide-ranging study, exemplify the way Andrews seeks to open up new ways through women's writing. She emphasises the continuities and differences between the writers, some well-known, some forgotten, and calls attention to the texture of language, the pleasure of description. We have a sense of the hidden tracks and by-ways of women's writing, so that the memory-making of Dorothy's walks re-emerges in another time in Linda Cracknell's 2014 memoir *Doubling Back*, a form of literary and pedestrian companionship across the centuries. Andrews, too, participates in this community. Each chapter ends with a coda, in which we see her reflecting on her own walking relationships, her memories of walks through the Cairngorms, Great Gable, the Californian mountains. She walks with friends, with colleagues, and alone, feeling 'the old soul-stirring joy at being high above the world' (p.207). As Andrews does so, she is not only

mapping out a personal path through the book, she is also reminding us that there has always been a long lively mode of female walker-writers: as Kathleen Jamie says in the foreword, 'a fine female tradition is at our backs, encouraging us forward' (p.10).

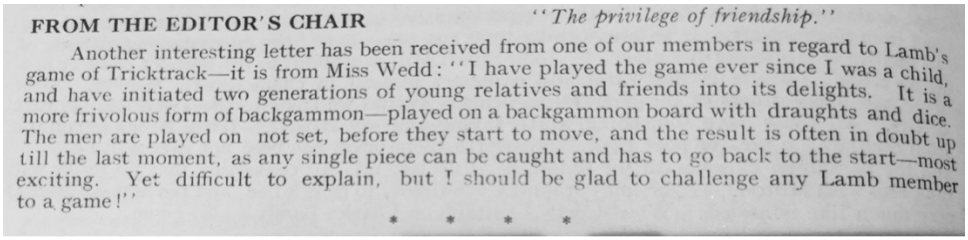
Felicity James,
University of
Leicester

From the Archives

There is a picture in the Guildhall archives that could use identification--please write in. On 19 October 1946, Edmund Blunden wrote:

Dear Crowsley,

> Perhaps you or another learned Elian can settle the question of the alleged portrait of Mary Lamb […] Sothebys have withdrawn it from their sale. I believe because they were advised at the National Gallery that the lady's costume is of the period 1830-1835—when Mary Lamb was about 70 years old […] I have a feeling that the headdress and other ornaments may have been added to the portrait by somebody in the thirties.



FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR *''The privilege of friendship.''*

Another interesting letter has been received from one of our members in regard to Lamb's game of Tricktrack—it is from Miss Wedd: ''I have played the game ever since I was a child, and have initiated two generations of young relatives and friends into its delights. It is a more frivolous form of backgammon—played on a backgammon board with draughts and dice. The men are played on not set, before they start to move, and the result is often in doubt up till the last moment, as any single piece can be caught and has to go back to the start—most exciting. Yet difficult to explain, but I should be glad to challenge any Lamb member to a game!''

* * * *

From the *CLB*,
July 1950

The archive can be viewed at the Guildhall by Lamb Society members.

Lamb Society Essay Prize 2022

Deadline for submissions: 1 September 2022

The Charles Lamb Society welcomes submissions for a new essay prize. The competition is open to all. The winning essay will be published in the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* (with revisions if appropriate) and the author will receive £200 and a one-year subscription to the Charles Lamb Society, including two issues of the journal. They will also receive 5 additional copies of the issue in which their essay is published.

Essays should be 3000-7000 words, and not under consideration for publication elsewhere. Entries must offer an original contribution on either, or both, Mary and Charles Lamb and their circle. All shortlisted submissions will be considered for potential publication in the *CLB,* and the winner will be chosen by the *Bulletin* Editorial Board. Please see the Lamb Society website for the style guide: www.charleslambsociety.com. Entries should be sent to the Editor, John.gardner@aru.ac.uk.

The *Charles Lamb Bulletin* is a highly regarded peer-review journal and a lively forum for discussion of all things Elian. It was founded in 1935 and since then has printed over four hundred issues containing essays, letters, reviews, poems, notes and queries relating to the Lambs and their circle. Its contributors have included an array of distinguished scholars including Jonathan Bate, Edmund Blunden, Gillian Beer, John Beer, Helen Darbishire, Earl Leslie Griggs, Nicholas Roe and Duncan Wu.

The *Bulletin* is now produced twice a year, in the summer and winter. It aims to promote and develop scholarship on the Lambs' circle and the editor 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.

Past issues of the *Bulletin* can be found at: www.charleslambsociety.com.

The Charles Lamb Bulletin

www.charleslambsociety.com/bulletin.html

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 preferably be in 11-point Book Antiqua typescript and between 4000 and 8000 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. For further information contact the Editor, John Gardner, School of Humanities, Anglia Ruskin University, East Road, Cambridge, CB1 1PT (john.gardner@aru.ac.uk).

The Charles Lamb Society

www.charleslambsociety.com

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 either the Membership Secretary, Helen Goodman, h.goodman@bathspa.ac.uk, or the Chairs, Felicity James, fj21@le.ac.uk and John Strachan, j.strachan@bathspa.ac.uk

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