The Charles Lamb Bulletin

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Editorial

TWO IMPORTANT ACADEMIC events fast approach, both organized by the Friends of Coleridge. The Coleridge Conference will be held at Cannington on 23-9 July. In addition to the academic attractions (always of very high quality at this Conference), it will feature a rare visit to Racedown Lodge, home of the Wordsworths 1795-7. The Lodge is now a private house but will be opened up on this occasion for Conference delegates. This is a unique opportunity to see the place where Wordsworth composed the first version of *The Ruined Cottage*, *The Borderers*, and *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*; the resourceful might even be able to find the exact gate which Coleridge is said to have jumped over when he came to visit the Wordsworths here in 1797. In addition, delegates will be able to climb Lewesdon Hill, site of the celebrated poem by William Crowe, which was read, and very much enjoyed, by Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the 1790s. This Conference cannot be too highly recommended; for further information contact either Graham Davidson, 87 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol BS6 5EP, or Professor Nicholas Roe, Department of English, The University, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9AL (telephone: 01334 476161 ext. 2642).

The Kilve Court Weekend this year promises to be a star-studded event. It will take place in the magnificent setting of Kilve Court, but a stone's throw from the green sea, and a short hop away from the Quantocks, which provided the settings for such poems as *The Thorn* and *Anecdote for Fathers*. It is not possible to fully appreciate the Lyrical Ballads until you have first seen the Quantocks, and what better occasion to do so than this? The Weekend will be held on 4-6 September, its theme being 'Figures in the Landscape'. Speakers will include David Fairer, Cecilia Powell, Robin Jarvis, Tom Mayberry, and Peter Larkin. For further details contact Shirley Watters, 11 Castle Street, Nether Stowey, Somerset TA5 1LN (telephone: 01278 733338).

The Friends of Coleridge also publish an essential journal for all admirers of the poet, *The Coleridge Bulletin*. For further details of this and all activities of the Friends contact either Reggie or Shirley Watters.

Mary Lamb

By MARY WEDD

A talk given at the Study Weekend run by the Friends of Coleridge at Kilve Court, September 1997

THE INDEFATIGABLE Crabb Robinson—what *would* we do without him?—tells of a visit he made to Mary Lamb in December 1814 when he 'chatted with her, her brother being in bed, from 10 to 11. She was not unwell, but she had undergone great fatigue from writing an article about needlework for the new *Ladies' British Magazine*. She spoke of writing as a most painful occupation, which only necessity could make her attempt. She had been learning Latin merely to assist her in acquiring a correct style. Yet, while she speaks of inability to write, what grace and talent has she not manifested in *Mrs Leicester's School*, etc.'[1]

This article 'On Needlework' was published in April 1815 in the *British Lady's Magazine* and I suspect that it was not writing in general that Mary found 'a most painful occupation' so much as tackling this particular subject. Talfourd suggests as a trigger for the insane attack upon her mother in September 1796 the stress of her domestic circumstances.

> The father was rapidly sinking into dotage; the mother suffered under an infirmity which deprived her of the use of her limbs; and the sister undertook the office of daily and nightly attendance on her mother, but sought to add by needlework to their slender resources.[2]

She was a mantua-maker and at that time was also training an apprentice. Her article begins: 'Mr Editor—In early life I passed eleven years in the exercise of my needle for a livelihood'. One is reminded of Thomas Hood's 'Song of a Shirt'.

> Work—work—work
> Till the brain begins to swim;
> Work—work—work
> Till the eyes are heavy and dim!
> Seam and gusset, and band,
> Band, and gusset and seam,
> Till over the buttons I fall asleep,
> And sew them on in a dream.
>
> O! Men with Sisters dear!
> O! Men with Mothers and Wives!
> It is not linen you're wearing out,
> But human creatures' lives!
> Stitch—stitch—stitch,
> In poverty, hunger and dirt,
> Sewing at once, with double thread,
> A Shroud as well as a Shirt . . .

[1] *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* selected and ed. Thomas Sadler (London, 1872), p. 242.

[2] Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, *Memoirs of Charles Lamb* ed. Percy Fitzgerald (London, 1894) (hereafter Talfourd), p. 22.

Seam, and gusset and band,
Band and gusset, and seam,
Work, work, work,
Like the Engine that works by Steam!
A mere machine of iron and wood
That toils for Mammon's sake—
Without a brain to ponder and craze
Or a heart to feel—and break![3]

Certainly Mary's profession was superior to this and she did not live in acute poverty like Hood's needlewoman but the monotony and exhaustion are the same. In this day of machines we have to remember that then all sewing was done slowly and painfully by hand and that was how I was taught at school to make a garment. Earlier still my granny taught me how to darn holes in the black woollen stockings which were part of our uniform. Surely this tedious work was enough without 24-hour care of ailing parents, not to mention housework and the provision of meals. As Charles was to say, in his essay on 'Modern Gallantry', 'I shall begin to believe that there is some such principle influencing our conduct, when more than one-half of the drudgery and coarse servitude of the world shall cease to be performed by women'.[4]

The article 'On Needlework' is much more wide-ranging and interesting than its title might suggest. It does not talk about the technique of sewing a seam or turning up a hem. Mary asserts at once, 'my strongest motive is to excite attention towards the industrious sisterhood to which I once belonged'.[5] She reads, she says, 'that women have of late been rapidly advancing in intellectual improvement', which the *British Lady's Magazine* exists to promote. Nevertheless, she asserts that 'Needlework and intellectual improvement are naturally in a state of warfare'. (They did not then have Radio 4!) But, she goes on, 'I am afraid the root of the evil has not as yet been struck at. Workwomen of every description were never in so much distress for want of employment'. Walter Hunt, it is said, who invented an early sewing-machine, never patented it because his daughter persuaded him that it would throw seamstresses out of work. Mary pleads both for work for women and for the work they do to be appreciated and paid for according to its tediousness and the time spent on it. One comes away from reading this article with the sense that needlework is associated in her mind with unutterable weariness. She is very conscious, too, of the load of hard labour '*done at home*' by women who do the necessary sewing for the household and family, 'for which', she says, 'no remuneration in money is received or expected'. Think of it! Every sheet, every curtain, every article of clothing, then, had to be sewn by hand. Mary goes on,

> Is it too bold an attempt to persuade your readers that it would prove an incalculable addition to general happiness, and the domestic comfort of both sexes, if needle-work were never practised but for a remuneration in money? As nearly, however, as this desirable thing can be effected, so much more nearly will women be upon an equality with men, as far as respects the mere enjoyment of life. As far as that goes, I believe it is every woman's opinion that the condition of men is far superior to her own.

[3] Published 1843 as anon.
[4] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* ed. E. V. Lucas (revised ed., 7 vols., London, 1912) (hereafter Lucas), ii. 91.
[5] Lucas i. 204.

She elaborates delightfully on this thesis, drawing a picture of the contrast between the man's '*Real business* and *real leisure*' and the woman 'who allows not herself one quarter of an hour's positive leisure during her waking hours'. Moreover, she has to try to mug up her husband's interests, however boring she finds them, so as 'to fit herself to become a conversational companion', which makes 'the hours in which we *sit and do nothing* in men's company too often anything but a relaxation . . .' Getting a word in edgeways herself is hardly envisaged. She implies that the amount of listening involved is exhausting enough.

Coming up against the insuperable obstacle of marriage and children in an age before birth-control, she regretfully acknowledges that women cannot expect to be regarded as a good investment where training and work prospects are concerned. In those days, a woman who was sufficiently suitably educated might hope to be a teacher or governess. This was the Lambs' aim in the case of their ward, Emma Isola, though they were not very sanguine about her ability to achieve it. Otherwise a woman could earn by the use of her needle and that was that. One remembers the Fricker women, suddenly plunged from comparative affluence to acute poverty, turning to the making of clothes and hats. Things had marginally improved when I was a child: we were told at school that we had the choice of being a secretary or a nurse. If we were very clever and lucky we might become a teacher or librarian. It went without saying, and largely still does, that these women's jobs were very poorly paid. Hence, while Mary limits herself to asking 'every female' 'to contribute all the assistance in her power to those of her own sex who may need it, in the employments they at present occupy, rather than force them into situations now filled wholly by men', yet she asserts strongly that the work they do do, both professionally and '*in the family*', should be properly paid. She adds that well-to-do ladies might consider giving the needlework they do for pastime to those who really needed the work.

Nowadays, in Britain though *not* world-wide, we can afford *anger* at the exclusion and exploitation women have always suffered at the hands of men and the consequent waste of talent, as well as what Mary calls 'the mere enjoyment of life'. The seemingly inevitable resignation of her time is, in her writing, tinged with a clear-eyed sense of injustice.

In her own life, Mary seems to have been unassuming in company and to have had no wish to usurp man's place. Talfourd quotes Hazlitt, unwittingly illustrating the prejudice that women were up against, who 'used to say, that he had never met with any woman who could reason, and had met with only one thoroughly reasonable—the sole exception being Mary Lamb.' Talfourd goes on, 'She did not wish, however, to be made an exception, to a general disparagement of her sex; for in all her thoughts and feelings she was most womanly—keeping, under even undue subordination to her notion of woman's province, intellect of rare excellence . . .'[6]

Nevertheless, Lucas detects a mischievous irony in some of Mary's remarks in this essay, and rightly so. People today seem to have difficulty in recognizing irony—it is too subtle for them. They cannot believe that a person can say one thing and mean its opposite. I have almost given up trying to make jokes, as, when I burlesque some monstrous statement commonly perpetrated in society but which I hate, my hearers, instead of laughing at my performance, rush to argue with me. I am certain they would assure me that it is no use my wishing to meet Burns—because he is dead. There are altogether too many Caledonians about. (See Lamb's essay 'Imperfect Sympathies'.) This is more than a personal misfortune of mine, for if academics cannot recognize 'that dangerous figure—irony' when they see it, their judgement will be awry and out will go some of the best of English Literature.

[6] Talfourd 223.

Consider this, for example.

> To make a man's home so desirable a place as to preclude his having a wish to pass his leisure hours at any fireside in preference to his own, I should humbly take to be the sum and substance of woman's domestic ambition . . . .
>
> I would appeal to them who have been most successful in the performance of this laudable service, in behalf of father, son, husband or brother, whether an anxious desire to perform this duty well is not attended with enough of *mental* exertion, at least, to incline them to the opinion that women may be more properly ranked among the contributors to, than the partakers of, the undisturbed relaxation of man.[7]

What a wealth of implied but unspoken meaning lies behind that passage!

That Mary was very successful in this 'duty' is evidenced by Coleridge, writing in 1808 about Samuel Daniel's *Poetical Works* which he had borrowed from Charles and now returned, having annotated the *Civil Wars*, recommending his friend to re-read it. 'Do read over—but some evening when I am quite comfortable at your fireside—and O! where shall I ever be, if I am not so there . . . well! I will read it to you and Mary.'[8] As early as December 1794, Coleridge had written of Mary, 'Her mind is elegantly stored—her Heart feeling'. In December 1796, he reports to Benjamin Flower, 'The young Lady, who in a fit of frenzy killed her own mother, was the Sister of my dearest Friend, and herself dear to me as an only Sister'.[9] Though Lamb says, 'We are in a manner marked' (12 May 1800), he is speaking there of people who do not know them personally. What is most striking, as one reads, is how completely their friends accepted Mary's illness and did not find it any bar to their affection and admiration for her. She herself recognised the symptoms of an approaching attack and would often indicate that she needed to go away.

Coleridge writes to his wife on 4 April 1803,

> I had purposed not to speak of Mary Lamb—but I had better write it than tell it. The Thursday before last she met at Rickman's a Mr Babb, an old Friend and Admirer of her Mother and the next day she *smiled* in an ominous way—on Sunday she told her Brother that she was getting bad, and with great agony—on Tuesday morning she layed hold of me with violent agitation and talked wildly about George Dyer / I told Charles, there was not a moment to lose / and I did not lose a moment—but went for a Hackney Coach, and took her to the private Madhouse at Hogsden / She was quite calm, and said—it was the best to do so—but she wept bitterly two or three times, yet all in a calm way. Charles is cut to the Heart.[10]

Though their friends learnt to live with Mary's periodical attacks they did not cease to be grieved by them. Coleridge, again, in March 1811 says, 'George Burnett's Death, told too abruptly, and in truth exaggerated [meaning the circumstances were exaggerated], overset my dear, most dear and most excellent Friend and Heart's Sister, Mary Lamb—and her illness has almost overset me'.[11]

[7] Lucas i. 206.
[8] *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71) (hereafter Griggs), iii. 55.
[9] Griggs i. 147 and 267.
[10] Griggs ii. 941.
[11] Griggs iii. 306.

Alas! Coleridge's own presence and conversation were themselves enough to disturb Mary, as Lamb knew: 'She must be with duller fancies and cooler intellects'.[12] Crabb Robinson reports in a letter of 14 March 1811,

> Poor Mary Lamb has been attacked again by her shocking malady. It has been, I fear, precipitated by Coleridge's company, which I think has a dreadful effect upon her nerves and shatters her frame. The conversation of such a man, whose eloquence is full of passion and mystical philosophy, a compound of poetry, metaphysics, plaintive egotism and diseased sensibility, continued for hours to a late hour in the night, is enough to disorder a sane but susceptible frame, much more rouse a dormant disease of imagination. Poor Coleridge is himself an object of compassion.

No wonder Mary in her article 'On Needlework' emphasizes that 'the hours in which we *sit and do nothing* in men's company (are) too often anything but a relaxation'. This did not alter the affection on both sides. As time goes on it is noticeable that Coleridge writes nearly always of 'dear Miss Lamb'.

Talfourd says,

> Miss Lamb would have been remarkable for the sweetness of her disposition, the clearness of her understanding, and the gentle wisdom of her acts and words, even if these qualities had not been presented in marvellous contrast with the distraction under which she suffered for weeks, latterly for months, in every year. There was no tinge of insanity discernable in her manner to the most observant eye; not even in those distressful periods when the premonitory symptoms had apprised her of its approach and she was making preparations for seclusion . . . To a friend in any difficulty she was the most comfortable of advisers, the wisest of consolers.[13]

On 7 May 1807, Coleridge writes that he has been ill but 'Already by Miss Lamb's nursing I am sufficiently recovered'.[14] When George Dyer forgot to eat and nearly starved himself to death, Charles and Mary fed him until 'he is got quite well again by nursing, and chirps of odes and lyric poetry the day long'.[15]

As with Charles, commentators have not credited Mary with the underlying toughness which was as important in both of them as their gentleness. When Mary felt that a crisis in the lives of her close friends demanded action, she was not afraid to take it. Despite not having a high opinion of husbands, and regarding marriage as 'but a hazardous kind of an affair',[16] she did her best to support Sarah Stoddart over her various suitors and in the choice she finally made to marry Hazlitt. In September 1806 when Coleridge, home from Malta, could not bring himself to leave London and go to Mrs Coleridge in Cumbria, though Mary thought a separation between them inevitable and that it was their affair, not hers, yet she could not tolerate Coleridge's refusal even to communicate with his wife. So she wrote to him in the following firm fashion.

> You must positively must write to Mrs Coleridge this day, and you must write here that I may know you write or you must come and dictate a letter for me to write to her. I know all

[12] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8) (hereafter Marrs) i. 127.
[13] Talfourd 223.
[14] Griggs iii. 18.
[15] Marrs ii. 30.
[16] Marrs ii. 229.

> that you would say in defence of not writing & I allow in full force every thing that you can say or think, but yet a letter from me or you *shall go today*.[17]

It did. One would have said it would be impossible to overcome Coleridge's disinclination to do as he should, but you will find the letter he wrote to his wife on 16 September 1806 in Griggs' second volume.

Though Coleridge ascribes Mary's relapse at the beginning of March 1811 to the news of George Burnett's death, it seems likely that she was even more concerned about the quarrel between Coleridge and Wordsworth. Later, writing to Wordsworth on 4 May 1812, Coleridge tells of the tremblings and 'agony of weeping' with which he had told 'Mary Lamb, the first person to hear of it from me'.[18] Godwin told Coleridge, as he reports in a letter of 14 March 1811, that at their house Mary had 'talked far more & with more agitation concerning me than about G. Burnett . . . & told Mrs Godwin, that she herself had written to Mr Wordsworth, exhorting him to come to town immediately, for that my mind was seriously unhinged'.[19] Though on the verge of a relapse, Mary acted as best she could to bring the two friends together.

But, of all her acts of friendship, the one that has always touched me most deeply is the letter she wrote to the Wordsworths about the death of their brother John. His ship went down on 2 February 1805, and Lamb had written as soon as he heard the news and had made enquiries at the India House with the object of reassuring William that his brother had behaved honourably as Captain of the ship. Charles wrote on 18 February,

> We have done nothing but think of you, particularly of Dorothy. Mary is crying by me while I with difficulty write this: but as long as we remember any thing, we shall remember your Brother's noble person, & his sensible manly modest voice, & how safe & comfortable we all were together in our apartment, where I am now writing.[20]

Mary waited till 7 May to write to Dorothy Wordsworth; before that, 'feeling that I was doing an improper thing to intrude upon your sorrow'. But a letter from Dorothy released her, and she was able to express what she felt.

> I wished to tell you, that you would one day feel the kind of peaceful state of mind, and sweet memory of the dead which you so happily describe as now almost begun, but I felt that it was improper, and most grating to the feelings of the afflicted, to say to them that the memory of their affliction would in time become a constant part not only of their 'dream, but of their most wakeful sense of happiness'. That you would see every object with, & through your lost brother, and that that would at last become a real & everlasting source of comfort to you, I felt & well knew from my own experience in sorrow, but till you yourself began to feel this I did not dare tell you so . . .[21]

With heartfelt apologies for its inadequacy, Mary includes her poem beginning

> Why is he wandering o'er the sea?
> Coleridge should now with Wordsworth be.

[17] Marrs ii. 240.
[18] Griggs iii. 399.
[19] Griggs iii. 309.
[20] Marrs ii. 152.
[21] Marrs ii. 166.

It includes lines which are echoed in Wordsworth's poem *The White Doe of Rylstone* (published 1815, written 1807-8). Here is Mary:

> He'd tell them that their brother dead
> When years have passèd o'er their head,
> Will be remember'd with such holy,
> True, & perfect melancholy,
> That ever this lost brother John
> Will be their heart's companion . . .

And here is Wordsworth, describing the state of his heroine, from whom everything that she cared for on earth, including a dear brother, had been taken away, who

> ranging through the wasted groves,
> Received the memory of old loves,
> Undisturbed and undistrest,
> Into a soul which now was blest
> With a soft spring-day of holy,
> Mild and grateful, melancholy . . .

Such, then, was the personality responsible for the writings, to none of which did Mary Lamb append her name.

The work which has never been out of print since its first publication at the end of 1806 (1807 on the title-page) is the book which my sister and I as children always called 'Lambstails'. Charles tells Wordsworth 'that I am answerable for Lear, Macbeth, Timon, Romeo, Hamlet, Othello, for occasionally a tail piece or correction of grammar, for none of the cuts and all of the spelling. The rest is my sister's'. He apologizes for the original illustrations, which were the choice of 'the bad baby', alias Mrs Godwin, and they *were* horrendous, as Professor T. W. Craik entertainingly demonstrated in his admirable lecture on the *Tales* given to the Lamb Society and published in the Golden Jubilee Number of their *Bulletin* in January 1985.

It amused Charles to pretend that Mary had no sense of humour. Writing to Wordsworth about his 1815 volume, he praises the poem 'The Force of Prayer' and says that he read out the first line to Mary 'as if putting a riddle, "What is good for a bootless bene?", to which with infinite presence of mind (as the jest book has it) she answered, a "shoeless pea". It was the first joke she ever made.' (In case you wonder what a 'bootless bene' is, it is a fruitless prayer.) But, in spite of what he says here, that Charles did not have the monopoly of humour in the family is revealed in flashes throughout Mary's writing. Here she is, describing the production of the *Tales*.

> Charles has written Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and has begun Hamlet; you would like to see us, as we often sit, writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting), like Hermia and Helena in the Midsummer's Night's Dream; or rather like an old literary Darby and Joan; I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds out he has made something of it.[22]

Professor Craik analysed some of the technical and moral problems they had in adapting the plays for children in that period and how they dealt with them, Charles with the tragedies, Mary

[22] Marrs ii. 228-9.

with the comedies. They omitted two comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and two tragedies, *Titus Andronicus* and *Troilus and Cressida*, and they did not attempt any of the histories, English or Roman. An example of Mary's throw-away humour occurs in her treatment of *The Tempest*.

> Prospero had commanded Ferdinand to pile up some heavy logs of wood. King's sons not being much used to laborious work, Miranda soon after found her lover almost dying of fatigue . . .[23]

Professor Craik quotes this and its context, the conversation between Ferdimand and Miranda and then Prospero, and sums up, 'Besides showing Mary's delightful tone, this passage shows her skill in condensing drama into brief narrative, for . . . this dialogue is a conflation of two scenes'.

The Lambs have to omit characters and sometimes whole subplots for their purposes and this they do with great expertise and ingenuity, while preserving the spirit of the original. Some of the main plots, too, proved a challenge. Mary writes in her part of the Preface,

> I have wished to make these Tales easy reading for very young children. To the utmost of my ability I have constantly kept this in my mind; but the subjects of most of them make this a very difficult task.

No wonder, then, that *All's Well that Ends Well*, which depends on the famous bed-trick, should almost have proved Mary's Waterloo. On 26 June 1806 Lamb writes to Wordsworth,

> Mary is stuck fast in All's Well that Ends Well. She complains of having to set forth so many female characters in boy's clothes. She begins to think Shakespear must have wanted Imagination.—I to encourage her, for she often faints in the prosecution of her great work, flatter her with telling her how well such a play & such a play is done. But she is stuck fast & I have been obliged to promise to assist her.[24]

Between them they managed it—without so much as a mention of a bed!

Lucas asserts in 1912 that 'The Lambs' *Tales from Shakespear* are, and probably will continue to be, the most widely distributed of all the Lambs' work. In England it may be that *Elia* has had as many readers.' Would it were still so. The *Tales*, he says, have been translated into French, German, Swedish, Spanish, and Polish.[25]

To Mary her writing for the Godwins' Juvenile Library meant, as she said, 'a job to keep going on'. By 23 October 1806, Mary tells Sarah Stoddart 'I have been busy making waistcoats and plotting new work to succeed the Tales'.[26] If she could make, as she hoped, £50 a year at such work it would doubtless be preferable to the alternative, that eternal sewing. What she came up with as her next project was *Mrs Leicester's School*, and I will not hide from you that this is a favourite with me. As Crabb Robinson said, 'what grace and talent has she not manifested in *Mrs Leicester's School*.'

Coleridge said to Allsop,

> It at once soothes and amuses me to think—nay, to know—that the time will come when this little volume of my dear and well-nigh oldest friend, Mary Lamb, will be not only

[23] Lucas iii. 9.
[24] Marrs ii. 233.
[25] See Lucas iii. 504.
[26] Marrs ii. 243.

> enjoyed but acknowledged as a rich jewel in the treasury of our permanent English literature . . .[27]

What will future generations think of us when they rediscover the works of Charles and Mary Lamb, as we are rediscovering now the women poets of the period, that after nearly two hundred years of popularity we are allowing these writings to disappear not only from the curriculum but from easily available print altogether? Luckily *Mrs Leicester's School* does exist in the Woodstock facsimile edition and, though it is expensive, one may think it worth the price.

Winifred Courtney heads her article on '*Mrs Leicester's School* as Children's Literature' in the Special Sesquicentennial Number of the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* (Nos. 47-48, July-October 1984) with a quotation from a review of the Opies' *Oxford Book of Children's Verse*.

> Not until Charles and Mary Lamb's 'The First Tooth' . . . do we become aware of any real attempt to imagine the world from the child's point of view . . .

'The First Tooth' is a poem in the Lambs' miniature two-volume *Poetry for Children*, also published in 1809 but, unlike *Mrs Leicester's School*, which went through ten editions by 1828, destined for oblivion. Charles, who wrote one third of the poems, said to Coleridge, 'You must read them remembering they were task-work',[28] but they do have their own charm. Particularly interesting are the two poems in which the sister resents her brother's deserting their common reading of English books for the study of Latin, which excludes her, but unlike the similar conflict in *The Mill on the Floss* this one is resolved by the brother saying, 'You shall Latin learn with me'.[29]

Lamb had protested to Coleridge against the current children's books then, both for their nauseous moralizing and for their cramming with facts rather than food for the imagination. 'Science has succeeded to Poetry no less in the little walks of Children than with Men.'[30] The stories in *Mrs Leicester's School* show another way. There *are* morals in them but they arise spontaneously out of the child's experience and simply sum up what she has learnt from it. The framework of the book is an ancient literary device but so adapted as to ensure a child's-eye view. Mrs Leicester, starting up a new school and noting the red eyes at parting, draws the ten girls into a close circle round the fire and asks each in turn to tell something about themselves and their lives so far, so that all can get to know one another. Charles wrote three of the tales, 'The Witch Aunt', 'First Going to Church' and 'The Sea Voyage'. Mary wrote the rest. The language is simple, as befits the narrators, but the child's unconscious irony is so skilfully and delicately portrayed that it pierces the heart of the adult reader quite without sentimentality. The children see the world within the limits of their understanding and the gap between their view and that of the reader provides some devastating implications.

For example, in 'Visit to the Cousins' Emily has been left with an Uncle and Aunt for a year while her mother and father are abroad. Her cousins treat her with great unkindness and their parents always favour them.

> My cousins very often quarrelled with me, and then they always said, 'I will go and tell my mamma, cousin Emily;' and then I used to be very disconsolate because I had no mamma to complain to of my grievances.

[27] Lucas iii. 509.
[28] Marrs iii. 14.
[29] Lucas iii. 457-8.
[30] Marrs ii. 81.

> My aunt always took Sophia's part because she was so young; and she never suffered me to oppose Mary, or Elizabeth, because they were older than me.
>
> The playthings were all the property of one or other of my cousins . . . I had nothing that I could call my own but one pretty book of stories; and one day as Sophia was endeavouring to take it from me, and I was trying to keep it, it was all torn to pieces; and my aunt would not be angry with her. She only said, Sophia was a little baby and did not know any better. My uncle promised to buy me another book, but he never remembered it.

In case you should think this exaggerated, I can assure you that as a child I stayed in a family where a young cousin was being brought up with the children of an aunt and uncle and I was acutely aware of all the cruel ways they found of excluding her. Her parents were in India. The pains of Empire were not all on one side. But in Mary's story the *coup de grace* comes when Emily is so little protected that she goes off trustingly with an unknown gentleman in a chaise and is taken to London. It transpires that he is her father but she has forgotten what he looks like. This, too, is true to life, for I remember being surprised at the appearance of my own parents when they met me from the train after a long term at boarding school.

Sometimes the irony lies in the child's double viewpoint of the seeming immediacy of remembered events and feelings juxtaposed with the better comprehension of them that has since come with the passage of time. An example of this is in the first story, Elizabeth Villiers' tale of 'The Sailor Uncle'. It begins:

> My father is the curate of a village church about five miles from Amwell. I was born in the parsonage-house, which joins the church-yard. The first thing I can remember was my father teaching me the alphabet from the letters on a tombstone that stood at the head of my mother's grave. I used to tap at my father's study door; I think I now hear him say, 'Who is there?—What do you want, little girl?' 'Go and see mamma. Go and learn pretty letters.' Many times in the day would my father lay aside his books and his papers to lead me to this spot, and make me point to the letters, and then set me to spell syllables and words: in this manner, the epitaph on my mother's tomb being my primmer and my spelling-book, I learned to read.

She knows now, and tells her listeners, that the gentleman who one day found her sitting on the churchyard stile was her sailor-uncle, who after long at sea had come to visit his sister, not knowing her to be dead. But at the time she was quite unaware of this.

> I agreed to take him to mamma, but we had a dispute about the way thither. My uncle was for going along the road which led directly up to our house; I pointed to the church-yard, and said that was the way to mamma. Though impatient of any delay, he was not willing to contest the point with his new relation, therefore he lifted me over the stile, and was then going to take me along the path to a gate he knew was at the end of our garden; but no, I would not go that way neither: letting go his hand I said, 'You do not know the way—I will show you:' . . . . At last I stopped at my mother's grave and, pointing to the tombstone, said, 'Here is mamma,' in a voice of exultation, as if I had now convinced him that I knew the way best: I looked up in his face to see him acknowledge his mistake; but Oh, what a face of sorrow did I see! . . . I knew not what to do; my mind was in a strange confusion; I thought I had done something wrong in bringing the gentleman to mamma to make him cry so sadly; but what it was I could not tell. This grave had always been a scene of delight to me.

Soon afterwards, when the brothers-in-law met, she 'conceived a dislike to my uncle because he had made my father cry'. 'Now I first learned that my mother's death was a heavy affliction.' Her happy routine of visiting the grave with her father was interrupted and her resentment at her uncle was expressed in those techniques of bad behaviour with which children know only too well how to exasperate adults. Mary's heroines are human children, warts and all. 'I screamed loudly, till my father came out to know what it was all about.' He took her to the tombstone but not for their usual activities there. 'I sate upon my father's knee, looking up into his face, and thinking "*How sorry papa looks*", till, having been fatigued with crying and now oppressed with thought, I fell fast asleep.' How sensitively Mary tempers the child's love and pity for her father with the mundane fact that crying and mourning make one very tired.

Gradually, by sensitive and thoughtful manoevres, the uncle weans them both from their obsession with the tomb of the dead mother and draws them out into a normal and happy life again. Then he has to go back to his ship and Betsy is overcome with remorse about 'how unkind I had been to my uncle when he first came.' Her father comforts her by saying, 'This is the sort of way in which we all feel, when those we love are taken from us . . .' Here comes the moral but it is an unexceptionable one and brave when one remembers Mary's history. 'Put away from you this unfounded grief; only let it be a lesson to you to be as kind as possible to those you love; and remember, when they are gone from you, you will never think you had been kind enough.' He ends his homily, 'But your uncle will come back again, Betsy, and we will now think of where we are to get the cage to keep the talking parrot in, he is to bring home; and go and tell Susan to bring the candles, and ask her if the nice cake is almost baked, that she promised to give us for our tea.' The stories are always preserved from mawkishness by such down-to-earth touches from everyday life to which every child—and adult—will respond.

If you think the deaths of mothers are much in evidence the answer is that so they were then. Deaths in childbirth or from complications afterwards were as common as deaths of children, and had to be assimilated into a child's picture of life. We are more fortunate now. But that they were common did not make such events less painful and Mary deals with them with a most skilful and delicate art. Landor comments, 'A fresh source of the pathetic bursts out before us, and not a bitter one . . .' and 'when I found myself upon it, I pressed my temples with both hands, and tears ran down to my elbows'. He particularly admired 'The Father's Wedding Day' and called it, with one exception, 'the most beautiful tale in prose composition in any language, ancient or modern'. He speaks of reading *Mrs Leicester's School* 'with exquisite delight'. I think one still can. He goes on, 'Most people, I understand, prefer the first tale ['The Sailor Uncle']—in truth a very admirable one—but others could have written it. Show me the man or woman, modern or ancient, who could have written this sentence: "When I was dressed in my new frock, I wished poor mamma was alive, to see how fine I was on papa's wedding day: and I ran to my favourite station at her bedroom door."'[31]

We have already seen an example of the economy with which Mary puts the reader in possession of essential facts in the opening of 'The Sailor Uncle'. She is equally skilled in framing the resolutions of her stories. In 'The Father's Wedding Day' the new wife gains Elinor's confidence by insisting on having the door of 'Mamma's room' unlocked, taking the child in and letting her talk about her mother. Eventually the room is made into her play and lesson area, where her new mamma teaches her to read. But the first breakthrough comes when Elinor sees

[31] Lucas ii.509.

'Miss Saville' weep and, in spite of her previous resentment, is sorry for her. Mary manages this perfectly, without sentimentality, by preserving the child's-eye view.

> I was so very sorry to hear her cry so, that I forgot I did not love her, and I went up to her and said, 'Don't cry, I won't be naughty any more, I won't peep through the door any more.'

Of course, the new bride has the great advantage of having been at school with 'mamma', but this device is entirely plausible, 'Miss Saville' being already known to both Elinor and her parents as a long-standing friend.

In 'The Changeling', the resolution is achieved by all the main participants behaving with exemplary kindness and magnanimity in a terrible situation. As Jonathan Wordsworth says, Mary 'reverses generations of changeling denouements by concerning herself with the one who was *not* the princess . . .' He goes on, 'A more adult style has been adopted for this older child and her deeper grief. Drawing on her own "experience in sorrow", Mary creates a story that is compelling and sustained. To quote Robinson one last time, it is "full of deep feeling, and great truth of the imagination".' The heroine, Ann Withers, learns some self-knowledge, in particular the damaging power of pride, as do Charlotte Wilmot in 'The Merchant's Daughter' and Emily Barton in 'Visit to the Cousins'. When the real daughter of Sir Edward and Lady Hariot Lesley shows that she has inherited her mother's musical talent, it is the last straw for poor ousted Ann, and she says,

> Nothing makes the heart ache with such a hopeless, heavy pain as envy. I had felt deeply before, but till now I could not be said to envy Miss Lesley.—All day long the notes of the harp or the piano spoke sad sounds to me, of the loss of a loved mother's heart.
>
> To have, in a manner, two mothers, and Miss Lesley to engross them both, was too much indeed.

Though doing her best to be fair, Ann cannot resist moments of cattiness about her ouster. 'Neither dancing, nor any foolish lectures could do much for Miss Lesley. She remained wanting in gracefulness of carriage . . .' The resolution, such as it is, comes in a heart-to-heart conversation between Ann and Lady Harriot, in the course of which it becomes clear that Ann's situation is impossible and that the best way out of it is for her to go away for a year or two to Mrs Leicester's school.

Particularly delightful is the ending of 'The Young Mahometan', in which Margaret Green's ill-advised solitary reading has persuaded her that she must be a Mahometan and has put her in a worry about how she and others would be able to get across the bridge, no wider than a silken thread, that they must cross after death. The doctor, who is called in because she has made herself ill with anxiety, decides that the best cure for 'a Mahometan fever' would be 'a ride to Harlow fair', and so it proved. For 'when we arrived at the fair', 'Ishmael, Mahomet and the narrow bridge vanished out of my head in an instant'. Though Lamb is said by Crabb Robinson to have claimed authorship of this story, it was in reply to the news that a Calvinist woman had torn it and 'The Witch Aunt' out, which spurred Charles on to taking defiant responsibility for them both. I think that, though doubtless the brother and sister consulted about the stories, this one bears the hallmarks of Mary's writing. Surely it was she who at Blakesware 'was never spoken to at all', beside the discrepancy between her memory and Charles's about the twelve Caesars, she saying that they 'hung' round the hall and he that they were life-sized busts. Most importantly there is the difference of tone, which one can only sense and not fully define.

Not all the stories hinge on different kinds of suffering and their cure. The youngest narrator, who is only seven, tells of an idyllic visit to her grandmother's farm on her fourth birthday. It is recognizably Mackery End, as Margaret Green's setting is Blakesware, but seen through Mary's rather than Charles's eyes. The hen's character is particularly well developed by Grandmamma. 'A hen, she said, was a hospitable bird, and always laid more eggs than she wanted, on purpose to give her mistress to make puddings and custards with.' But there was another side to her. As a mamma for the 'little yellow ducklings' she left something to be desired. 'She was so frightened if they went near the water. Grandmamma says a hen is not esteemed a very wise bird.'

I have not time to illustrate further the artistic skill and human understanding shown in Mary's narration of these stories, but I do recommend them to you.

Despite her strictures on the relative positions in society of men and women in her essay 'On Needlework', I do not think Mary ever regretted the state of 'double singleness' in which she lived with Charles. One has only to think of the horrors of Bedlam from which he had saved her. Nor did he fail to appreciate her worth. 'She is older, and wiser, and better than me.'[32] Of course, Elia admits, she has her little faults.

> She hath an awkward trick (to say no worse of it) of reading in company: at which times she will answer *yes* or *no* to a question without fully understanding its purport—which is provoking, and derogatory in the highest degree to the dignity of the putter of the said question.[33]

So *that* was how she dealt with some of that boring male talk. I must take note and follow her example. Come to think of it—perhaps sometimes I already have.

As Friends of Coleridge, let us end by saluting Mary in his words: 'my dear, most dear and most excellent Friend and Heart's Sister, Mary Lamb'.

Sevenoaks

[32] Marrs ii. 169.
[33] Lucas ii. 87.

The Case of Anna Laetitia's Barbauld's 'To Mr C[olerid]ge'

By LISA VARGO

FOR MANY YEARS Anna Laetitia Barbauld's tenuous place in literary history depended upon her link to Coleridge—her notorious complaint that the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 'was improbable, and had no moral.'[1] Barbauld appears in the footnotes of countless anthologies; Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling explain how as 'celebrated Bluestocking' her misguided insistence upon a moral inspired 'Coleridge's most helpful comment on the poem.'[2] As notions of the canon have become more inclusive, anthologists have moved Anna Barbauld from the footnotes to the table of contents. One of the most often anthologized of her poems, along with 'Washing Day' and 'The Rights of Woman', is 'To Mr C[olerid]ge', which takes the poet to task for being drawn to 'the maze of metaphysic lore' (l.34).[3] The poem is no doubt a popular choice for the simple reason that it is about Coleridge; at the same time it confirms that Barbauld was a more intelligent reader of Coleridge than the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* anecdote would suggest. Roger Lonsdale describes her poem's significance accordingly: 'Her shrewd assessment of his gifts and temperament may explain his later condescending remarks about her.'[4] Yet such interpretations place an emphasis on reception of the poem by Coleridge and by late twentieth-century readers. Barbauld could not have predicted her place in Coleridge's *Table Talk* when she wrote the poem. More needs to be said about what Anna Barbauld herself had in mind in writing 'To Mr C[olerid]ge', which means considering the poem's contexts in the culture of Unitarianism.

This is not to say that the matter of canonical inclusion is irrelevant in the case of 'To Mr C[olerid]ge'. If it was Coleridge's adoption of Unitarianism in 1794 that led to their acquain-

[1] *Table Talk* ed. Carl Woodring (2 vols., Princeton, 1990) (hereafter *Table Talk*), i. 272-3. The entire passage as presented by David Perkins: 'Mrs Barbauld once told me that she admired the Ancient Mariner very much, but that there were two faults in it,—it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights'* tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son' (*English Romantic Writers* ed. David Perkins (2nd ed., Fort Worth, 1995), p. 520).

[2] *English Romantic Poetry and Prose* (New York, 1973), 238n.

[3] Text quoted from *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens, Georgia and London, 1994) (hereafter McCarthy and Kraft).The poem appears in Jennifer Breen's *Women Romantic Poets* (London, 1992), Roger Lonsdale's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford, 1990) (hereafter Lonsdale), Jerome McGann's *New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* (Oxford, 1993), Andrew Ashfield's *Romantic Women Poets: 1770-1838* (Manchester, 1995), Duncan Wu's *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Oxford, 1994) (hereafter Wu), and Anne K. Mellor and Richard E. Matlak's *British Literature, 1780-1830* (Fort Worth, 1996). Other recent anthologies that include Barbauld's works: *The Norton Anthology*, vol. 2 (6th ed., New York, 1993), Robert W. Uphaus and Gretchen M. Foster's *The Other Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1991), and David Perkins's revised *English Romantic Writers*.

[4] Lonsdale 530n. The editors of Barbauld's poetry suggest the poem is an 'admonition' against 'self-destructive tendencies of his temperament,' with which Coleridge agreed at the time. But they add, 'His subsequent change of feeling and the sniping campaign he waged against her for the rest of his life do not seem to have been provoked by this poem' (McCarthy and Kraft 296n).

tance, his particular motive seems to have been Barbauld's renown as a writer.[5] When Coleridge and Barbauld met in August 1797, at the Bristol home of their mutual friend, the Unitarian minister John Prior Estlin, Coleridge was 25 and had published his first collection of poetry in April 1796, while at 54 Barbauld had long established her reputation with *Poems* (1773) and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781).[6] That Coleridge was eager to make Barbauld's acquaintance is suggested by the fact that he walked from Nether Stowey to Bristol solely for the purpose of meeting her.[7] And it seems that they continued to meet in London. In a letter written 1 March 1800 to Estlin, Coleridge adds as a postscript, 'The more I see of Mrs Barbauld the more I admire her—that wonderful *Propriety* of Mind!—She has great *acuteness*, very great—yet how steadily she keeps it within the bounds of practical Reason. This I almost envy as well as admire—My own Subtleties too often lead me into strange (tho' God be praised) transient Out-of-the-way-nesses. Oft like a winged Spider, I am entangled in a new Spun web—but never fear for me, 'tis but the flutter of my wings—& off I am again!'[8]

But by 1804 Coleridge forgot his regard for her propriety of mind when it came to the practicalities of the literary market. An unfavourable review of Charles Lamb's *John Woodvil* was wrongly rumoured to have been written by Barbauld. Coleridge explains in a letter to Robert Southey written 25 January 1804 that he has read the review and vows, 'if I do not cut her to the Heart, and openly & with my name, never believe me again.'[9] Southey's response seems to have initiated their childish punning on her name: 'Why have you not made Lamb declare war upon Mrs Bare-bald? He should singe her flaxen wig with squibs, and tie crackers to her petticoats till she leapt about like a parched pea for very torture.'[10] A notebook entry for July 1810 mentions 'Wordsworth's enemies—especially that Mistress Bare and Bald.'[11] Coleridge's antipathy reached a climax when he ridiculed the diction in the seventh stanza of Barbauld's 'Hymn to Content' in his 27 January 1812 lecture on Milton.[12]

Barbauld died in 1825, but Coleridge's dislike lived on. Her marriage, which ended with her husband's madness and suicide in 1808, is described with sexual derision by Coleridge in a comment reported by Henry Crabb Robinson: 'Barbauld must have had a very warm constitution, for he had clasped an icicle in his arms, for forty years before he found it was cold.'[13] In 1830 John Frere heard him say that her abusive review of *Wallenstein* had discouraged sales; Carl Woodring points out the review was by John Ferriar.[14] And it is in the *Table Talk* that Coleridge's comment about the moral of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is recorded without mention of Barbauld's name on 30 May 1830 and in the much cited account of 31 March 1832.[15]

[5] H. W. Piper, 'Coleridge and the Unitarian Consensus', *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland* ed. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (London and New York, 1990) (hereafter *Coleridge Connection*), p. 273.
[6] McCarthy and Kraft 296n.
[7] McCarthy and Kraft xxi.
[8] *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71) (hereafter Griggs), i. 578.
[9] Griggs ii. 1039.
[10] *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey* ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey (6 vols., London, 1850), ii. 175.
[11] *Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Vol. 3. ed. Kathleen Coburn (London, 1973), 3965.
[12] *Lectures 1808-19, On Literature* ed. R. A. Foakes (2 vols., Princeton, 1987) (hereafter Foakes), i. 406-8.
[13] *Table Talk* i. 564-5. The comment was repeated to Robinson by Elton Hamond. Icicle seems to have been Coleridge's term of abuse for bluestockings. He refers to Hannah More in 1800 in a letter to Southey: 'to hear a Thing, ugly & petticoated, ex-syllogize a God with cold-blooded Precision, & attempt to run Religion thro' the body with an Icicle—an Icicle from a Scotch Hog-trough—! *I* do not endure it!' (Griggs i.563).
[14] *Table Talk* i. 272n.
[15] *Table Talk* i. 149; i. 272-3.

Coleridge's public ridicule of Barbauld was criticized as 'unmanly' by his contemporaries who saw merit in what he mocked.[16] But neither regard nor derision guaranteed her work a posthumous existence. Though Barbauld wrote a number of kinds of verse, she was selectively represented in nineteenth-century anthologies as a religious and moral poet. Frederic Rowton's *The Female Poets of Great Britain* restricts itself to poems and hymns that display 'the quick intuitive perception, the chaste tenderness, the delicate, *musical* flow of thought, that distinguish the female mind', while her satirical and political poems are unmentioned.[17] By the end of the century Barbauld's reputation rested on one poem, 'Life', largely due to Henry Crabb Robinson's publication of a comment by Wordsworth who was said to have remarked, 'I am not in the habit of grudging people their good things, but I wish I had written those lines.'[18] An excerpt from 'Life' ended the third book of Francis Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (1861) and was also included in Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse* (1900).[19]

If in the nineteenth century Barbauld's body of work was narrowed to a single poem Wordsworth wished he had written, her twentieth-century diminution to footnote means that Coleridge's antipathy is transformed by twentieth-century writers to unquestioned fact. In 1927 John Livingston Lowes glossed Coleridge's *Table Talk* story about Barbauld with this comment:

> There is no mistaking the point of that. Coleridge may (he felt) have carried his premises too far for safety in a world of Mrs Barbaulds who yearn for a moral with their poetry, as they hanker after bread and butter with their tea. With the moral sentiment so patent in the poem they would be bound to put in their thumb and exultantly pull out their plum—as indeed they have.[20]

Lowes also calls attention to comments by Wordsworth and Godwin, as well as 'a gloriously volcanic outburst of Charles Lamb's which sufficiently elucidates both Mrs Barbauld and her criticism' in damning the 'cursed Barbauld Crew' for banishing the 'old classics out of the nursery.'[21] Lowes's view is repeated without question; for example, in James Boulger's 1969 explanation of the *Rime*'s 1817 gloss: 'In an age of literalists and simple moralists . . . he was content to give the kind of answer to the question of its meaning that a person of Mrs Barbauld's intelligence and viewpoint might understand.'[22] What seems particularly unjust is how Barbauld is singled out with respect to the *Rime* when there are other offenders closer to Coleridge. In his influential 1946 essay on the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Robert Penn Warren quietly equates Barbauld's criticism with Wordsworth's, Southey's, and Lamb's opinions about the poem.[23] But it is Barbauld and not Wordsworth (whose own actions and comments with respect to the *Rime*

[16] See Henry Crabb Robinson's letter to Mrs Clarkson included in Foakes i. 407-8.

[17] *The Female Poets of Great Britain* introduced by Marilyn L. Williamson (1853; rpt. Detroit, 1981), p. 243. The controversy surrounding her apocalyptic satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, which was savagely attacked by John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* (McCarthy and Kraft 310n) is elliptically referred to by Rowton as 'some unjust and unkind criticisms upon a poem published in 1812, led her to resolve upon retiring from the literary world' (p. 243).

[18] McCarthy and Kraft 318n.

[19] Edith J. Morley, *The Life and Times of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London, 1935), pp. 39-40.

[20] *The Road to Xanadu* (Boston, 1927), p. 302.

[21] Ibid.

[22] *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1969), p. 4.

[23] Ibid., 45-6.

had considerable influence on the poem's fate during Coleridge's lifetime) who becomes the representative misreader of Coleridge's subtleties.[24]

This narrative of Barbauld's fall from favour can be read as an example of dispossession by masculinist priorities developed in response to the rise of women writers and readers in the late eighteenth century. And it is this retelling of literary history that inspires Barbauld's reentry into the canon. Yet anthologists at the end of the twentieth century are no less influenced by ideological projects. The editors of one recent anthology explain that 'The rediscovery of forgotten women writers and of neglected working class and regional writers, together with a clearer recognition of the many ways in which all the literary works written in England between 1780 and 1830 responded to the political and social movements of the time, has led many scholars to question the sufficiency of traditional aesthetic definitions of "Romanticism"'.[25] In fact 'To C[olerid]ge' is presented as an act of questioning of aesthetic definitions by Barbauld herself. Roger Lonsdale claims, 'Barbauld evokes the mysteries and dangers of an "unearthly" Romanticism.'[26] Duncan Wu suggests the poem 'is distinguished by her early recognition of his talents and by her shrewd warning against the "metaphysic lore" which preoccupied him in later years.'[27] Such comments merely tell us about Coleridge, which further validates his importance. And in larger terms the recovery of the poem tells us something about our own desires to be inclusive. But it still needs to be asked what 'To Mr C[olerid]ge' conveys about Anna Barbauld.

What seems forgotten in the juxtaposition of the poem to Coleridge with a desire to imagine Romanticism anew is that 'To Mr C[olerid]ge' is steeped in Unitarian debates about the role of writing in promoting social transformation. It is common knowledge that during the 1790s Coleridge was deeply involved with Unitarianism, serving from time to time as an unpaid preacher. He was particularly attracted to the writings of the chemist and philosopher Joseph Priestley, who taught at the Dissenting Academy at Warrington when Barbauld's father was tutor in divinity. Inspired by his contact with Cambridge Unitarian William Frend, Coleridge composed *Religious Musings, A Desultory Poem, Written on the Christmas Eve of 1794* and published it in his *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796). An epic vision of more than four hundred lines modelled on Milton's blank verse, the poem is clearly indebted to Coleridge's reading of Priestley for its rejection of the trinity, its views of the Christian Millennium, and its necessitarian belief in the restoration of Paradise through science.[28] Priestley is invoked in the poem as 'Patriot, and Saint, and Sage' driven from England into exile by 'Statesmen blood-stained and priests idolatrous' (ll.371-5). *Religious Musings* served Coleridge as an entrée into Unitarian circles; John Estlin used lines from the poem as an epigraph to one of his published sermons.[29]

As someone immersed in the intellectual world of the Warrington Academy, the praise of Priestley would not go unnoticed by Anna Barbauld, to whom Coleridge had sent a presentation copy of his *Poems* in 1796.[30] But neither would she ignore the poem's heterodox positions and abstruse thought. Her response to Coleridge's declaration at the end of his poem that he will

[24] Wordsworth's and Lamb's criticisms and a description of Wordsworth's treatment of the poem in the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* may be found in the edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (1963, rev. London, 1965), pp. 273-8.
[25] Mellor and Matlak vii.
[26] Lonsdale xli.
[27] Wu 17.
[28] Piper 279-80. Quotations from *Religious Musings* are taken from *Poetical Works* ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1912, rpt. Oxford, 1969).
[29] Piper 281.
[30] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (1989; rpt. Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 112.

'discipline my young and novice thought / In ministeries of heart-stirring song' (ll.411-12) was to write a poem about discipline. That 'To Mr C[olerid]ge' was written with *Religious Musings* in mind is indicated by its Miltonic blank verse and a series of echoes with Coleridge's poem. An aspect of her discipline is to create a vision on a smaller scale, yet one that does not diminish her authority to speak. If Coleridge writes a long poem in which he imagines himself 'on Meditation's heaven-ward wing / Soaring aloft' (ll.413-14), Barbauld's 43-line poem begins with a reference to a grove 'Midway the hill of Science', a setting that invokes Priestley and Coleridge's own contention that 'From Avarice thus, from Luxury and War / Sprang heavenly Science; and from Science Freedom' (ll.224-5). As Coleridge invokes the elect who 'patiently ascend / Treading beneath their feet all visible things' towards God's throne (ll.50-1), Barbauld alludes to the language of the elect as she explains that the hill's paths 'tire th' unpractised feet' (l.2). It is the matter of practise that concerns Barbauld. Coleridge takes the role of prophet as he echoes Luke 2:13 at the beginning of his poem: 'the rushing noise of wings / Transports my spirit to the favor'd fields' where in a 'shepherd's guise' he can 'mark entranc'd / The glory-streaming Vision throng the night' (ll.4-8). A less exalted Coleridge later admits to a lack of vision in at least one respect—Priestley is 'Patriot, and Saint, and Sage / Whom that my fleshly eye hath never seen / A childish pang of impotent regret / Hath thrill'd my heart' (ll.372-5). Barbauld, on the other hand, can speak with the authority of long acquaintance with Priestley and his principles, which makes her question Coleridge's vision.

The discipline she would convey is how easy it is to 'lure the eager foot / Of youthful ardour to eternal chase' (ll.5-6). Hence her focus on the midway point of the hill where she locates the 'strange enchantment' (4) of the grove. There shadows seem real, 'while things of life' 'Fade to the hue of shadows'. Scruples, or intellectual puzzles, send out webby nets, and Indolence 'wears the garb / Of deep philosophy'. Yet in spite of its deceptive nature, Barbauld believes the grove is a necessary way station for those able to climb the hill:

> Here each mind
> Of finer mold, acute and delicate,
> In its high progress to eternal truth
> Rests for a space, in fairy bowers entranced;
> And loves the softened light and tender gloom;
> And, pampered with most unsubstantial food,
> Looks down indignant on the grosser world,
> And matter's cumbrous shapings. (ll.25-32)

Discipline takes a gentle form as she creates a landscape of delightful imaginings which convey her admiration for the 'mind / Of finer mold' who seeks truth. At the same time her sympathy is part of her rhetorical strategy.

Having described the state of repose in general terms, the final ten lines of her poem suddenly shift to the particular, to the 'Youth belov'd / Of Science—and of the Muse belov'd' (ll.32-3). In addressing Coleridge directly Barbauld identifies his interests in Priestleyan science and in poetry, two subjects that matter a great deal to Barbauld herself. She provides Coleridge with the counsel of an experienced poet not to settle for the grove:

> not here,
> Not in the maze of metaphysic lore
> Build thou thy place of resting; lightly tread
> The dangerous ground, on noble aims intent;

> And be this Circe of the studious cell
> Enjoyed, but still subservient. (ll.33-8)

The 'maze of metaphysic lore' seems to represent her comment on *Religious Musings* and its more audacious flights of fancy. The locale resembles the spot halfway up a hill where Coleridge repeatedly situates himself in his poems, including 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), and 'France: An Ode' (1798). And, as McCarthy and Kraft note, the Hill of Science refers to the hill Difficulty in *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Christian finds an arbour and falls asleep and loses his scroll.[31] Surely an equation of Bunyan's narrative with the landscape of his own poetry would not be lost on Coleridge, who draws upon Bunyan in *Religious Musings*.[32] Coleridge is being advised not to lose his purpose.

But more than allude to Coleridge's work or that of Bunyan, Barbauld intends the grove on the hill of science to refer to her own body of writings. Her poem was written shortly after she composed a similar portrait of the poet in the introductory essay to her 1797 edition of Collins:

> A real Poet must always appear indolent to the man of the world. The alacrity and method of business is not to be expected in his occupation. His mind works in silence, and exhausts itself with the various emotions which it cherishes, while to a common eye it appears fixed in stupid apathy. The Poet requires long intervals of ease and leisure; his imagination should be fed with novelty, and his ear soothed by praise.[33]

David Simpson quotes this passage as evidence that women writers in the 1790s defined literature in terms of practical reason and common sense and rejected theory. Certainly Simpson offers a cogent argument for locating the poem to Coleridge as a site of contestation by male and female writers over gender and genre.[34] If Simpson is right in arguing that the passage, which seeks to defend Collins against the charge of indolence, created anxiety in male writers because of its feminized character, it nevertheless accounts for why Barbauld entertains such sympathy for Coleridge's writing. Priestley criticized Barbauld's own contention that the seat of religion need be found 'in the imagination and the passions' as containing 'too much of the language of poetry and romance.'[35] In a time when writing was becoming commodified, Barbauld believes that literature need be placed within a different economy than the marketplace. Hence she uses the language of commerce in the essay on Collins with an ironic touch. Yet this does not mean that writing need be divorced from social good. Her point with respect to Coleridge is that he is too ready to adopt as an end what she believes is at best a means.

An extended meditation on the 'high progress to eternal truth' (l.27) exists in her allegory, 'The Hill of Science, A Vision', collected in *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose* (1773), which she co-authored with her brother. It is likely Coleridge knew the essay, whose image of 'a dark and sluggish water, curled by no breeze, and enlivened by no murmur, till it falls into a dead sea' resembles the 'sacred river' in 'Kubla Khan'.[36] The narrator in Barbauld's essay travels through an autumn landscape and has a dream vision of a mountain many people are trying to climb. While many attempt the ascent to the temple of Truth, some turn back while others are lost in the wood of error or are led astray by Appetites, Passions, and Pleasures or are delayed by Indolence.

[31] McCarthy and Kraft 297n.
[32] Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford, 1989), p. 99.
[33] *The Poetical Works of Mr William Collins. With a Prefatory Essay, By Mrs Barbauld* (London, 1802), pp. vii-viii.
[34] *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago, 1993), p. 123.
[35] Betsy Rodgers, *Georgian Chronicle: Mrs Barbauld and Her Family* (London, 1958), p. 65.
[36] *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (3rd ed., London, 1792) (hereafter *MP*), p. 36.

The dreamer focuses on the figure of Genius whose 'progress was unequal, and interrupted by a thousand caprices': 'I observed that the Muses beheld him with partiality; but Truth often frowned and turned aside her face.'[37] While the dreamer in the essay believes happiness exists in being permitted to ascend the mountain, a divine figure suggests that 'those whom Virtue conducts to the mansions of Content' are happier still. The essay presents a reminder of Barbauld's Dissenting belief that Virtue resides in the vale and is accessible to all. Genius must not lose touch with the powers of virtue from which all might benefit.

Her statement about Genius is extended to Coleridge in her poem. Barbauld implies that Coleridge's commitment to egalitarian principles gets lost in his interest in metaphysics. That genius must relinquish leisure for the virtues of discipline in 'its high progress to eternal truth' (l.27) is made clear in the final lines of the poem:

> Active scenes
> Shall soon with healthful spirit brace thy mind,
> And fair exertion, for bright fame sustained,
> For friends, for country, chase each spleen-fed fog
> That blots the wide creation—
> Now Heaven conduct thee with a Parent's love! (ll.39-43)

The reference to fog turns Coleridge's Miltonic metaphor of the elect as a shepherd creeping through fog who is suddenly touched by the sun back on the poet himself (ll.94-104). Barbauld implies that Coleridge has lost sight of the public good, on which as a Unitarian and poet he should focus.

The particular character of these active scenes and their relation to Britain are illuminated by her 1793 polemic 'Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation', in which she advocates the adoption of a 'national religion', defined as 'the extending to those affairs in which we act in common, and as a body, that regard to religion, by which, when we act singly, we all profess to be guided'.[38] She concludes the essay with a wish for gradual reform through benevolence, 'political principles of practical utility,' and religious principles 'by which we may act and by which we may suffer', which are contrary to the visionary bravado of Coleridge's poem: 'Whatever part we take in public affairs, much will undoubtedly happen which we could by no means foresee, and much which we shall not be able to justify; the only way, therefore, by which we can avoid deep remorse, is to act with simplicity and singleness of intention, and not to suffer ourselves to be warped, though by ever so little, from the path which honour and conscience approve'.[39] However much she understands the need for imagination, Barbauld may have found reason to agree with John Thelwall that *Religious Musings* contains passages which are 'the very acme of abstruse, metaphysical, mistical rant'.[40]

In spite of the certainty of her convictions, Barbauld did not rush the poem to Coleridge into print. For some eighteen months it remained a private document in the Estlin circle; a manuscript copy survives titled 'Mrs Barbauld to Mr Coleridge', in Mrs Estlin's hand and dated September 1797.[41] The poem appeared in the April 1799 *Monthly Magazine*, whose literary editor from the time of its founding in 1796 until 1806 was Barbauld's brother John Aikin. Coleridge himself

[37] *MP* 32-3.
[38] *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. With a Memoir* ed. Lucy Aikin (2 vols., London, 1825), ii.385-6.
[39] Ibid., ii. 411-12.
[40] Nicholas Roe, 'Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey,' *Coleridge Connection* 69.
[41] McCarthy and Kraft 296n.

published in the *Monthly Magazine*; his letter of 6 January 1798 to Estlin announces that he plans to sell the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to the magazine.[42]

Why Barbauld chose to publish the poem when she did can only be a matter of speculation, but some intriguing possibilities can be suggested. From 30 December 1797 to 16 January 1798 Coleridge carried on an intense correspondence with Estlin as to whether he should accept a position preaching at Shrewsbury or an unexpected annuity from Josiah Wedgwood. The circumstances are well known to Coleridge scholars, but it is worth dwelling on a comment he made after he decided in favour of the annuity:

> To the cause of Religion I solemnly devote all my best faculties—and if I wish to acquire knowledge as a philosopher and fame as a poet, I pray for grace that I may continue to feel what I now seek, that my greatest reason for wishing the one & the other, is that I may be enabled by my knowledge to defend Religion ably, and by my reputation to draw attention to the defence of it.—I regard every experiment that Priestly made in Chemistry, as giving *wings* to his more sublime theological works.[43]

Some version of this comment might have reached Barbauld via the Estlins; compounded with what might have been her disappointment that Coleridge had overthrown the 'fair exertion' of the Unitarian ministry, she seems to have felt that it was time to make her admonition public.

More than serving as a corrective to the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* comment, the contexts of 'To Mr C[olerid]ge' call into question Coleridge's very reporting of Barbauld's criticisms of the *Ancient Mariner*, which may just as likely have been invented by Coleridge as actually having occurred. The ballad, like 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' and 'Frost at Midnight', is informed by Unitarian principles of the presence of God in nature. And while these poems remained important to Coleridge throughout his life, when he rejected Unitarianism after 1805, he was eager to dissociate himself from his past beliefs. The *Table Talk* comments and his punning with bare and bald are part of his effort to distance himself from Unitarianism. If Coleridge came to view Unitarianism as 'a cold and dull moonshine', Unitarianism is bare and bald for him.[44] So when Barbauld suggests that the *Rime* doesn't have enough of a moral, Coleridge is recasting his 1800 comment to Estlin about her powers of reason in terms of his later statement, 'We do not win heaven by logic.'[45] Thomas McFarland observes that Coleridge 'never seemed to be able to forgive Unitarianism for having led him so close to the perversion of his religious sensibilities.'[46] Coleridge turns his praise of Barbauld's propriety of mind and practical reason to scorn so as to purge association with what he would forget.

But it still remains to be answered why Barbauld's poem is worth reading now. In this respect the Unitarian contexts in themselves cannot provide good reason for rescuing the poem. After all, Coleridge's *Religious Musings* has suffered the same fate of obscurity as Barbauld's poetry, and there are few signs that its star will reascend. If *Religious Musings* hasn't been recovered, the appeal of 'To Mr C[olerid]ge' need be found elsewhere. And yet as has already been suggested, to see Barbauld's poem merely as important for its subject or for its discussion of gender and genre is to undervalue its author's intentions. Two matters will be proposed. Certainly Barbauld's poem is important for the lessons it teaches us about the complexities of the contexts

[42] Griggs i. 368.
[43] Griggs i. 372.
[44] Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford, 1969), p. 182.
[45] Ibid., 183.
[46] Ibid.

of works we would restore to the canon. More significantly, the poem has the power to show us how, as McCarthy and Kraft state, 'Barbauld's religious verse suggests how her faith empowered her—not with the moral responsibility that Hannah More suggests was the central concern of woman's separate sphere, but instead with purpose, courage, and activity that is not gendered'.[47] The poem might prompt us to question some of the assumptions about gender and writing that places it in so many anthologies.

To ignore that 'To Mr C[olerid]ge' has its origins in a debate about Unitarianism and to simply read the poem as a commentary on Coleridge himself means that the poem's present popularity in anthologies of the Romantic period can be said to perpetuate Coleridge's legacy with respect to Barbauld. To select as important a poem written in tribute to Coleridge constructs Barbauld in a role that undermines her own authority.[48] And to do so is to read Coleridge's fame back upon the poem. It is to undervalue Barbauld's own prominence as Unitarian dissenter, pacifist, wit, political radical, and poet. Harriet Kramer Linkin concludes a consideration of the 'implications various new editions of Romantic poetry will have in making it feasible to teach a canon that includes, for the first time, the work of women poets' by suggesting that 'the actual currency we assign women's poetry in our classrooms will depend on the terms of valuation we establish through our own continuing education'.[49] It is unlikely that the currency of the canon could or even should become fixed, yet in understanding changes in value, we might recognize that our own continuing education involves not only the recovery of texts excluded from the canon, but an attempt to understand their contexts. Barbauld's poetry invites us to consider how through editing we might truly read Romanticism anew.

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[47] McCarthy and Kraft xxv-xxvi.

[48] Similar readings with respect to Mary Wollstonecraft have been made about Barbauld's poem 'The Rights of Women'. See William McCarthy, '"We Hoped the *Woman* Was Going to Appear": Repression, Desire, and Gender in Anna Letitia Barbauld's Early Poems', *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices* ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover, NH, 1995), pp. 113-37.

[49] 'Taking Stock of the British Romantics Marketplace: Teaching New Canons through New Editions?', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 19 (1995) 111, 119.

Two Notes on 'Kubla Khan'

By DAVID CHANDLER

'I would build that dome in air'

In an important article of 1985, '"Kubla Khan" and Michelangelo's Glorious Boast',[1] Jack Stillinger made a significant contribution to our understanding of Coleridge's most enigmatic poem by demonstrating that the key line, 'I would build that dome in air', almost certainly derives from a 'boast', at one time attributed to Michelangelo, that the cupola of St Peter's would be equivalent to the Pantheon suspended in the air. Unfortunately most of Stillinger's illustrations of the currency of the 'boast' postdate the composition of 'Kubla Khan', but, with the assistance of Philipp Fehl, he found three examples that predate it (in works of 1692, 1781 and 1789). To his list can be added a passage in the 'considerably augmented' third edition of Sir William Chambers' *Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture* (1791):

> MICHAEL ANGELO, who skilled as he was in mathematical knowledge, could have no very high opinion of the ancient construction; boasted that he would suspend the largest temple of antiquity (meaning the Pantheon) in the air: which he afterwards performed, in the cupola of St Peter's at Rome.[2]

In the context of 'Kubla Khan' it may be deemed particularly suggestive that Chambers was famous for disparaging classical and championing oriental architecture.

Of the works cited by Stillinger, it is Hester Lynch Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) that comes closest to Coleridge's phrasing: 'Michael Angelo, looking at the Pantheon, said, "Is that the best our vaunted ancestors could do? If so, I will shew the advancement of the art, in suspending a dome of equal size to this up in the air."' It is not close, of course, and Stillinger speculates that there might be a closer 'source combining the verb "build" . . . with the phrase "in the air"'.[3] Such a 'source' can be found in a review of the third edition of Chambers' *Treatise* which appeared in the *Monthly Review* for April 1791. Quoting the above passage, the reviewer, William Seward (1747-99),[4] added an explanatory footnote that immediately brings Coleridge's line to mind:

> This singular expression [i.e. 'suspend the largest temple of antiquity . . . in the air'] may puzzle some readers: but it means no more, than that Mich. Angelo . . . said that he would build a *dome* in the *air*, as large as that which stood on the ground . . .[5]

On the whole it must be considered more likely that Coleridge had encountered this idea in the *Monthly Review* than in specialised publications. In April 1791 he was in his final months at Christ's Hospital and reading '*through* the catalogue' of a circulating library in nearby King

[1] *English Language Notes* 24 (1985) 38-42 (hereafter Stillinger).
[2] *A Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture* (London, 1791), p. 24. The first edition of the *Treatise* had appeared in 1759.
[3] Stillinger 41.
[4] Reviewers in the *Monthly Review* were identified by Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review First Series 1749-1789* (Oxford, 1934).
[5] N.S. 4 (1791) 394.

Street.[6] No records of the library appear to have survived,[7] but other circulating libraries certainly did subscribe to the periodical reviews,[8] of which the *Monthly* was, by a large margin, the most popular.[9] Coleridge, aiming at a wide general knowledge, would almost certainly have turned its pages if opportunity beckoned, and Seward's key phrase, dramatically emphasised at the bottom of a page, was eye-catching. It was also the sort of phrase that a young poet might very well savour and remember.

'Floated midway'

Despite the mass of source-hunting that 'Kubla Khan' has inspired, the distinctive phrase 'Floated midway' ('The shadow of the dome of pleasure / Floated midway on the waves') does not appear to have been glossed. The phrase had been employed by Ann Radcliffe in one of the celebrated landscape descriptions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, however, and significantly in the context of a river landscape:

> The rivulet, which had hitherto accompanied them, now expanded into a river; and, flowing deeply and silently along, reflected, as in a mirror, the blackness of the impending shades. Sometimes a cliff was seen lifting its bold head above the woods and the vapours, that *floated mid-way* down the mountains; and sometimes a face of perpendicular marble rose from the water's edge, over which the larch threw his gigantic arms, here scathed with lightning, and there floating in luxuriant foliage.[10]

Radcliffe's syntax makes it initially unclear whether the floating vapours are being observed directly, or via their reflection in the river, and though the former proves the case there is a residual sense of association with the reflected 'shades' of the previous sentence that is suggestive for 'Kubla Khan'. In Coleridge's poem, as Kathleen Wheeler has written, 'It is . . . unclear how the adverb "midway" should be taken. But the idea of shadow has certain symbolic associations which point to a level of reflection about reality, and about illusion.'[11] It can be added that 'floated mid-way' was a formulation that Coleridge was likely to be struck by, and to recall, because he was interested in the 'hovering' 'middle state' of the act of imagination.[12]

Garland Greever's old claim that Coleridge reviewed *The Mysteries of Udolpho* for the *Critical Review*[13] gained wide currency, but was based on a mistaken premise, and has been sufficiently refuted.[14] Nevertheless, Coleridge did review Radcliffe's next novel, *The Italian*, for that periodical, and this review points to his acquaintance with the earlier novel.[15]

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[6] James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1838), pp. 17, 20. John Beer identified the library as John Boosey's in his 'Coleridge's "Great Circulating Library"', *Notes and Queries* 201 (1956) 264, and see also Duncan Wu, 'Coleridge's "Great Circulating Library": A Footnote', *Notes and Queries* 238 (1993) 470.

[7] I am indebted to Richard Harvey of the Guildhall Library, London, for confirming this.

[8] Derek Roper, *Reviewing Before the Edinburgh* (London, 1978), p. 25.

[9] Ibid., p. 24.

[10] *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford, 1966), p. 37; my italics.

[11] '"Kubla Khan" and Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theories', *Wordsworth Circle* 22 (1991) 20.

[12] I am indebted to Seamus Perry for this observation. In a lecture of 1811 Coleridge spoke of '[the] effort in the mind when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites and to leave a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other when it is hovering between two images' (*Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature* ed. R. A. Foakes (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1987), i. 311).

[13] *A Wiltshire Parson and His Friends* (London, 1926), p. 165.

[14] Derek Roper, 'Coleridge and the "Critical Review"', *Modern Language Review* 55 (1960) 11-16.

[15] *Shorter Works and Fragments* ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1995), i. 11-16.

Review Article

NICHOLAS ROE, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. Pp. xx + 315. ISBN 0 19 818396 8. £40 hardback.
Keats: Bicentenary Readings. Ed. MICHAEL O'NEILL. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. Pp. vii + 175. ISBN 0 7486 0899 0. £35 hardback.

HERE ARE TWO VALUABLE books on Keats. I shall begin with Nicholas Roe, who has produced a remarkable study, one which will doubtless become a landmark in Keats studies. *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* fuses close formal analysis with a broadly historical approach in its attempt to 'trace those frequently unstraightforward ways in which [Keats's] poems responded to and addressed matters of the moment'. Professor Roe succeeds in his aim, and has produced a book which is rich in critical and historical insight.

Roe begins by placing his own work in the context of the newly historically charged Keats evident in recent Romantic studies, most notably since the publication of 'Keats and Politics', the 1986 special issue of *Studies in Romanticism*, and, though modesty forbids him from registering the volume's importance, the essays in his own collection *Keats and History* (1995). He quotes, somewhat ruefully, Marilyn Butler's recent comment that, in the midst of this welcome contextualising enterprise, perhaps 'Keats's artistry is actually being neglected'. Things have changed remarkably if Nicholas Roe needs to preface a book on Keats with a half-apologetic defence of his historicist method. This is, after all, the same poet whom Stopford A. Brooke vacuously but perhaps representatively (at least before the age of historical enlightenment begins in the 1980s) states has 'no vital interest in the present, none in man as a whole, none in the political movement of human thought'. As far as Professor Butler's charge is concerned, one must acquit Professor Roe, who constantly and ably attends to the formal qualities of Keats' work. Unlike sociopolitical critics who rely on the letters and other contextual material, his version of Keats' political radicalism is firmly rooted in close attention to the poetry, and, in particular, that side of the poetry not normally seen as being saturated with contemporary resonance (*Endymion, Sleep and Poetry*, even 'This pleasant tale is like a little copse'). His study is an exemplary demonstration of the utility of formalism to historicist literary criticism.

Roe's book is grounded on a belief that 'the vigorous campaign to suppress John Keats, carried on in Tory journals of the day', most notably the attack by 'Z' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 'has had an enduring and malign effect on later approaches to his life and work, especially so in having prejudiced understanding of his education and its effect on his poetry'. Roe is right to stress the importance of Lockhart's attack and his account of its pervasive influence is well-judged. The book engages in a rehabilitation of the poet's education against Lockhart's sour onslaught which, as Roe convincingly demonstrates, has left even sympathetic critics and biographers with a false picture of the 'disadvantaged' poet. Roe's first two chapters convincingly establish that Keats's education at Enfield Academy was both liberal and of a high intellectual quality. Equally important were 'the radical politics associated with the school'; Roe demonstrates that Keats's politics were formed by Enfield's 'culture of dissent' and his later readings of the poetry show how the poet's work is saturated with that culture. Keats has not been unfortunate in the quality of his biographers, but here is a biographical meditation which clearly sheds new light on a crucial aspect of the poet's career.

The account of Enfield Academy and the related discussion of Keats's relationship with Charles Cowden Clarke provide a platform for the critical readings. For me, the high points are Roe's discussion of 'the politics of sociality', 'the politics of greenery', and the 'chemistry of

revolution'. Any one of these topics would have made a memorable discussion in its own right. Roe's examination of the politics of sociality rightly sees the collegiate 'Cockney' spirit of the Hunt circle as offering an 'antidote' to both the supposed 'solitude' of the lakers, exemplified in Wordsworth, and the 'Tory politics Wordsworth so emphatically' endorsed. Chapter five develops Roe's argument that verdant imagery in the Hunt circle 'was associated with a complex of oppositionalist values'. His fine meditation on the politically charged nature of Keats' greenwood pastoral sets it in its proper context of the liberal politics of greenery, evident in such volumes as Hunt's *Foliage* (1818), John Hamilton Reynolds' *The Garden of Florence* (1821), and Horace Smith's *Amarynthus, the Nympholept* (1821). This innovative approach, part of Roe's ever-astute contextual awareness, left me, as so often in reading this volume, wanting to see a more expansive discussion. The current tendency to view Keats as a Cockney poet, which mirrors the vogue for reclaiming hitherto pejorative labels evident in society as a whole, strikes me as entirely admirable and Roe's is the fullest and best treatment of the subject. Indeed, one might argue that Roe's title should have reflected his study's preoccupation with Cockney culture; 'dissent' as a term has overtones of Protestant nonconformity which are not hugely significant in relation to Keats' adult life. Chapters six and seven, which deal with Keats' profession, the subject of Lockhart's cruellest animadversions, are simply outstanding, both in the discussion of the links between contemporary medicine and radicalism and in the fascinating examination of Keats's 'chemistry of revolution'.

If I have any reservations about this critical *tour de force*, they centre on what might be seen as its rather glib identification of *Blackwood's*, that troubling, highly irresponsible and highly imaginative journal, with the 'Tory establishment'. Z's maledictions are explicitly linked with Coleridge's attempt in the *Lay Sermons* (published in the same year as the first of Lockhart and Wilson's 'Cockney School of Poetry' essays) to 'reassert the hegemony of establishment values'. However, Blackwood's was not the *Quarterly* and in its diatribes against the *Edinburgh* liked to see itself as anti-establishment, at least in Scottish terms. Though I wouldn't go as far as Ian Jack, who finds Wilson 'not wholly sane', certainly there is a capricious and attitudinising edge to 'Maga' which I feel is ignored here. In the same figure, Wilson, we see an individual who could praise Wordsworth to the skies and label the poet a 'fat ugly cur'. Furthermore, Roe's thematic link between Coleridge and *Blackwood's* is not helped by the fact that the notorious October 1817 issue, which incorporated the first 'Cockney School' essay, also included a fearsome attack on the *Biographia* which led the poet to consider a libel suit.The number also contained the scandalous and later suppressed 'Chaldee Manuscript'; the attack on Hunt was only one part of a provocative relaunch of a failing journal. William Blackwood had dismissed his magazine's original editors and brought in Lockhart and Wilson in a desperate gamble to boost its falling circulation. *Blackwood's* was relaunched on a sea of stylish vitriol against both the Cockneys *and* the Lakers. Though Coleridge built his bridges with the magazine, Hunt did not and the attacks on 'the land of Cockaigne', though they clearly engage with wider literary debates, notably in their attacks on the supposed pretentiousness of Cockney aspirations to classical culture, owe at least something to the more prosaic commercial rationale of repeating the successful formula of mordantly amusing *ad hominem* abuse. Neither is the magazine's attitude to Cockney culture univocally negative as the praise heaped upon Pierce Egan's *Boxiana* over several years and Wilson's eulogy of Reynolds' *The Fancy* demonstrate. Whilst Hunt's proclivity for neologisms is consistently attacked, Egan's cant is constantly aped. Hazlitt's friend P. G. Patmore is first allowed to publish laudatory reviews of Hazlitt's lectures in the magazine and is then viciously bated. At the same time as Hunt's 'sociality', to use Roe's word, is scorned, Maga pours forth

celebrations of tobacco, drink and the pleasures of the fancy in its *Horæ Nicotinæ, Noctes Ambrosianæ* and *Boxiana* series.

As I have noted, one of the important aspects of this book is the fact that it places Keats very firmly in the tradition of what one might call a bucolic Jacobinism initiated by Hunt's *The Descent of Liberty a Mask* (1815). This in itself raises interesting questions. Roe pays some attention to that other other youthful Huntian, Cornelius Webb, who penned the doggerel lines pounced upon by Z and used as an epigraph to the 'Cockney School of Poetry' series:

> Our talk shall be (a theme we never tire on)
> Of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron,
> (Our England's Dante)—Wordsworth—HUNT, and KEATS,
> The Muses' son of promise; and of what feats
> He yet may do.

Perhaps it is taking critical sympathy a little too far to argue, as Roe does, that Webb's work 'improves upon acquaintance'. However, he is right to link the two poets in the radical post-Napoleonic 'politics of greenery'. Professor Roe has no space to analyse Webb in his already compendious volume, but it might be instructive to compare the two Cockneys. Roe's assessment of the politics of *Endymion* might just as easily be applied to Webb's own 1817 poem 'Fairy Revels'. In a rehash of Hunt's mask, and in less than elegant verse ('the bald, monkish crown / Of dandelion old'), Webb's fairy characters guzzle an insect feast of epic proportions (featuring such delicacies as the 'round and honeyed thighs of Hyblæan bees'). Fifty aristocratic fairies, 'pamper'd with pride', eagerly consume birds' eggs, displaying a gluttonous relish to match the greed of the most debauched aristocrat of the radical imagination ('Much like some larger lords who batten on this earth'). Elsewhere, Oberon is wolfing down his bee thighs, disappointingly unaware of the struggles of the poor:

> had he starved
> Much as some subjects do, he had not ate
> More hungrily.

This ethereal Jacobinism is found in much 'Cockney' literature: Hunt, Keats, Webb, even Hood's *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*. One might, perhaps provocatively, ask what differentiates Webb from Keats. Initially, Hunt acted as organ-grinder to both, but to my mind Webb alone remains his monkey. And Keats? Well, Keats is something different. Even though this is the age of critical relativism, perhaps one needs that antediluvian critical term 'greatness' here. Webb and Keats are carved from the same wood; how else does one explain their difference? One key message of *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* is that 'artistry' and 'formal quality' should be an ineluctable part of the historicist critical enterprise and that sociopolitical analysis is damaged by a lack of attention to these issues. Nicholas Roe's own artistry has produced a fine account of the historical resonance of Keats' work.

One does not normally open a collection of the proceedings of a lecture series with the avidity with which one opens a birthday present. Too often, as they say, you have to have been there and the collection provides little more than a keepsake for the various notables summoned to the feast. However, this is emphatically not the case with *Keats: Bicentenary Readings*, edited by Michael O'Neill. Most of these essays were originally delivered as part of the 'Keats Bicentenary Lectures' held at the University of Durham in 1995. As Professor O'Neill writes in his introduction, the contributors were not asked to 'highlight or favour any one approach or theme' and the resulting volume illustrates the healthy and diverse state of contemporary work in the field. The

first essay is Nicholas Roe's, a truncated version of material developed in the early chapters of *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*. Roe's essay is followed by Fiona Robertson's outstanding 'Keats's New World: An Emigrant Poetry', an examination of the poet's 'dealings with America' which draws attention to the 'heavily politicised nature of Romantic-period representations of the United States'. This is a learned and subtle piece. It is also instructive, with Z's anathemas fresh in the mind, to see Keats adopting something of the same tone in his disdain for the mercantile vulgarity of Franklin and Washington: 'the humanity of the United States can never reach the sublime'. Gareth Reeves examines the other side of the coin in his examination of the American reception of Keats, or at least one aspect of it, in 'The Inward Keats: Bloom, Vendler, Stevens'. This is perhaps well-worn territory but Reeves's essay maps it well. David B. Pirie's focus, in his study of 'Keats's *Eve of St Mark* and Popular Culture', is rather narrower than Robertson's, but his close reading of the poem and discussion of its resonance is well done. J. R. Watson offers a magisterial survey of 'Keats and Silence' which is ably complemented by Martin Aske's examination of 'the art of looking as Keats experiences it'. O'Neill himself deals with another sort of looking in his attention to the 'varied forms of self-consciousness evident in Keats's poetry'. As one might expect, his essay is a subtle and insightful thing. Timothy Webb's fine essay '"Cutting Figures": Rhetorical Strategies in Keats's *Letters*', casts new light on a well-mined source. Webb argues that despite the emphasis upon the letters amongst biographers and critics as revealing contexts for the life and poetry, they have not often been read 'in their own right' and he calls for the development of a fully achieved 'poetics of the letter'. The actual accounts of the letters are well-judged and stimulating. I particularly enjoyed the extended and witty meditation on the unplanned appearance of blackcurrant jelly on a February 1820 letter to Fanny Brawne. Mercifully, we are spared the frenetic festival of sexual puns this happenstance might have elicited from a Freudian critic; Webb confines himself to imagining Keats 'lick[ing] the page . . . with "purple-stained mouth" enjoying an unusual physical sensation which could easily be equated with his "palate-passion" . . . for claret'.

Professor O'Neill hopes that the reader of the collection will 'get a revised understanding of where major aspects of Keats criticism have reached and are heading in the 1990s'. In general, the book succeeds in this aim. However, a selection intended to offer a snapshot of Keats studies as a whole would need to include American contributions. Furthermore, earnest devotees of the *nouvelle critique* would doubtless fault this volume for its lack of explicitly theoretical voices. Nevertheless, this is a valuable collection and its standards are consistently high.

JOHN STRACHAN

Society Notes and News from Members

FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

Charles Lamb Society: Annual General Meeting 1998

The AGM takes place at 2.30 pm on Saturday 9 May at the Mary Ward Centre, Queen Square, London. Nominations in writing for the offices of Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Editor of the *Bulletin*, and Hon. Secretary, and for up to ten members of the Council, should reach the Hon. Secretary by Saturday 2 May. The consent of nominees should be obtained beforehand. The Council normally meets twice a year after the November and March lectures.

1998/9 Programme

Provisional dates: 3 October 1998, 7 November, 5 December; 9 January 1999, 20 February (luncheon), April (t.b.a.), 6 March, 8 May (AGM). At our first meeting on 3 October we shall again welcome Mary Balle from the USA who will be speaking on 'Mary Lamb and Sarah Stoddart: An Unlikely Friendship'. For our final lecture on 6 March 1999, the Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture, we are pleased to announce that our speaker will be Professor Scott McEathron of the University of Southern Illinois. I welcome offers of speakers for the intervening dates (see *CLB* 100, page 145), especially for one on Thomas Hood, the bicentenary of whose birth is celebrated in 1999.

Charles Lamb's Birthday Celebration

Forty-six members and guests attended the Luncheon held at the Royal College of General Practitioners, Kensington, on 21 February, with our President, Professor John Beer, in the chair. The Guest of Honour, Professor Jonathan Wordsworth, responded to the toast, 'The Immortal Memory of Charles Lamb'. The Christ's Hospital Graces were said by Grecians Hugh Anthony and Luke Dealtry, who were presented with copies of *Charles Lamb and Elia*, edited by Professor J. E. Morpurgo.

Footnotes on William Hazlitt

Following Dr Tom Paulin's brilliant talk in January, Hazlitt was again called to mind in two exhibitions at Christie's in February.

The excellent catalogue to the exhibition, 'Heinrich Heine in England', quotes Heine's 'With the exception of William Hazlitt England has produced not a single important commentator on Shakespeare'. (Perhaps Charles Lamb was not sufficiently serious?) Like Hazlitt, Heine was a great admirer of Napoleon and ordered a copy of Hazlitt's *Life of Napoleon* when it was published in 1828. Incidentally, who was the Kitty Clairmont whom Heine visited at Regent's Park during his one and only visit to England from 12 April to August 1827? Was she related to Claire Clairmont?

'Builder of Towers: William Beckford and Lansdown Tower' was an exhibition in support of the £100,000 appeal for the restoration of Lansdown Tower, Bath. On Thursday 7 May at 6 pm, Stephen Lloyd is speaking on 'Hazlitt and the Romantic Collector: Beckford and Cosway Contrasted' at the Paul Mellon Centre, 16 Bedford Square, London. This is one of the Beckford Society's series of free lectures.

The George Eliot Fellowship

I have details of guided tours of the George Eliot country and events diary for 1998. Please send me a SAE if you would like a copy.

From the Editor

Lamb's Letters: A New Publisher

Members may recall the update on the Marrs edition of the letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb in *CLB* 100 (October 1997) 144, announcing that where on the one hand the Marrs edition had been given new life by the recruitment of Professor Joseph E. Riehl, of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, as co-editor, it had suffered a significant blow from the decision of Cornell University Press to decline to publish the remaining volumes. It gives me much pleasure to report that Professor Riehl has found another publisher, the University of Delaware Press (under Associated University Presses), and that volume 4 of the *Letters* is scheduled for publication in the year 2000.

Lamb on the Net

Eldritch Press offers a large selection of free, complete online books at its web site (http://www.tiac.net/users/eldred/). Elian web-surfers will find in the 'Read aloud to a child' section links to the *Tales from Shakespear* (http://www.tiac.net/users/eldred/cml/tfs.html) and *The Adventures of Ulysses* (http://www.tiac.net/users/eldred/cml/au.html). Both volumes are available to browse online or to download onto your computer. The *Tales from Shakespear* page also contains illustrations by Arthur Rackham (1899, 1909). The *Adventures of Ulysses* page includes the preface, introduction and notes by John Cooke (from the 1892 edition), as well as some useful notes on the edition and the HTML coding by Eric Eldred, the online editor.

Project Bartleby (http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/), an important online resource of primary texts by a large selection of American and British authors, offers the entire text of John Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* (1901), including several famous contributions from Lamb. This is a small but pleasant web page which illustrates the genius of Lamb and will no doubt entertain Elian readers (http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/bartlett/343.html).

Michael Laplace-Sinatra

50 Years Ago: from *CLS Bulletin* no. 83 (May 1948)

Summer Outings in Hertford: 12 June 1948

Visit to Hertford, organised by Mr. G. Moody, Hon. Sec. of the East Hertfordshire Archaeological Society. Itinerary will include Christ's Hospital for Girls (where members will be received by the Headmistress), the Castle, Parish Church, and the Museum where the title deeds of 'Button Snap', which once belonged to Charles Lamb, will be inspected. Tea will be served at the Regent Cafe, Fore Street, Hertford. Members should travel on the 2 pm train from Liverpool Street Station to Hertford East (change at Broxbourne): return fare 5*s*.8*d*., unless special terms can be arranged when participating members will be informed. Members travelling by other means should meet outside Christ's Hospital at 3.30 pm. It is essential that those members taking part should notify Miss F. S. Reeves, 33 Alma Street, London NW5 (and not Mr Crowsley) by 5 June 1948. Members should also check train service, as alterations may occur on 31 May.