The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

October 1999 New Series No. 108

Contents

Editorial

I OWE A PARTICULAR DEBT to contributors to this issue of the *Bulletin*: all items included here were commissioned. For this valedictory issue, I have been more mindful than usual of the fact that I inherited the post of editor of this journal from my much-missed predecessor, Bill Ruddick. As I wished him to be a presence here, I have solicited contributions from others who knew him. The three major articles are concerned with aspects of Lamb studies. Richard Clancey pursues classical influences on Lamb in his article, 'Lamb, Horace, and the Ring of a Classic'. Mary Wedd, one of my predecessors as Editor, has returned to Lamb's *Essays* for her examination of the Elian persona. And J. R. Watson, recently retired from his Chair at Durham, takes another look at Dyer's cancelled Preface to the *Poems* (1800). Simon Curtis, one of Bill's former colleagues at Manchester University, is represented by a poem on a Romantic theme, the work of John Robert Cozens; and T. W. Craik by an illustration of a pivotal event in Lamb's life.

I wish to acknowledge, with the deepest gratitude, the help of those who have aided and abetted me during my years as editor. There are too many to enumerate by name, but I should at least mention Alan Wheeler at Stanhope Press; Pat Wallace, my typist; Madeline Huxstep, the erstwhile Hon. Secretary; Nick and Cecilia Powell; D. E. Wickham, and my other colleagues on the council of the Charles Lamb Society. I also acknowledge the kind help of my editorial board, particularly Mary Wedd, John Beer, and T. W. Craik.

Lamb, Horace, and the Ring of a Classic

By RICHARD W. CLANCEY

IN 'GRACE BEFORE MEAT', Charles Lamb quotes a passage from Horace's *Ars Poetica* in a rather free and surprising way. He is speaking of the grace or blessing offered at Christ's Hospital before 'our bald bread and cheese suppers'. These turgid blessings included 'a recognition of benefits the most awful and overwhelming to the imagination which religion has to offer. *Non tunc illis erat locus'* ('This was hardly the place for those things').[1] Lamb wittily argues that elaborate blessings are more of an embarrassment than a proper beginning for most meals. They are dubious because the meals themselves more often tend to be sensual repasts than the 'daily bread' we should petition and offer thanks for. At Christ's Hospital an elaborate blessing was hardly called for because of the dismally meager fare foisted on the children as meals.

What interests us is Lamb's playful recasting of Horace's text. The correct passage from the *Ars Poetica* should not read *Non tunc illis erat locus*, but *sed nunc non erat his locus* ('but now was not the place for these things') (*Ars Poetica* line 19).[2] This line is from the famous passage which deals with what Horace calls 'purple patches' (*purpureus . . . pannus*, 14-19). Sometimes these flights of style can be appropriate, but they can often be totally out of place. Horace is giving advice on appropriateness of style in poetry, thus his injunction concerns the here and now, *nunc . . . his.* Lamb is indicting inappropriately elaborate blessings, thus the correlatives are changed to the then and those, *tunc . . . illis.* Even prayers deserve a rhetorical/occasional decency. Lamb changes Horace's Latin, but he has preserved his sentiments. Barnett points out that Lamb, when quoting, will frequently change the text of his source or sometimes use it in a different context. But Lamb does all this appropriately and often to the clear advantage to the quoted material.[3] Lamb's classical sensibility actually enlists the Roman Horace in a Christian cause. He does not simply quote Horace, he makes him a coadjutor. As always, Lamb's irony is perfect.

The Horatian presence, however, is more than a quotable ally in the various *Essays of Elia.* I find Horace to be a inspiriting presence in much of the total creative dynamic of Lamb's essays. Bate and Barnett have traced Lamb's place in the development of the personal essay back through Goldsmith, Addison and Steele and the seventeenth-century prose masters to Montaigne.[4] My goal is to relate Lamb's essays to Horace, especially to his *Literary Epistles.* Unlike his elegant *Odes* and *Epodes*, Horace's *Literary Epistles* resemble his *Satires* or *Sermones.* Called *Sermones*, they are like a conversation with someone immediately present. The *Epistles* are also conceived as conversations, but with someone at a distance, thus they are called *Epistulae*, or Letters. The so-called *Literary Epistles*, the *Epistles* of Book II of the *Epistles*, are

[1] Charles Lamb, *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia* ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987) (hereafter Bate), p. 110 (page numbers of this volume will hereafter be given in parentheses).

[2] Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, MA, 1978) (hereafter *Epistles*). Hereafter the line numbers of the works of Horace quoted from this volume will be given in parentheses. Translations and paraphrases are mine.

[3] George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia* (Bloomington, 1964) (hereafter Barnett), pp. 220-1.

[4] Bate, pp. ix-xvi; Barnett, pp. 18-47; Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 181-208 – a synoptic account of the development of the genres of the essay and the character in the seventeenth-century English literature.

called that because they all deal with literary criticism. The famous *Ars Poetica* is usually classified as the third of these epistles.[5] In their easy familiarity and simultaneously high artistic quality, I find Lamb and Horace so close in essay and epistle. Especially because both Lamb and Horace exercise such genius in the use of language and exhibit such a warm humanism and possess such appealing self-effacing personae, voices that win us with their candour and sincerity, I see them as especially alike.

It is not surprising that Lamb should remind us of Horace. Horace was one of the most important classical authors studied in grammar schools like Christ's Hospital. But Horace, like Virgil and Homer, had to be memorized as well as mastered.[6] Lamb was a fine classicist; very likely his stammer prevented his rising to the highest level of classical scholars at Christ's, the Grecians.[7] Coleridge has famously described the terrors of classical instruction under the infamous headmaster Boyer. The rigours of Boyer's instructions, however, were not lost on Lamb; no cowering drone, Lamb saw to it that his English style benefited from Boyer's regime.[8]

Lamb makes extensive use of classical quotations; Virgil is his favorite and Horace his second. Horace's *Ars Poetica* and his other *Literary Epistles* are especially esteemed. Barnett also demonstrates how Lamb uses this quoted matter in unfailingly creative ways and thus makes it completely his own.[9] For me, it is Lamb's sophisticated and appropriative use of classical quotations that gives so many of his texts such convincing power and authority. So often his style disarms us because it seems so simple, offhand, and then immediately we are struck by the subtlety of the texture. The classical quotations especially alert us to a depth not at first expected.

Lamb and Horace always provide a felicitous mosaic. Brink, the eminent Horace scholar, points out that one of Horace's major endeavors was to use language in such a way that it might be free 'from the flatness of daily speech and its devalued common coin'.[10] This reminds us immediately of one of the great pronouncements of Romantic critical doctrine. In commenting on a key goal for Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads,* Coleridge declares that Wordsworth was to remove 'the film of familiarity' from everyday things so that they can be seen afresh.[11] Wordsworth's great zeal in using 'a selection of language really used by men'[12] for poetry was directed to this goal. Wordsworthian Romantic critical doctrine and Horatian classicism both share a common semantic zeal; both are committed to what I have elsewhere identified as a philological poetics.[13] Lamb and Horace share a similar commitment. It results in their special skill to be simultaneously virtuoso and sincere, a skill that enables them to show a depth of meaning unexpected in a prose essay or epistle.

Horace's *Epistle to Florus* is a brilliant text both propounding and exhibiting this poetics. Florus was a friend of Horace and, though a lawyer, he was also a poet. The burden 'of the epistle is a series of excuses' by Horace for not writing his friend, especially for not sending some

[5] H. Rushton Fairclough, Introduction *Epistles*, pp. xxi-iii.
[6] Barnett, p. 193.
[7] George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb* (Boston, 1976), p. 24.
[8] Barnett, pp. 192-200.
[9] Ibid., 190-232.
[10] C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry. Epistles Book II: The Letters to Augustus and Florus* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 502.
[11] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1983), ii. 7.
[12] William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), i. 123.
[13] See my forthcoming *Wordsworth's Classical Undersong* (to be published by Macmillan).

promised poetry.[14] One of the most interesting parts of the epistle is the section dealing with the demands of poetic art. Here Horace details how the art of poetry especially depends upon real sensitivity to language (lines 109-25).

The passage is too long to quote in full, but we can examine some of its major precepts. Horace begins by challenging the aspiring poet in effect to *want* to write a truly 'legitimum . . . poema' (109), a poem done according to the rules of poetic art. The challenge comes in a clever use of the conditional followed by a list of requirements: if the poet *really* wants to do a legitimate poem, then these are the tasks that must be undertaken. First, the poet must make himself an honest and, perforce, a severe critic of himself, 'animum censoris sumet honesti' (110). The poet must scrutinize his text and ruthlessly extripate every word that lacks real splendour, depth of thought, and dignity, 'quaecumque parum splendoris habebunt / et sine pondere erunt et honore indigna . . .' (111-12). The poet's main charge is to share with the reader, with the literate world at large, a splendidly lucid body of expression, 'speciosa vocabula rerum' (116). The poet is to unearth terms which once were part of the vocabulary of great Romans like Cato and Cethegus, terms which now lie caught in a kind of refuse, a desultory mass, spurned because of their age, 'nunc situs informis premit et deserta vetustas' (118).

The poet is also to champion new coinages, such as have the sanction of usage, and also to rid the nation's speech of anything overblown, rude, or slack (119-23). Especially, though, the poet is to be a cultural benefactor for Latium by becoming a kind of living stream, 'vemens et liquidus puroque simillimus amni' (120) which will pour out and bless the nation with new riches for its corporate body of expression, 'fundet opes Latiumque beabit divite lingua' (121). But in all these endeavours, though extremely taxed, the poet is ever to seem the actor, playing now the part of a Satyr, and now the part of a comic Cyclops (124-5).

Horace, of course, practices what he preaches. In these mandates we catch not just challenges of a poet to a tyro, but also a catalogue of the achievements that have made Horace so honoured a poet. Lamb ably sprints in pace with his master. It may seem irreverent to compare a personal essayist, a humorist to some, with one of our greatest poets. But as Horace's emphasis on the philological tasks of the poet is clear, so Lamb's dedication in performing these tasks is equally clear. First of all, Lamb is a professional in every way. He sought the legitimacy of a relatively new genre, the Romantic personal essay, and did so by attending to the contemporary demands of his art and by cultivating other bodies of diction and modes of expression which his reading of seventeenth-century literature provided him. Barnett shows how hard Lamb worked to master his medium,[15] and he also provides extensive documentation from Lamb's texts at various stages of development and revision that shows how assiduously Lamb worked to correct and improve them.[16] Barnett suggests reasons for Lamb's revisions: 'to increase the precision of the expression . . . to add vividness and intensity . . . to perfect the rhythm, variety, or concision of the structure'.[17] These are typical classical-Horatian goals.

Horace's next mandate is that the poet be an active, creative agent in enriching the nation's language by restoring to use words which have been discarded through cultural indifference. Our culture, the offspring of modernism, characteristically seeks the new in art. Lamb, however, is famous for his archaisms,[18] but, as many scholars have shown, these ex pressions realize valuable

[14] Horace, *Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones ('Ars Poetica')* ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, 1989), p. 14.
[15] Barnett, pp. 9-47, 126-89.
[16] Ibid., 169-74; 233-44.
[17] Ibid., 169.
[18] Ibid., 214.

goals. Commenting on Lamb's description of the layers of dust that have accumulated on the ledgers in South Sea House, a 'superfoetation of dirt', Monsman observes that this 'daring' usage, '*superfoetation* (*super*, over, above + *foetation* from *fetus*, pregnancy)', forces the reader to examine the expression closely. 'Lamb's is a style sensitive to the precise value of words, a style that often pressed words that have become mainly figurative back into their literal , etymological root meanings'.[19] Lamb's 'superfoetation' would mean of course layers of or multiple pregnancies without anything being born.[20] This Latinate term smacks of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but it also does precisely what Horace requires of the poet: it provides the reader then – if not a new or forgotten term – certainly a term seemingly quaint, one outside the nation's contemporary vocabulary, but one ready again to be used in the right context. As will be shown more fully ahead, such a usage immediately reminds us of the richness of our tongue and the facility of its idiomatic resources.

Another way of seeing Lamb's Horatian office is to observe with John Coates how the very diction and sentence patterns of Lamb, so redolent of the seventeenth century, constituted in effect social and even political commentary. They conferred an enabling power whereby Lamb 'may challenge his time'.[21] The seventeenth century was also an age that cherished 'the aesthetic value of words'.[22] But I would argue that Lamb does much more than revive the past or make social-political commentary. He instructs us in the range and compass of our language and culture; he returns our heritage to us and returns us, as it were, to our heritage. 'A Quaker's Meeting' brings us home to an especially cherished heirloom:

> Reader, would'st thou know what true peace and quiet mean; would'st thou find a refuge from the noises and clamours of the multitude; . . . would'st thou be alone, and yet accompanied; . . . a unit in aggregate; a simple in composite: – come with me into a Quaker's Meeting. (51-2)

It is not just the antique verb forms, but the doctrine and the catalogue of callings that take us back to Fox and Penn and the seventeenth century. In the quiet pulse of the repetitions of the invitations, the noise and clamour of our time are challenged. The sentence seems not foreign in its structure, but cadenced like a ballad or a hymn. The Society of Friends lives still among us; it is a part of our lives even now. Through Lamb we are recalled to its blessings, renewed in its spirit, even if many of us cannot share its formal doctrines. The natural and idiomatic expression of the invitation is as warm and ready on our tongue as it is on the tongue of Lamb's voice.

Another passage evokes our parliamentary past and comments on our political present. The Quaker Meeting is a 'Nothing-plotting, nought-caballing, unmischievous synod! convocation without intrigue! parliament without debate! what a lesson dost thou read to council, and to consistory!' (53). Again the diction is surely evocative of the seventeenth century, 'cabal', 'synod'. The nastiness of political intrigue, its poisoning of the democratic process, is especially indicted by the evocative use of expletives. In these we have a touch of the jeremiad, but just a touch. For Lamb's purpose is to show how great values are served by quiet fidelity to principle, how principles are nurtured in the heart by heroic witness. He takes us immediately to the history

[19] Gerald Monsman, *Confessions of a prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb's art of autobiography* (Durham, 1984), pp. 44-5 (hereafter Monsman) (his italics).
[20] Ibid., 45.
[21] John Coates, '"Damn the Age! I will write for Antiquity": Lamb's Style as Implied Moral Comment', *CLB* NS 47-8 (October 1984), pp. 147-8.
[22] Barnett, p. 214.

of Quakers who suffered severely for their faith, e. g., 'James Naylor: . . . he endured even to the boring through of his tongue with red-hot irons without a murmur . . .' (54). We are beyond mere political commentary. We live in the age when our civil liberties were born. But we, personally as individuals, are confronted by a call of conscience; Quaker interiority urges us to a loyalty worthy of our ancestors.

It is no mean thing to remind us in our heavy days of doctrinal materialism just how broad and spiritual (not necessarily to be understood in the churchly sense) our culture and its roots are. We see our language as cosmopolitan and global because it is used as a handy, international 'work-horse lingua franca'. Lamb shows us that our language has a living presence not simply in the contemporary jejune, but in the ideological and ideal courses and causes which shaped its multiple registers of expression, enriched them, and actually created one vast humanistic vocabulary. To taste that vocabulary in an embodied form as offered by Lamb is to meet the texts of Burton, Milton, Fuller in a more familiar way. We have always read and quoted these texts, but as texts from the past. Lamb's usage gives us a colloquial, conversational entrée, a special kinaesthetic accessibility, a presence to these texts and the culture of their nurturing. Lamb puts us at home with them; he loosens our tongue and expands the plane of our vision. This is the genius of the personal essay. Its insouciance, its frequent piquancy have a multiproductive tenure in us.

I cannot prove that Lamb's practice was inspired directly by Horace, but his fidelity to these precepts of the *Epistle to Florus* show him as no mere antiquarian. Horace urges the vitalization of the nation's word store by revitalizing its ancient vocabulary. This urging gives a theoretical foundation for the amazing anachronistic practices of Lamb.

At this point we can go from the *Epistle of Florus* to the *Ars Poetica.* Here again we encounter more precepts of Horace that Lamb fulfills with impressive credit. The *Ars Poetica* was apparently written to instruct an aspiring playwright.[23] Characterization is crucial in drama and equally important in the kind of personal essay Lamb created so successfully. As will be seen, Horace's rules for good dramatic characterization constitute a major section of the *Ars Poetica.* But what is not considered often enough is the relationship between the techniques of characterization an author employs, the meaning achieved at the surface level, and what subliminally these techniques may allow the text also to say. Both Horace and Lamb are supreme ironists and great satirists. Their characterizations go far deeper than is often realized.

One way of looking at characterization in both Horace and Lamb is to consider a link suggested by Mary Wedd. As she leads us through the complex layers of the irony in Lamb's 'Poor Relations', she points out how this essay with its rich character study involves one of the oldest of genres, the character, a genre established by Theophrastus (d.c. 287 BC). The character became popular and was developed extensively in seventeenth-century British literature. Initially the essence of this genre was overt description of a character type, the miser, the fop, the gossip, etc. Eventually it was related to the essay and the character types discussed became more personalized.[24]

Douglas Bush, commenting on Thomas Fuller, 1608-61, points out that Fuller extended the compass of the character in his *The Holy State* (1642), 'which unites character, aphorism, injunction, essay, and biography in what is essentially a comprehensive conduct-book'.[25] Bush

[23] *Epistles*, pp. 442-3.
[24] Mary Wedd, 'That Dangerous Figure – Irony', *CLB* NS 73 (January 1991). See Bush, pp. 197-208, for a consideration of the genre of the character in seventeenth-century English literature.
[25] Bush, p. 204.

also reminds us of the connection of the character with Horace. In cataloguing the vast array of forces in the seventeenth century which contributed to the popularity of the character, Bush cites '*exempla* in sermons; the growth of psychological studies and the medical, psychological, and dramatic doctrine of "humours", fortified by Horatian precepts regarding dramatic types . . .'.[26] Brink links Horace's dicta on these 'dramatic types' to Aristotle and then to Theophrastus and the development of the character.[27] It is not difficult to see how Lamb, trained in Horace as a boy, dedicated to both the seventeenth century and especially to the essay as he matured as a writer, would easily fuse all these elements together in his Elia essays.

Horace's pronouncements on characterization in the *Ars Poetica* begin with his insistence that in drama it must be convincing, 'the soul of the audience must be moved', 'animum auditoris agunto' (100). This requisite involves sincerity, 'A plea for sincerity – a rarish plea in ancient literature'.[28] Horace next presents a catalogue of character types and then specific persons from mythology and literature who must be presented authentically (lines 114-27). He assigns boldly graphic epithets to each character whom an author may choose to write about,[29] and here our attention is caught by a strong affinity between Lamb and Horace. Horace's gift for the right word, for a kind of philological snapshot, the perfect term to encapsulate a given character, is extraordinary. Horace legislates on characterization by doing some memorable characterization himself. In this context Horace insists that Achilles must be rendered as 'diligent, irascible, unyielding, vehement', 'impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer' (121). Medea must be 'fierce, and unconquerable', 'ferox, invictaque' (123).

Horace's own practices in his *Satires* and *Epistles* illustrates his gift for this kind of epithetic characterization. In his famous tribute to his father, Horace tells us that if he has led a decent life, has been blessed with friends, he owes it all to his father. He deftly employs the simple term 'dear', 'carus', 'if I live as one who is dear to his friends', 'si et vivo carus amicis' (*Satires* I. vi. 70). This affecting Latin adjective means esteemed, dear to one's family and friends. It implies personal moral genuineness. Horace does not say he possesses friends, he has friends. He is diffident and uses the conditional, 'if I live as one', in effect, if I am 'worthy to be cherished by friends', if he has the moral goodness to be able to be blessed with friends, he owes it to his father. 'Carus' makes no claim for Horace, its force is a tribute to his father.

In this passage Horace explains that his father made enormous sacrifices so that Horace could be educated at Rome in the same excellent fashion as the children of knights and senators. One expression here is especially poignant. In order to explain the degree of his father's generosity, Horace points out that as a schoolboy, he was dressed in the best clothes, was attended by slaves, and was so fitted out that people must have concluded that the expenses for such equipage must have come from a family fortune, 'avita ex re', more literally, 'from an ancestral estate' (79-80). This expression is to be contrasted with an earlier one in the text which characterizes exactly his father's resources, strained to the utmost so that Horace could strike the fine figure he did. His father is honestly identified as a 'poor man', 'pauper', and his supposedly great resources as actually derived from a 'marco . . . agello', a struggling, even withering, farm; 'agello' literally means a little field (71). Horace offers no explanation of how his father met the expenses he did. The stark contrast of the two expressions is what concerns us. It is his father's goodness and

[26] Ibid., 198 (his italics).
[27] C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The 'Ars Poetica'* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 228.
[28] Ibid., 482.
[29] Ibid., 487.

selflessness which alone matter and are evident in the diction which touchingly contrasts two forms of patrimony.[30]

Another instance of the exact, the telling epithet comes in a particularly moving section of his *Epistle to Florus.* Here Horace laments the overzealous seeking of wealth. How can goods or land count for much if ownership passes so quickly from one person to another, from ancestor to heir, with the unremitting succession of the tides of the sea? 'How can the grand or the mean count if in the end Death claims all; Death, Orcus, which is implacable, which cannot be appealed to, which cannot be bribed with gold', 'si metit Orcus / . . . non exorabilis auro'? (*Epistles,* II. ii. 178-9). Each word in this passage is a stinging indictment of acquisitiveness, and yet the passage has a modulated elegiac tone. Horace's dactylic hexameter surely helps, but it is his chiseled positioning of such palpable terms as 'Orcus', and 'non exorabilis auro' that enable to passage to tell so forcefully 'on our pulses'.

To my mind Lamb's style is very similar to Horace's in his *Epistles*. Both care about language and both are verbal craftsman of the first order. Barnett cites such critics as Sir Edmund Gosse in emphasizing Lamb's gift for the stunning use of words. He quotes a comment from the early twentieth-century critic Derocquigny, 'Lamb's style [is] a style of words. . . . Lamb sought for the precise word, not content with any that did not carry the exact connotation'.[31] Barnett concludes, 'The perfection of Lamb's work . . . is owing to his painstaking attention to the details of literary expression.'[32]

I would argue that, in the seemingly incidental stylistic device of epithet, Lamb and Horace exhibit a particular affinity. Both are gifted, not simply in naming a person, both are endowed with a power of verbal divination that captures as would a fingerprint the uniqueness of a subject. Here the use of the antique term in a revitalized sense is particularly interesting. Such a term builds characters like figures in an illuminated manuscript or a prophets in ecstacy in a Baroque fresco. Lamb's 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple', as a vivid cast of characters, reminds one of Shakespeare or Dickens. His first character is the Inner Temple itself: 'What a cheerful, liberal look hath that portion of it, which . . . overlooks the greater garden . . .' (94-5). He speaks of 'Crown-office Row (place of my kindly engendure)' (95). We slip easily into the world of Lamb's childhood as the antique connotations of 'liberal' and the antique term 'engendure' strike us. Lamb leads us through the garden, with its elegant buildings constituting a 'classic green' (94), down to the Thames:

> which washes the garden-foot with her yet scarcely trade-polluted waters, and seems but just weaned from her Twickenham Naiades! a man would give something to have been born in such places. (95)

This is indeed the Thames of Spenser, the England of the classical revival in all its smiling enthusiasm. In the diction we feel the past embodied in this place, a past commenting on itself benignly in all its accoutrements, the 'Elizabethan hall, where the fountain plays', and the 'sun-dials, with their moral inscriptions, seeming coevals with that Time which they measured' (95). These breathe the past alive because they are living agents still doing in the present the natural tasks assigned them in the past. The 'dead thing' of a 'clock, with its ponderous embowelments

[30] For my discussion of 'agello', I am indebted to my colleague Professor Donald Poduska, who also read this paper and offered valuable comments.
[31] Barnett, p. 215.
[32] Ibid., 231.

of lead and brass, its pert or solemn dulness of communication' is no match, even yet, for 'the simple altar-like structure, and silent heart-language of the old dial! . . . the garden god of Christian gardens' (95). In each of these evocations the perfect term embosses a living genealogy on our consciousness. The expressions 'altar-like' and 'garden god of Christian gardens' return us to our Graeco-Roman heritage and its Christian appropriation. Even the pious rhetoric of that appropriation sounds again in the sundial's 'moral uses': 'It spoke of moderate labours, of pleasures not protracted after sun-set, of temperance, and good-hours. It was the primitive clock, the horologe of the first world. Adam could scarce have missed it in Paradise' (95).

The era of sundials and fountains is gone. Lamb's account becomes elegiac as he laments a present bereft of these poetic devices. But his very elegy reifies the world that has slipped away. His term for the loss of a particular fountain is movingly sensory and fittingly textual: 'the spring' that fed it is now 'choked up' (97). He plays upon the power of poetic fancy by playing on the evocations of childhood and the child's gift of wonder. The fountains are gone because they were thought 'childish', but, he counters, 'Is the world all grown up? Is childhood dead?' In our world of adults is there nothing 'of the child's heart left, to respond to its earliest enchantments?' (97). In all these passages the term 'coevals' sings, as it were in the background. The 'sun-dials . . . seeming coevals with that Time which they measured' (95), become the moving symbols for the essay. Lamb's process is incantatory; his antique terms a kind of plainsong; we meld into and become 'coevals' with the past he describes.

But it is the Benchers themselves who dominate Lamb's essay. His terminology literally moves them before us and moves us in among them. In Lamb's obvious affection for his principals, we find the sincerity which Horace demands of characters in drama and also of the playwright who creates them.[33] Lamb is not simply a descriptive voice, he is the affecting impresario who unfolds this little world before us. He gives act and life to everything. He begins with the terrace, once called 'the parade', now bereft 'of the footsteps which made its pavement awful!' (97). Those who originally strode this walk secured it to themselves with absolute tenure. '[I]n the forepart of the day at least . . . [t]hey might not be sided or jostled. Their air and dress asserted the parade. You left wide spaces betwixt you, when you passed them' (97). Their dominion speaks especially in Lamb's term 'asserted'. Here he invokes the etymology of 'assert', 'asserere', to sow, to plant, to possess a thing as one's own. These imperious figures have commandeered this simple walk as though it were a parapet. We notice how Lamb intimately involves us in the scene, 'You left wide spaces betwixt'; they strode and we cautiously sidled by. The archaic 'betwixt' reminds us that we are dealing with a world remembered. Though it is from Lamb's youth, he endows it with an almost medieval aura.

These figures are realized in classical dimensions. We recall Horace's injunction that Achilles is to be characterized as 'diligent, irascible, unyielding, vehement' (*Ars Poetica* 121). Lamb gives us Thomas Coventry 'whose person was a quadrate, his step massy and elephantine, his face square as the lion's, his gait peremptory and path-keeping, indivertible from his way as a moving column' (97). He was the terror of children, '[h]is growl was as thunder', and thus they fled before him (97). Lamb's effective use of Latinate terms gives us our Achilles figure; his 'moving column', the perfect metaphor for the military way he moved and was encountered.

The fearsome Coventry is contrasted with 'the pensive gentility of Samuel Salt' (98). Lamb begins with an abstract yet pointedly impersonal characterization. Salt's 'pensiveness' is a bit of a mask. He cannot really be trusted with challenging cases; these he gave over to Lovel, his

[33] Rudd, p. 168.

'factotum' and Lamb's evocation of his father.[34] Salt 'was a shy man; a child might pose him in a minute – indolent and procrastinating to the last degree' (98). Again we notice the wonderful precision of Lamb's adjectives. Salt had already clearly emerged simply for being identified as the opposite of Coventry. We thus know him well. But then shyness, indolence, procrastination add to the figure, and his individuality develops all the more. Lamb describes Coventry by putting him into action. We feel ourselves fleeing his coming. With Salt, Lamb's technique is to accumulate details, anecdotes, until the figure is fully rounded. Salt forgets his sword; he speaks unwittingly but very much out of turn at a dinner party. He comments on the execution of a relative of the very family with whom he dines. He was appealing to women, but never was able to use this gift to advantage. Yet Lamb recounts the devotion of one lady, 'Susan P—', who pursued this confirmed bachelor right up to his death. She 'was seen . . . wetting the pavement' with her 'tears' (99). And yet for all the details and their precision, Lamb causes us to wonder about this gentleman, to wonder with affection. He did have friends, won the heart of Susan, and especially enjoyed the undying loyalty of Lovel.

In Lovel we have one of Lamb's warmest characterizations. It reminds us of Horace's tribute to his father. It is Lamb's picture of his own father, John Lamb, but unfortunately we don't know that much about him.[35] Lovel's characterization is cleverly built on that of Salt, whose indolence was such that he hardly knew what he was worth. Luckily for him he had the honest Lovel who 'took care of every thing'(100). Here we may even think of Chaucer and the Canterbury pilgrims. The integrated pattern of Lamb's characterizations allows us to see one in terms of another and thus their little world whole and entire. Lovel was everything to Salt: 'He was at once his clerk, his good servant, his dresser, his friend, his "flapper", his guide, stop-watch, auditor, treasurer' (100).

Lamb's first-person commentary is especially moving: 'I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty' (100). The simple 'this' makes Lovel immediate to our vision. What follows is an account, like that rendered for Coventry, of what Lovel did: his bravery in trouncing a gentleman, his humorous conceits, his being likened to and his admiration of Garrick, his making excellent punch, his being a perfect angler, one after the heart of Walton, his 'palsy-smitten' old age. And finally the poignant, all-encompassing anecdote: Lovel in his dotage recalling his coming to London as a raw boy from Lincoln to go into service, his return home decked in livery, his mother's tears, and then his own, old man that he was, as the flood of those days came back upon him. And here indeed is the 'gentle-hearted' Charles Lamb. As Lovel wept at these memories, Lamb comments, 'I [could] have wished that sad second-childhood might have a mother still to lay its head upon her lap. But the common mother of us all in no long time after received him gently into hers' (101).

The wonder of this passage is its diction; each word is offered as a tribute set caringly in place. 'Losing honesty', challenges every probe of logic. We see a man whose honesty is so fine it cost him his life and yet saved it to something higher, something more beautiful. He served Salt punctiliously. He could have deprived Salt '[of] his title . . . to respect as a master, if L. could ever have forgotten for a moment that he was a servant' (100). But this was Lovel's secret. He went about the business of being himself with such total honesty, that he has won a kind of immortality in Lamb's prose. These descriptions provide fine examples of Lamb's humanism. In Coventry and Salt, with all their faults and foibles, Lamb gives us fascinating human beings.

[34] Monsman, p. 70.
[35] Barnett, p. 50.

Lamb's text not only reveals the truly human depths that often lie hidden in people of forbidding or bizarre exteriors, but his frank, sometimes gibing, more frequently touching accounts also disclose the interior of Charles Lamb. We sense his feelings as he delineates real people, truly as they are, when fully drawn. And here in Lamb we have Lovel's 'losing honesty'. The author is supposedly muted in the full face of the human portraits she/he renders of others. Paradoxically, however, such is the power of the painter's hand and the poet's voice, that it is the artist especially whose humane countenance is revealed behind the vivid wrinkles and torques of the human beings the artist has created with such absolute commitment.

It is the humanism of Lamb that especially reminds me of Horace. Among the final items in *The Last Essays of Elia* is a wonderfully ironic series called 'Popular Fallacies'. One of the fallacies exposed is titled: 'That a sulky temper is a misfortune'. This piece recounts the joys to be derived in cherishing an imaginary slight:

> The first thing to aggrandise a man in his own conceit, is to conceive of himself as neglected. There let him fix if he can. To undeceive him is to deprive him of the most tickling morsel within the range of self-complacency. . . . To be sure he is something shortsighted ; and it was in your power to have accosted *him.* But facts and sane inferences are trifles to a true adept in the science of dissatisfaction. (310; emphasis his)

Lamb recounts how he thought himself snubbed by a friend; how he nursed this spurious grievance and worked himself into a wonderful funk. He enjoyed his pique and gives abundant advice to his reader as to how similarly supposed slights may be nursed into the most delightful fits of misery: 'To grow bigger every moment in your own conceit, . . . to deify yourself at the expense of your species; to judge the world – this is the acme and supreme point of your mystery [sic] – these the true PLEASURES OF SULKINESS' (311; emphasis his).

Lamb then tells how he was disabused of the grounds of his annoyance by the friend who initiated the supposed slight. He and another friend had seemingly ignored Lamb as the three passed in the street. Both called on Lamb to explain their neglect of him had been simple 'oversight' (312). Lamb could do nothing but accept their account, 'the frank manner of them both was convictive of the injurious nature of the suspicion' (312). Lamb is a supreme ironist nowhere more so than when the irony is at his expense. His self-effacing candour strikes a moral with peerless efficacy.

Here again Lamb and Horace are strikingly similar, and here Lamb emphasizes his affection for Horace. Lamb ends his account, as he supposedly laments the loss of the joys of nurturing a false grievance, by an extended quotation from Horace. He does this a bit pedantically by not including any reference to his source. It comes from his *Epistle to Florus*, the very text we have invoked as embodying so many theoretical and stylistic similarities of Lamb and Horace. As will be recalled, Horace attempts to excuse himself from sending his friend promised poetry. He is like the poor, somewhat deranged citizen of Argos who, perfectly rational in all other respects, delighted himself by visiting empty theatres and there seeing imaginary performances. So enthralled was he by these vivid fantasies that he applauded enthusiastically as they ended. His friends became alarmed and administered a potion that freed him from his visions. Instead of being happy, the poor man lamented that he had been cheated out of one of his most precious delights.

Lamb comments that he too was similarly happy in his delusion, and he too felt cheated and 'could have exclaimed with equal reason against the friendly hands that cured us –' (312). He then quotes lines 138-40 of the *Epistle to Florus*, lines which begin with the claim by the poor gentleman in Horace's fable that his friends had killed him, '"Pol me occidistis, amici"; they had

done him no service at all because they had forcefully deprived him of a most agreeable delusion, "et demptus per vim mentis gratissimus error"' (140). Again, Lamb has invoked Horace perfectly. The ironic situations are virtually the same. Horace claims to his friend Florus that he can no longer attempt poetry. The demands of the art are too great. It is much more pleasant to be solipsistically content, to live in the pleasant delusion that composing really good poetry according to the rigours of the art is hardly worth the trouble. His own supposedly mediocre achievements are enough. This ironic protest comes, however, in a beautifully rendered poem. Horace the poet was never more the poet than here in his poetically elegant claims in behalf of his art.

Lamb and Horace are masterfully gifted in wit, verbal artistry and absolute, unself-conscious candour. Both are ultimately gentle moralists. Lamb especially never preaches. With a taste that is as perfect as his word choice, he touches us because he understands human nature so well and treats it with such kindness. Even his self-mockery has a classical-Horatian poise. He moves us because he knows exactly what part of his heart to share.

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The *Essays of Elia* Revisited

By MARY WEDD

IN THE YEAR 2000 it will be 225 years since the birth of Charles Lamb, a time perhaps to look back and take stock. Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey are no longer commonly read in school or university. In fact, they are hardly read at all. Undoubtedly their fate has been part of a general neglect of the essay-form. In addition to the general down-grading of essayists, Lamb in particular has suffered eclipse. His reputation has been almost equally traduced by his friends and by his enemies. There is no question that his work is shaped by his personality and his life or that his attraction for readers is enhanced by that fact. The most beguiling introduction to him is through his correspondence which has been called 'among the world's best letters'.[1] But Thackeray did him a disservice when he called him '*Saint* Charles' and his admirers at one time tended to be sentimental about him. This gave his detractors just the handle they needed to dismiss him as negligible. As Stuart M. Tave pointed out in 1966,[2] such essays as Denys Thompson's 'Our Debt to Lamb', though 'its force is certainly dissipated by the indiscrimination of its violence' nevertheless 'probably sums up intemperately the reasons for the relative critical neglect of Lamb in the past thirty years – the personal, eccentric, non-intellectual quality'. Admittedly Tave goes on to 'a list of distinguished critics who . . . are neither his fulsome admirers nor his denigrators . . .' but 'who take him seriously . . . who respect him, and who find him a masculine figure, a man of some complexity and a good share of wisdom arid vision' and there have been notable additions to the list since. Yet the notion has persisted that Lamb is a mere fribble, not worthy of the notice of august personages who design syllabuses. One wonders sometimes whether critics actually read the texts they criticize. For, of course, as Robert D. Frank points out, 'Praz, Thompson, and even many good friends of Elia have, I believe, been gulled by Lamb'.[3] Those who see him as 'lovable but not very bright'[4] have hardly distinguished themselves by their own penetration. They have fallen into a trap Lamb set for them by his creation of the character of Elia.

Yes, there is fun and idiosyncrasy – why ever not? If the first object of poetry is to give pleasure, as has been affirmed from Aristotle onwards, why not of the essay? But only a fool would think that humour and quirkiness are the only qualities present in Lamb's essays. He knew that readers might take against him: 'Those who did not like him, hated him. . . . Few understood him; and I am not certain that at all times he quite understood himself. He too much affected that dangerous figure – irony.'[5]

This is still a stumbling block, for the literal-mindedness that assured Elia that his wish to meet Burns 'was impossible because he was dead'[6] plagues us still. It is necessary to look beneath the surface of the soil if one wishes to find precious metal.

Lamb showed prescience when he begged Coleridge not to call him 'gentle-hearted in print' and asserted that 'the meaning of gentle is equivocal at best, and almost always means poor-

[1] John Mason Brown, introduction to *The Portable Charles Lamb* (New York, 1969), p. 25.
[2] Stuart M. Tave, 'Charles Lamb – Criticism', *The English Romantic Poets and Essayists* ed. Houtchens (New York and London, 1966), p. 63.
[3] Robert D. Frank, *Don't Call Me Gentle Charles: An Essay on Lamb's Essays of Elia.* (Oregon, 1976), p. 21.
[4] Reported by Tave, p. 21.
[5] 'By a Friend of the late Elia', *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia* ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987), p. 172.
[6] 'Imperfect Sympathies', Bate, p. 70.

spirited'.[7] Just so have his detractors interpreted it. Wordsworth put the seal on it when, after Lamb's death, he called him 'the frolic and the gentle', beautiful though his tribute is.[8] Not that Wordsworth made the mistake, in his affection for the man, of underestimating the work. He puts his finger on its quality when he says in a letter of 14 November 1833, 'tell L. that his Works are our delight, as evidenced better than by words – by April weather of smiles and tears whenever we read them'.[9] Tears? Yes, certainly. Humour, far from being necessarily escapism, is one of the most courageous methods of dealing with pain. Lamb has often been compared to Lear's Fool. Hazlitt said of Lamb, 'His jests scald like tears'.[10] Of course, Hazlitt was referring to Lamb's conversation, but in the *Essays* too one recognizes a similar quality. Consider when the well-meaning woman says to the Poor Relation, 'Do take another slice Mr Billet, for you do not get pudding every day'.[11] What depths of humiliation on the one hand and crass failure of empathy on the other lie beneath this humorous incident and how it contrasts with the old man's saving just the necessary money to pay for his funeral, so that he 'left the world blessing God that he had enough to bury him, and that he had never been obliged to any man for a sixpence'.

The tears are not confined, though, to the unstated implications of apparently comic or idiosyncratic utterances. No one can better create a sense of desolation without sentimentality and epitomize it in a couple of sentences. 'Death does not shrink up his human victim at this rate. The burnt ashes of a man weigh more in their proportion.' Or 'I walk about; not to or from'. Or 'The children of the very poor have no young times'.[12]

So what about that stereotype, personal, eccentric, non-intellectual? Well, the eighteenth-century periodical essayists also wrote in the first person and, in a conversational tone, so that Lamb was following an established tradition when he created Elia, but also developing it. Invaluable light on this can be found in Lamb's review of the first volume of Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, a review unpublished until 1980 when Roy Park included it in *Lamb as Critic*.

> A series of Miscellaneous Essays, however well executed in the parts, if it have not some pervading character to give a unity to it, is ordinarily as tormenting to get through as a set of aphorisms, or a jest-book. – The fathers of Essay writing in ancient and modern times – Plutarch in a measure, and Montaigne without mercy or measure – imparted their own personal peculiarities to their themes. By this balm are they preserved. The Author of the Rambler in a less direct way has attained the same effect. Without professing egotism, his work is as essentially egotistical as theirs. He deals out opinion, which he would have you take for argument; and is perpetually obtruding his own particular views of life for universal truths. This is the charm which binds us to his writings, and not any steady conviction we have of the solidity of his thinking.

So much for Dr Johnson, as downright as when he kicked the stone, but there is a subtler way.

> Another class of Essayists, equally impressed with the advantages of this sort of appeal to the reader, but more dextrous at shifting off the invidiousness of a perpetual self-reference,

[7] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr. (Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), i. 217-18.
[8] William Wordsworth, 'Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg'.
[9] William Wordsworth, *Letters, The Later Years Part 2* ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1979), p. 658.
[10] William Hazlitt, 'On the Conversation of Authors – Continued', *The Plain Speaker: Key Essays* ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1998), p. 29.
[11] 'Poor Relations', Bate, p. 184.
[12] 'Blakesmoor in H------shire', Bate, p. 175; 'The Superannuated Man', Bate, p. 225; 'Popular Fallacies – That Home is Home Though it is Never so Homely', p. 300.

> substituted for themselves an *ideal character* which left them a still fuller licence in the delivery of their peculiar humours and opinions, under the masqued battery of a fictitious appellation. Truths, which the world would have startled at from the lips of the gay Captain Steele, it readily accepted from the pen of old Isaac Bickerstaff.

This surely was Lamb's way. Hazlitt, he says, is by contrast without subterfuge.

> He talks to you in broad day-light. He comes in no imaginary character. . . . He attracts, or repels, by strong realities of individual observation, humour and feeling.[13]

So what it boils down to is that *all* the essayists in their varying ways come under that appellation of 'personal'. So why, in Lamb's case, is the term felt to be pejorative? Is it because, as Robert D. Frank suggests, critics have been fooled by the mask of Elia?

We do miss a lot by not reading those essayists as regularly as we used to do. Here is Dr Johnson introducing Dick Minim: 'Criticism is a study by which men grow important and formidable at very small expense'. They do not actually need to pay close attention, for instance, to what they read. But this is not true of all critics. Some look carefully and see what is there, E.V. Lucas, for example, looking at 'A Character of the Late Elia'. Lamb has been rebuffing the charge of egotism in Elia, claiming rather that he would 'imply and twine with his own identity the griefs and affections of another – making himself many or reducing many unto himself'. He compares Elia to the dramatist 'who doubtless under cover of passion uttered by another, oftentimes gives blameless vent to his most inward feelings, and expresses his own story modestly.' Lucas notes of the next passage, 'The opening sentences of this paragraph seem to have been deliberately modelled, as indeed is the whole essay, upon Sterne's character of Yorick in *Tristram Shandy*, Vol. I., Chapter XI.'[14] Yorick's indiscretion in saying just what he thought 'without much distinction of either person, time or place' made him enemies, as did Elia's when 'He observed neither time nor place, and would e'en out with what came uppermost'.

What is the adjective that first springs to mind in relation to *Tristram Shandy*? Is it not perhaps 'eccentric'? Do we therefore condemn it as beneath our notice? I think not. Personalities that have no tinge of eccentricity in them tend to be very tedious – and to be boring is the last thing one wants in an essayist. Lamb wrote with appreciation of 'those fine Shandian lights and shades'.[15]

In that same chapter of *Tristram Shandy* is a description that might have been written for Lamb.

> For, to speak the truth, Yorick had an invincible dislike and opposition in his nature to gravity; – not to gravity as such; – for where gravity was wanted, he would be the most grave or serious of mortal men for days and weeks together; – but he was an enemy to the affectation of it, and declared open war against it, only as it appeared a cloak for ignorance, or for folly: and then, whenever it fell in his way, however sheltered and protected, he seldom gave it much quarter.

Lamb was not a simpleton. It was pretension he could not stand.

'Personal, eccentric, non-intellectual' – non-intellectual, eh? How many of the learned allusions that Lamb throws off without having to look for them would a modern reader

[13] *Lamb as Critic* ed. Roy Park (London, 1980), pp. 300 and 302.
[14] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* ed. E. V. Lucas (5 vols., London, 1912), ii. 402-3.
[15] 'My Relations', Bate, p. 81.

recognize? Latin comes as easily to his tongue as English. A glance through the notes to Jonathan Bate's World's Classics Edition of *Elia* is enough to convey the breadth of learning which Lamb wore so lightly. Tave reports the critical accusation against Lamb of 'making a virtue of his own ignorance and indolence'[16] so as to appeal to the lowest common denominator among readers. I suppose this means that he is neither pretentious nor dull.

In fact, far from being ignorant, stupid and lazy, Lamb is too clever for many of his readers, including some critics. His creation of Elia follows literary tradition and revitalizes it. In place of the Club, with its characters designed to set forth aspects of English society so that its mores could be examined and reformed, while still flattering the periodical's readers, Lamb created a gallery of everyday people of his own time, with their genuine oddities and living reality. Instead of the exponent of Good Taste, the 'parson in a tye-wig', he deliberately constructed a limited, faulty but endearing narrator, whose characteristics are generally based on those of Lamb himself, but altered, exaggerated and often deprecated. Intentionally downplayed are more rigorous qualities, equally Lamb's, of strength, courage and intelligence, though for those who have eyes to see they are there beneath the surface. Similarly, though like the periodical essayists of the earlier period he does not deal with the headline news of the day in political or military matters, the values that Elia supports do emerge. Though sometimes stated, they are not inculcated through a sermon and often only suggested by implication.

Regard, for example, Captain Jackson. Elia tells with affectionate laughter of his friend's refusal to acknowledge his poverty in his wish to entertain right royally. His dealing with the cheese, which was all the family had while the guests were treated to the luxury of 'a bare scrag, cold savings of the foregone meal', speaks volumes. Captain Jackson served out small portions to his wife and daughters while reserving the rind for himself. Elia at first indicates that he admires the Captain for triumphing in this way over adversity, but this is undercut by one of Lamb's heart-wrenching understatements. Of the daughters who were 'in the main, perhaps, not insensible to their true circumstances' Elia says, 'I have seen them assume a thoughtful air at times'. How did they endure their father's make-believe? Who can doubt that the unstated implication of this essay is shame and indignation that an officer who had given hard and honourable service should, in retirement, be reduced to a choice between humiliation and subterfuge. One is reminded of Wordsworth's Old Soldier or those playing-cards that were better treated in their old age than men.

> A thick-ribbed army, not, as in the world,
> Neglected and ungratefully thrown by
> Even for the very service they had wrought.[17]

Worse than this, even, is the fate of the Captain's dependents with no reliable future to look forward to. Elia has not overtly made any statement. He does not need to. His method is 'showing' not 'telling'.

Closely associated with this is what Lamb calls 'that dangerous figure – irony'. 'Dangerous' because when your 'intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used', some readers will take you literally. 'Poor Relations', which I analysed in an earlier article,[18] with special reference to the use of irony, is particularly dependent on this, but skilful manipulation of the device can be found throughout the *Essays*.

[16] Tave, p. 63.
[17] *The Prelude* (1805), i. 544-6.
[18] *CLB* NS 73 (January 1991).

For example, in 'Imperfect Sympathies', Elia purports to be apologetic about belonging to 'an order of imperfect intellects' for whom 'Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they pretend to'. Read carelessly this seems to condemn Elia out of his own mouth as the paltry fellow his detractors think him, though the rest of the essay makes clear the *superiority* of this sort of mind to the 'Caledonian', who 'never hints or suggests anything, but unlades his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness'. One is irresistibly reminded today of those scientists who think that they know everything about the brain and have an appropriate corner in it for anything 'transcendental' such as pre-death experiences, thus somehow invalidating them. Yet such a one is using that same brain when 'He brings his total wealth into company, and gravely unpacks it'.

One has to feel sorry for the 'Caledonian' who has no knowledge of 'negative capability'. He is both obtuse and arrogant. 'He has no falterings of self-suspicion' but 'stops a metaphor like a suspected person in an enemy's country'. How well one knows this phenomenon. 'He's using an image' one may say. The invariable answer is, 'Well, why can't he say what he means?' Elia gives comic examples of this literal-mindedness and then advises the reader, 'Clap an extinguisher on your irony, if you are unhappily blest with a vein of it'.

Similarly, in 'The Old and the New Schoolmaster' Elia denigrates his own 'very little knowledge'. 'In everything that relates to *science* I am a whole Encyclopaedia behind the rest of the world.' If we have been going along with him in happy acceptance and even a sneaking approval of his list of ignorances, we must surely be pulled up short when he comes to 'small Latin' seeing how the *Essays*, including this one, are sprinkled by quotation from or reference to classical texts. Surely the rogue has been 'conning' us and Elia is an anagram of 'A lie'. Then, when he demonstrates his lack of knowledge by not being able to answer any of the schoolmaster's questions, one cannot feel that he is missing much.

Elia then looks back with ostensible regret to 'those fine old Pedagogues' who believed 'that all learning was contained in the languages which they taught, and despising every other acquirement as superficial and useless, came to their task as to a sport!' Elia, by his affectionately dismissive tone, indicates that he does not share the old Pedagogues' belief. What he does approve is the 'gusto' that went along with it. Alas! he says, there is little of that left in the teacher's life. 'The fine dream is fading away fast; and the least concern of a teacher in the present day is to inculcate grammar-rules.' You can say that again. Elia, of course, refers to the classical languages, but it is true now of our own. A seminar group studying Wordsworth some years ago was totally unable to understand the poet's meaning in a passage, I think from *The Prelude*. Rather surprised, I ventured in my innocence, 'but surely it's only a matter of grammar', and proceeded to disentangle the sentence as I had learnt to do in the junior school. Like those old Pedagogues, I had thought it then the best game ever invented. The seminar group of Scholars looked at me as at a magician or as a prophet who had just brought down new tablets of stone for them, written in an unknown language.

'The modern schoolmaster is expected to know a little of every thing, because his pupil is required not to be entirely ignorant of anything.' *Plus ça change* . . . Hence the module system. But does any student of English either see a coherent picture or know anything properly? Perhaps we should make it the fashion to follow the example of Elia's acquaintance, who 'left off reading altogether, to the great improvement of his originality'.[19]

[19] Bate, p. 195.

Alternatively, has the time come for a complete overhaul of the English Literature curriculum, not to overload it further with governmental red tape but to get back to some genuine, solid, enriching learning? Years ago, there used to be a little World's Classics volume called *Selected English Essays*, which was on the shelves of all serious students of English Literature. It was first printed in 1903 and went through 20 reprintings by 1930, when at fourteen I acquired my copy. Children's studies at school, and I do not mean a school that selected its pupils by ability, were not confined to this book, though it ranged from Bacon to Robert Louis Stevenson – and only Bacon and Addison had more entries than Charles Lamb – but went on to larger selections from individual essayists taken chronologically. Meantime, they read also representative poems from each period in historical order, a series of Shakespeare plays and classic novels. Later, they became familiar with some seventeenth-century prose such as Sir Thomas Browne and John Donne. It was assumed that students would explore for themselves such current writing as now might be set texts. They were well equipped, therefore, by the time they were in the sixth form to read Lamb's work with growing understanding, recognizing some of the influences that contributed to making him what he was and also to his innovations. One of the most interesting joys in the study of literature, as of history, is surely to see how one thing grows out of another, either by influence or by opposition. Lest you should think that only the privileged were exposed to some of the greatest literary masterpieces, I must tell how, during the war, I met an elderly man, retired from the Navy, who had been a boxer, with the squashed nose to prove it. He had left school at fourteen but could quote the whole of Gray's *Elegy* by heart and did so not with boredom but with delight. Surely 'we are greater than we know' but we have to be given the opportunity to fulfil our potential.

When reading the *Essays of Elia* one needs to be always on the *qui vive*. Sometimes an essay may be a straightforward narrative or description, though told with Elia's characteristic voice. At other times the reader may be tricked, as those critics were who took Elia at his own seeming valuation and proved that it was not, after all, he who suffered from 'ignorance and indolence'. There is remarkable variety in the subjects of the *Essays* too, so that the reader is forever pleasurably changing gear. There is no telling what may come next. Reminiscences of the South Sea House, Christ's Hospital, the Old Benchers, accounts of Elia's friends and relations, memories of Mackery End, Blakesmoor or Old Newspapers, all these hold our interest though they were already in the past more than 150 years ago, because of their human interest which never goes out of date and because of the way they are told. In the same way, comments on acting, the theatre, the Comedy of Manners have a kind of double perspective for us, being seen from Lamb's time and from our own, while we also find concerns in them which are universal. Juxtaposed with these are all manner of meditations sparked off by some apparently random thought. Nor are the *Essays* mere maundering on. George L. Barnett records that 'Authorial dissatisfaction is manifested in revisions constantly made from the earliest manuscript to the final book. Many such changes were made merely to correct errors; many more were made in an attempt to improve style'.[20] He also points to the more conscious artistry in the essay than in the letter when both have the same subject-matter.

The prevailing technical devices vary with the demands of particular essays. The martial imagery – even extending to her name – in 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist' has often been commented on. She is undoubtedly a 'Caledonian' who does not see the point of any activity that is not 'rational' or not done for money. She is a 'control freak' who would certainly do away with

[20] George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb* (Boston, 1976), pp. 87-8.

the pageantry of the State Opening of Parliament or the Changing of the Guard, however much Elia might plead that 'Man is not the creature of pure reason – he must have his senses delightfully appealed to'. Take away the colour and decoration on them and 'the *beauty* of cards would be extinguished forever'. What a drab, grey world such realistic Puritans would condemn us to! As with Captain Jackson, Elia begins by pretending to admire Mrs. Battle's stiff-necked, unimaginative character. Of half-hearted card-players he says, 'she detested them, as I do, from her heart and soul'. That she has the weakness of possessing these human adjuncts is indicated by her out-of-character declaration 'under the rose, that hearts was her favourite suit'. Gradually, Elia lets slip that he is not entirely in agreement with her – until by the end he acknowledges that there is an opposing point of view to hers, both as to cards and as to 'those more serious *games* of life, which men play . . .' One may do things '*for nothing*' or '*for love*' – or perhaps even just for fun. Those who see life, like cards, as a perpetual war in order to become a winner may be missing the best of it. Imagine the come-down 'To expect a Steele, or a Farquar, and find – Adam Smith'![21]

In 'All Fools Day' the theme is co-ordinated by quotation and allusion which, as Ian Jack says, are perhaps in this case 'excessive'.[22] Partly, of course, we may think so because we are not as quick to pick them up and so to see their implications as his peers in his own time would have been. If a trifle overdone, it is a splendidly heterodox Feast of Fools, including as it does philosophers, a world-famous conqueror, a theologian, an alchemist (scientist) and humorous characters from the literature of centuries. Elia confesses that 'I love a Fool – as naturally as if I were kith and kin to him' – which of course he is and so, often, in reading him are we. 'Reader, if you wrest my words beyond their construction, it is you and not I, that are the April Fool!'

There is at least one essay in which Elia expresses overtly a strong moral judgment, in 'Modern Gallantry'. Feminists today might demand that a woman should be regarded as equal with a man and should not need to ask for special 'respect for her as she is a woman' but in Lamb's time things were very different. Moreover, we have still a long way to go and there are several statements here that make one want to stand up and cheer. Elia says of gallantry that 'I shall believe it to be something more than a name, when a well-dressed gentleman in a well-dressed company can advert to the topic of *female old age* without exciting, and intending to excite, a sneer:' and 'Lastly, 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'. This is by no means out of date.

It is true that Elia does not normally deal with current affairs or controversial philosophical or political ideas, though Charles Lamb had done so at times. Such issues would not have been appropriate to the *Essays*, but that does not mean that profound questions about the universal human lot are excluded. Far from it. In particular, Elia is concerned with man's attempts to wrestle with the concepts of time and eternity. This is closely linked to experiences of childhood and memory. The similarity with Wordsworth's 'spots of time' is so great that one wonders why in his case these concerns are respected, whereas in Lamb they are regarded as escapist, a cowardly withdrawing from adult reality. Perhaps it is just that poetry is 'serious', whereas the familiar essay may not so easily be recognized as such.

In 'Blakesmoor in H-------shire', Elia, hoping to revisit a great house much loved in childhood, is brought up short when he finds it has been razed to the ground. Though he knew that this was

[21] Bate, p. 196.
[22] Ian Jack, *The Oxford History of English Literature 1815-1832* (Oxford, 1963), p. 290.

so he had not been able entirely to believe it. It was as if he himself had died. 'Had I seen those brick-and-mortar knaves at their process of destruction, at the plucking of every pannel I should have felt the varlets at my heart.' The question in italics, '*How shall they build it up again*?' carries the sense of disbelief and deprivation of the newly bereaved. Yet, as Elia reconstructs every detail of the place in memory, the motto on the coat-of-arms, 'their prophetic "Resurgam"' begins to come true. He adopts the place and its family as his own so that it is no longer deserted by its owner, and by the end of the essay he has built it up again.

'I sometimes think that as men, when they die, do not die all, so of their extinguished habitations there may be a hope – a germ to be revivified'. Though he would make no such claim, perhaps by his art Elia has given Blakesmoor eternal life.

> So long as men can breathe and eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.[23]

In 'New Year's Eve', the bells that frame the essay, ringing out the old at the beginning and ringing in the new at the end, remind every man of 'the lapse of time, as it affects his mortal duration'. We may forget birthdays but 'No one ever regarded the First of January with indifference'. I wonder what Lamb would have made of a millennium. Elia contrasts the middle-aged man that he is with all his faults – and if we were to take him entirely at his word here we should indeed have no more to do with him – with the child he used to be, truthful, honest, courageous, religious, imaginative, hopeful. 'Do I advance a paradox, when I say, that, skipping over the intervention of forty years, a man may have leave to love *himself*, without the imputation of self-love?' If the reader cannot sympathise with this sentiment and the possible reasons for it, then 'I retire, impenetrable to ridicule, under the phantom cloud of Elia'.

A child knows about death but it is not real to him. 'Not childhood alone but the young man till thirty, never feels practically that he is mortal.' Hazlitt makes the same observation in 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth' and excellently done it is. In many ways, including sheer bulk, his work eclipses Lamb's, yet who but Elia could have spoken of 'this intolerable disinclination to dying' and would it not be worth reading him for the sake of such phrases alone?

A future life would need to resemble this one for it to be any use to Elia, complete with all its homely details.

> Sun and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fire-side conversations, and innocent vanities and jests, and *irony itself* – do these things go out with life?

He is not at all tempted by such inducements as are held out to him to accept a future state. 'For what satisfaction hath a man, that he shall "lie down with kings and emperors in death", who in his life-time never greatly coveted the society of such bedfellows?' The advice given to him by the dead from their tombstones does not impress him either. 'In the meantime I am alive. I move about. I am worth twenty of thee . . . I survive, a jolly candidate for 1821. Another cup of wine . . .' He has not in the course of the essay been reconciled to death but he has progressed to looking forward with hope from looking back with regret. This is not, as some are, a perfectly shaped essay and the inclusion of Cotton's poem strikes me as a cop-out, but it is worthy of its place for the nuggets of felicitous expression to be found in it.

[23] Shakespeare, Sonnet 18.

If one says 'Wordsworth' to unliterary people, they say 'Daffodils'. If one says 'Lamb' it at least used to be the case that with joyful smiles they would answer 'Roast Pig'. Are future generations to be deprived of this pleasure? Are we never now to be allowed to enjoy ourselves? Notice its title 'A Dissertation upon Roast Pig'. Someone is getting a Ph.D. out of it. The manuscript-discovering industry has been at work and here are the fruits of its labours. It is gratifying to find the research supported by a hint in Confucius (scholarly reference duly given) to a period of pre-history, 'Cho-fang, literally the Cook's holiday', a kind of golden age when meat was eaten raw. The subsequent story is told with consummate skill, all the details filled out from what seems to have been Manning's 'bald and unconvincing narrative' to create a hilarious romp that surely no-one could resist. It will be noted that it needed a sage, 'like our Locke' says Elia, the original citing 'a philosopher', but we should surely guess rather an experimental scientist, to discover, 'that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might he cooked (*burnt* as they called it) without the necessity of consuming a whole house to dress it'. The mock-scholarship is maintained by the use of Latin phrases where English would certainly have done as well. From the pineapple that bites back via the aunt's cake given away in an 'out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness' (he would never have made such a mistake if it had been roast pig) and satire on the repellent idea that improvement can be achieved by flagellation, we come tamely to instructions for making the pig's sauce. By this time, exhausted. by laughter, we are happy to let it rest.

So what do we make of the *Essays of Elia* Revisited? Their quality is uneven. At their best they are very good indeed. It has been generally acknowledged that Lamb's teacup in *Old China* serves a similar purpose to Keats' Grecian Urn and this essay and a number of others are beautifully shaped so as to develop the underlying themes in them and to provide a progression of thought. Even the seemingly least of the *Essays* deserve careful reading lest one miss hidden treasure, through being deceived 'by the mask of Elia' or by missing the frequent ironies. In spite of the archaism of the style and the period atmosphere, the subjects of the *Essays* speak to us today, if we have ears to hear, because they deal with the universal nature and concerns of humankind. Also, for heaven's sake, they are gloriously entertaining and we can surely do with that in our sometimes depressing age.

Sevenoaks, Kent

'My benevolent Friend': George Dyer and his 1800 Preface

By J. R. WATSON

READERS OF CHARLES LAMB will be familiar with the figure of George Dyer, whose eccentric person appears in 'Oxford in the Vacation' and in 'Amicus Redivivus' (after falling into the river outside Lamb's house at Islington). He was an endless source of delight (as well as inconvenience) to Lamb, as he is to the modern reader of Lamb's letters, where he appears in various absurd situations. His absent-mindedness was legendary: perhaps the best story told about it concerns Dyer's time as a Baptist, and William Frend's teasing him in later years about having drowned a woman by dipping her in the water and then forgetting about her. Frend, like Lamb, was a good friend to Dyer at the same time as he had much amusement from him; Lucas, and Winifred Courtney, quote Lamb's charming and tender verses on the subject:

> Friend of the friendless, friend of all mankind,
> To thy wide friendships I have not been blind;
> But looking at them nearly, in the end
> I love thee most that thou art Dyer's Frend.

But Dyer was a learned man as well as an eccentric: he laboured for years over James Valpy's edition of the Classical Authors, published in 141 volumes between 1809 and 1831; and he wrote a fine biography, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson.* Robinson, who was a Baptist minister and then a Unitarian, is best known today for a hymn which is still sung in some nonconformist churches:

> Come, thou fount of every blessing,
> Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
> Streams of mercy never ceasing
> Call for songs of loudest praise.
> Teach me some melodious sonnet,
> Sung by flaming tongues above;
> Praise the mount; I'm fixed upon it,
> Mount of God's unchanging love.

The second verse of this hymn begins with a striking image (I sang it with awe and wonder in my youth, but it is now, in the days of ignorance, deemed too obscure):

> Here I'll raise my Ebenezer;
> Hither by thy help I'm come;
> And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
> Safely to arrive at home.

The reference to 1 Samuel 7:12, and the general tone of the verses, suggest that Dyer (who was tutor to Robinson's children at one time) moved in circles in which a certain excited enthusiasm was normal, and in which a knowledge of Holy Scripture was taken for granted. And certainly Dyer's nonconformity was part of his independent way of seeing the world – serious, utterly truthful, careless of appearances, unsophisticated and ingenuous, even naive.

The reason for this roundabout opening is that, as an hymnologist, I was drawn back to Lamb's friend George Dyer by discovering that he was the chief source of information about Robinson. The biography, published in 1796, is a good one: Wordsworth admired it. The only element in it that suggests a lack of what the psychologists call 'insight' is the Preface, which states that 'This volume being already swollen to a sufficient bulk, it would be unreasonable to distend it further by a tedious preface': which is what Dyer then proceeds to do, following it with a two-page introductory note, beginning in a rather inflated imitation of Johnsonian grandeur – 'The history of nations, by the extent of its views, and the variety of its objects, may be reckoned the most important subject of human survey'.

Dyer, who moved in the radical circles of the London of the 1790s, had previously written *The Complaints of the Poor People of England* (second edition, 1793). Together with the biography of Robinson, it suggests a writer who was more acute and self-aware than might be thought from the portrait of him in Lamb's essays. *The Complaints*, for example, describes the sufferings of the poor without condescension: 'But if I love and pity the poor, I also respect them' (p. 2). Again, Johnson comes to mind: whatever Dyer's limitations were, cant was not one of them. He had visited the Marshalsea, the debtors' prison, and seen the disproportion between crimes and their punishments. He describes the corrupt political system, with rotten boroughs such as Old Sarum and Midhurst, and the general inequality of society – 'How are the poor oppressed, to enrich our nobles!' (p. 13). The rich held sinecures, and were the beneficiaries of an unequal tax system; in addition, 'a great part of the taxes laid on the people, are not employed merely in great salaries to magistrates and officers in public service, but are wasted on placemen and pensioners' (p. 14). Dyer goes on to write of the Church, the Army, and the education system, with special reference to Christ's Hospital, where he had been a Grecian (before Lamb's time, but it made a bond between them). His common theme is that each has become corrupt. In the Church, for example, the Bishop of Durham had an income of £10,000; a poor curate, in the neighbourhood of Durham, not above £20 a year. 'A sensible man, who had been a justice of the peace, had seen such dreadful instances of oppression in this matter, that he flapped his hat, and became a Quaker'(p. 39). The army ('made up, in great measure, of effeminate coxcombs, or of bold profligates', p. 42) was 'overstocked with officers', whose commissions were bought and sold (pp. 45,43), while the ordinary soldiers survived on very little: 'within a few months past, they have had two-pence farthing a day added, as *bread-money*. What a wretched pittance! Yet for this a poor fellow lets himself to be shot at, and is a slave for life, 'till he is either bought off, or becomes an invalid' (p. 45). As far as education was concerned, Christ's Hospital he thought a good school, but 'not a public school': 'a nobler institution does not exist, in theory, than Christ-Hospital, in London' (p. 18). It had been designed originally for poor orphans, but 'the poor man's bread is frequently put into the rich man's cupboard' (p. 55).

Dyer was a radical in the Godwinian style. He was against the war with France: 'Let those, then, who thrive by the impoverishment of the nation, speak the praises of the present war' (p. 77). He was (naturally, for a nonconformist) against the slave trade: 'the slave-trade teaches us to treat our fellow-creatures like dogs' (p. 63). He was against flogging in the army and navy, and thought the poor houses were 'worse than prisons' (p. 61).

Dyer's radicalism would have endeared him to Lamb; so would his attachment to his old University of Cambridge, which Lamb visited in 1819 to 'play the gentleman, enact the student'. And we have Lamb's own affectionate letter of 1831, which praises Dyer's gentle and unmalicious disposition: 'You mistake your heart if you think you *can* write a lampoon. Your whips are rods of roses. Your spleen has ever had for its objects vices, not the vicious – abstract

offences, not the concrete sinner.'[1] This was the Dyer whom Lamb found in 'Oxford in the Vacation', 'busy as a moth over some rotten archive'. The poetic accuracy of that image is so astonishingly evocative of a certain kind of scholarly attention, that it is no surprise when Lamb's fancy goes on to play with the idea that Dyer is no longer quite human: 'With long poring, he is grown almost into a book. He stood as passive as one by the side of the old shelves. I longed to new-coat him in Russia, and assign him his place.'[2]

Dyer 'started like an unbroken heifer' on being interrupted by Lamb in the old library. It is another of those brilliant images, which depends for its humour upon its ability to make Dyer resemble something non-human: first a moth, then an unbroken heifer. But the essay ends with a lovely tribute to Dyer's affection for Cambridge:

> D. is delightful any where, but he is much the best in such places as these. He cares not much for Bath. He is out of his element at Buxton, at Scarborough, or Harrowgate. The Cam and the Isis are to him 'better than all the waters of Damascus'. On the Muses' hill he is happy and good, as one of the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains; and when he goes about with you to show you the halls and colleges, you think you have with you the Interpreter at the House Beautiful.'[3]

This recognition of a kindred spirit (for Lamb too would surely have been out of his element in a fashionable watering-place) is part of the respect which Lamb felt for Dyer. Lamb's sense of the ridiculous was tempered by something more than affection, and he viewed Dyer's ingenuous personality not only as a rich source of comedy but also as something genuinely good in this world of sharp and self-aware and fashionable people. The portrait of Dyer which I am trying to present, therefore, is more complex than that of the amiable buffoon who walked into the river by mistake, and who left his shoe under Leigh Hunt's table. As an example, I turn to the Preface which Dyer wrote for his *Poems* of 1800. It reveals Dyer as a learned and well-intentioned man, but also a clumsy one, an unbroken heifer clumping about in the yard of literary criticism.

According to Lucas, Dyer's *Poems* were first advertised in the *Monthly Magazine* for October 1796. They were to include satires, odes, and elegies, 'two of which will shortly make their appearance'. A further advertisement appeared in November 1798, promising 'instead of three volumes at a guinea, two only, consisting of poems and poetical essays, will be published at twelve shillings.' The first volume was promised 'next month', but it did not appear. Instead, in June 1799, Dyer produced an apology (printed by Lucas), informing the subscribers 'with great concern', that the publication would be delayed until the following winter. He now promised two volumes, one of prose and one of poetry:

> After mature deliberation, therefore, he [the author] thinks it most advisable to print his two volumes at the same time; and his criticisms, extended as they are to an unexpected length, will form a distinct volume, comprehending free remarks on every species of poetry, and illustrations from the mythology of different nations.[4]

[1] Quoted in E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (4th ed., London, 1907), p. 147.
[2] *The Works of Charles Lamb* ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1924), p. 483. 'Russia' was Russian leather, used for bookbinding. I am not sure what the following sentence, 'He might have mustered for a tall Scapula' means (a scapula is a shoulder blade, or a garment worn by monks).
[3] Ibid., p. 485. The essay is dated 'Aug. 5th, 1820. From my rooms facing the Bodleian.'
[4] Lucas, *Life*, p. 154.

The criticisms did not appear in the volume which finally made its way into the world, dated 1801. It dealt with none of the promised subjects, but concerned itself with lyric poetry. It contained an 'Advertisement' (unpaginated, so it had been stuck in):

> In page 321 an allusion is made to a preface. It may be proper, therefore, to inform the reader, that an Essay on the Nature of Lyric Poetry, and on the Characters of Ancient and Modern Lyric Poets, was not only written, but actually printed off; and, from the pages of the introductory poems it will appear, that it run out to a considerable length. This, however, for many reasons, has been cancelled.

In the British Library copy Charles Lamb has written 'one copy of this cancelled preface, snatch'd out of the fire, is prefixed to this volume'. It follows a title page dated 1800.

As Lucas points out, it is hard to know what caused Dyer to withdraw the preface: as it is, the whole episode is part of a sorry narrative of promises, apologies and cancellations. It seems that Dyer, so confident in biography and social commentary, had unusual anxieties about his poetry. That is the theme of his opening remarks:

> That poetry will allow no mediocrity, is a formidable principle of criticism; a principle, however, which, as laid down by an accurate critic and elegant poet, may be plausibly quoted, and even malignantly applied.
>
> I grant, that I experience some portion of this anxiety at present: though I am by no means – however moderately soever I think of my talents – overawed by the strictness of this rule, and still less by the terror of malicious criticism. (p. iii)

His anxiety, Dyer thinks, 'may proceed from a conviction, that a particular species of poetry hath its particular delicacy, and appropriate difficulties'. This is 'lyrical poetry'. Some people think that it is easy, but it is actually very hard:

> Such sort of compositions may be reckoned of slender contrivance, and easy of execution. And – it is true – any gentleman or lady may cap rhymes at their ease: as any child can blow bladders, or catch a ball in a cup, so may almost any trifler make mere verses. . . . But will they satisfy a correct or refined taste? Or, will what proceeds not from the heart, be likely to reach it? (pp. iv-v)

Anyone who really knows about the subject, says Dyer, will admit that the writing of good lyric poetry is very difficult:

> Yet who are they, that speak of the easy composition of lyric poetry? Assuredly not such, as have made any successful attempts that way themselves, or are properly acquainted with the opinions of others. Had they made more experiments, let me say, had they been more successful, they would have been better acquainted with their own imbecility. (pp. v-vi)

The word 'experiments' recalls the 'Advertisement' to *Lyrical Ballads*, which Dyer would almost certainly have known, although there is no sign of it in his preface. His remarks on English poetry are conventional and neo-classical. He quotes Horace on Pindar and on the difficulties of lyric poetry (Ode 2 of Book IV, 'Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari'), and uses Gray and Collins as his modern examples:

> And how slow our two best English lyrists, Gray and Collins, were in their poetical movements, before they could seize on an idea, which they thought sufficiently brilliant, or adapt to it language sufficiently impressive, is well known to all their readers. (p. vii)

The Greek lyrists were 'the most excellent', followed by Horace; and Dyer notes that Scaliger awarded 'the nobleness of lyric poetry the next place to the majesty of the heroic' (p. ix). This penumbra of classical knowledge which surrounds Dyer's criticism makes him follow Johnson in condemning the 'unnaturalness' of Metaphysical Poetry, especially of Cowley, who was 'a wonderful genius, unquestionably; but a writer always catching at brilliancy, and toiling, as it were, after wit' (p. xvii). 'His metaphysical poetry, unworthy the perspicuity and charm of this kind of poetry, I leave to the tomahawk of Johnson, that has deservedly cleft it asunder' (p. xviii).

The image of Dr Johnson with a tomahawk is one of those ill-judged metaphors that invites what Johnson himself called 'risibility', and Dyer's preface is full of moments that might encourage a certain levity in the reader. He swings into an amiable discussion of eighteenth-century poets, with Shenstone as 'the lady's poet', Akenside as 'a great poet', and Gray's 'On the Progress of Poesy' described as 'exquisite' (pp. xix, xxiii). Then, oddly, he develops an argument that associates lyric poetry with panegyric:

> Panegyric, in the hands of a mere rhymster, is almost sure to sink into insipidity; in the hands of a poet, it may swell into flattery. Here, probably, Pindar and Horace grew extravagant. (p. xxvi)

This provoked an outburst from Coleridge in the margin, protesting against the bracketing of Pindar with lesser poets:

> *Pindar* – and – who? ---------- *Horace*!!!
>
> and pray, good George Dyer! in what ode or fragment of the Theban Republican do you find Flattery? I can remember no one word, that justifies the charge. As to Horace, praise be to him as an amiable gentleman, & man of fine courtly sense – thanks & thanks for his Satires & Epistles, & whatever is 'sermone proprius' – & his little translations or originals of light & social growth, thanks for them too! – But as a Poet, a Lyric Poet, a Companion of *Pindar*, or the Author of the Atys – (be he Catullus, or some unknown Greek –) – it won't do! – No![5]

Coleridge, like Lamb, shared interests with Dyer – Christ's Hospital, Unitarianism – and one wonders when he made the marginal note. Perhaps Lamb showed him the preface, 'snatch'd from the fire', in 1801, when Coleridge was back in London.

Dyer's critical survey takes him to the end of page 27 of his preface. He then turns to his own work:

> As to the following volume, its very professions are moderate: it is, indeed, but an effort at the lighter excesses of lyric poetry; and how far even any of these pieces are successful attempts, the learned will judge.
>
> But having gone thus far, I am now compelled to go further; and to meet such objections, as the mere reading of the preceding pages may, perhaps, prepare some readers to advance, had they not even occurred to them before. (pp. xxvii-xxviii)

This modest beginning leads Dyer into a verbose and ramshackle account of his own verse that goes on for another 40 pages. It begins grandly with reflections on lyric poetry in relation to

[5] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia II* ed. George Whalley (Princeton, NJ, 1984), pp. 353-4.

tragedy and comedy, and in connection with musical expression; then suddenly it descends into the bathetic:

> As to particular objections that may be made to the *following* work; I know it may be urged, that some of the poems are rural and descriptive; whereas the author resides in the Great City.
>
> But, will it necessarily follow, that the person, who lives in London at a particular period, must have resided there always? suffice it to say, that of the years of my life, passed since I left college, the greater part have been spent entirely in the country; and, that since I have lived in town, I have usually spent some part of the year in a course of constant rambling, or at the rural seat of some friend. The environs of London, too, will bear witness, how regular have been my solitary devotions in her modest retreats; so that, I hope, the critics will not treat my muse too ungallantly, at least, on this account, as though she were a mere London trollop, always sauntering, or gadding, about the streets of London, sallow with city smoke, and listening to the sound of Bow-bells. (pp. xxx-xxxi)

With this kind of discourse, Dyer's preface descends from the heights of a neo-classical survey of lyric poetry to a sad triviality. If one of his defects as a writer is that he does not know when to stop, another is a failure of decorum. The personal continues to intrude:

> But, though I have been an occasional wanderer, my habits and pursuits are those of a retired, abstracted, though, I will add, of a some what trifling, desultory, and unprofitable student: and, that even my perambulations have been made subservient to some ardent pursuit. Independently, then, of early habits of indolence, the effects of which I still feel powerfully, my pursuits and manners are such, as rather belong to a solitary bookworm, than to one, agreeably relaxing in society. Those hours, which others have spent in the ordinary amusements of life, have been devoted by me to literary visions and speculations, as often, indeed, trifling, and unimportant, as dignified or serious.
>
> This character discovers itself in all my publications; and may lead to an improper conclusion, on the style of my writings. (pp. xxi-xxii)

It is not easy to see what the 'improper conclusion' might be: but there is an element of self-congratulation here which is tiresome. It suggests that Dyer, ingenuous though he was, took a certain pleasure in his scholarly impracticableness (as academics do, when they say that they cannot boil an egg). He anticipates Lamb's description of him as one who would be out of place in Bath or Harrogate, by claiming that he has been a bookworm rather than one 'agreeably relaxing in society'.

But, of course, his poetry is not always so personally expressive as these revelations suggest. 'I mean not, however, to assert that all my poems either in this volume, or in that which will follow, describe my genuine, at least my present feelings. Some are merely poetical or dramatic' (p. xxxv). One that does represent a mingling of the personal and the classical is 'Gaia, or Willy Rhymer's Address to his London Landladies', in which Gaia is 'A landlady honest and true'. At other times there are conventional subjects of eighteenth-century verse, treated in traditional ways: landscape, childhood, friendship. Some of them are clearly influenced by Gray and Collins: the Ode 'Written in the Cloisters of Christ's Hospital' is Dyer's version of the 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', and the poem 'On the Evening, Meditated on the Welsh Coast. Addressed to Theophilus Lindsay [The respected friend of Dr Priestley]' contains an obvious echo of Gray's 'Elegy':

> Or if, perchance, yon church-yard drear
> Where slowly tolls the passing bell . . .

Others celebrate personified qualities, such as friendship or genius ('On Genius. On taking leave of Dr Priestley, when preparing to go to America'), or the seasons ('Approaching Spring', 'Autumn'), or places such as the River Cam, or traditional poetic emblems such as the nightingale. There is a 'Monody on the Death of Robert Robinson [A celebrated Dissenting Preacher, formerly of Cambridge]'.

These poems suggest that Dyer was firmly in the tradition of his time, and the contrast with that other 1800 volume of lyric poetry, *Lyrical Ballads*, with its own radical agenda and its manifesto of a preface, could hardly be greater. But Dyer lived in a perpetual state of sanguine expectation. This volume will be the beginning: 'In the second volume I shall attempt, at least, a brighter strain' (p. xxxvii). He proposed to concentrate on liberty. Polonius-like, he promises that these poems 'will be enhanced and coloured, as it were, with various topics, historical, oeconomical, philological, critical, topographical, and commercial. There will also be an attempt, in that volume, at some pictures of poetry and painting' (p. xlii).

But if Dyer's promises are tiresome, his apologies are worse. He spends a good deal of time in the latter half of the preface weaving patterns of self-accusation and breast-beating:

> One word relative to the delay of this publication: and an apology, is, certainly, due, if not to the world at large, who would probably endure the loss of these poems without murmuring, at least to my friends and subscribers. For I have certainly trifled with my engagements, if not with their patience; and so truly blame-worthy has been my dilatoriness, that in the very act of apologizing, I must be my own accuser. Apologizing is at all times an irksome and unpleasant business; but it is generally more painful to him who is constrained to make it, than even to him who has patience to hear it. (pp. lv-lvi)

This leads into a lengthy discussion of 'castle-building', by which Dyer means building castles in the air. And when this is finished he irritates the reader still further by announcing 'And now while at confessions, I will confess more' (p. lvii). This turns out to be an admission that he has been busy writing other books, and thus distracted from the main task in hand.

After a promising beginning, therefore, Dyer's preface becomes a tedious exercise in self-justification. Nor do his poems provide more than traditional exercises in an eighteenth-century mode. The problem is that Dyer (perhaps because of his amiable character) was trying too hard to please conventional taste. He lacks Wordsworth's awareness, expressed in the 1800 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (written, one supposes, contemporaneously with Dyer's preface) that his and Coleridge's poems in the 1798 volume could, and should, stir up strong feeling:

> I flattered myself that they who should be pleased with them would read them with more than common pleasure: and on the other hand I was well aware that by those who should dislike them they would be read with more than common dislike.[6]

This concept of 'pleasure' is referred to by Dyer in a footnote to one of his poems, 'The Redress', which contains the line 'But genuine wit is sure to find a sale'. Typically, Dyer, who could never resist a footnote, adds a comment:

[6] *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800* ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, 1992), p. 741.

> That the principal and immediate aim of poetry is, to please, has been opposed by Julius Scaliger, and some other critics. But though I must admit that,
>
> *Omne* tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci,
>
> yet will I still abide by Aristotle's and Plutarch's opinion, that the immediate object of poetry is, to please, and that even in solemn subjects poetry is used to render them more engaging and agreeable.

Coleridge was aggravated by this into another annotation:

> Damned Nonsense! But *why* does it please? Because it pleases! O mystery! – If not, some cause out of itself must be found. Mere utility it certainly is not – & that is beauty, i.e. that which *ought* to please.
>
> My benevolent Friend seems not to have made an obvious distinction, between end and means – The Poet *must* always aim at Pleasure as his specific *means*, but surely – Milton did & all ought to aim at something nobler as their end – viz – to cultivate and predispose the heart of the Reader &c.[7]

Coleridge's response is symptomatic. He represents all those readers who find Dyer irritating; yet within a sentence or two he is recalling Dyer as 'My benevolent Friend'. This mixture of exasperation and admiration is something which might be found in all dealings with Dyer, whether those of his friends and contemporaries or those of his readers, then and now. Dyer's learning, sincerity, and genuinely good intentions are never in doubt; what is often missing is tact, literary decorum, and sheer practical sense. It suggests that we should admire William Frend even more than we do for being Dyer's friend; and Charles Lamb also.

University of Durham

[7] *Coleridge: Marginalia II*, pp. 355-6.

John Robert Cozens in Italy

By SIMON CURTIS

'Cousins was all poetry' – John Constable

Those ink and wash and watercolour views
Of palace, church or Claude-glass distant vale
Night seem, at first, stiff Models of Good Taste;
But 'Cousins was all poetry' as well.

For all their calm, their tact of tint and tone,
With nascent feeling, look, his landscapes stir;
The sun which breaks through clouds on *Naples Bay*,
Or *Villa d'Este* or *Arricia*.

So academic set-piece harmonies
Of Empire, Golden Age and Pastoral
Come charged through his imagining and touch
With first light glows of mood you could call Soul:

Restrained but luminous, his works surprise,
A Newfoundland of sense, new earth, new skies.

Reviews

Literature of the Romantic Period: A Bibliographical Guide. Ed. MICHAEL O'NEILL. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. ISBN 0 19 871121 2. Pp. viii + 410. £14.99 paperback.

THIS ENORMOUSLY USEFUL LITTLE BOOK includes eighteen chapters which run as follows: *General Studies of the Romantic Period* (Michael O'Neill), *William Blake* (David Fuller), *William Wordsworth* (Nicholas Roe), *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Nicola Trott), *Lord Byron* (Andrew Nicholson), *Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Jerrold E. Hogle), *John Keats* (Greg Kucich), *John Clare* (P. M. S. Dawson), *Women Poets of the Romantic Period* (Jennifer Breen), *Poetry by Burns, Cowper, Crabbe, Southey, and Other Male Authors* (Michael Rossington), *Walter Scott* (Fiona Robertson), *Jane Austen* (Fiona Stafford), *Thomas Love Peacock* (J. P. Donovan), *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (Pamela Clemit), *Fiction of the Romantic Period – Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Bage, Edgeworth, Burney, Inchbald, Hays and Others* (Susan Matthews), *Romantic Gothic* (Peter Garside), *Essayists of the Romantic Period – De Quincey, Hazlitt, Hunt, and Lamb* (Robert Morrison), *Political Prose of the Romantic Period* (John Whale).

Michael O'Neill says in the *Preface* that the book is directed towards 'postgraduates, lecturers, Romantic specialists, and interested general readers' but has also been written with 'an undergraduate audience in mind.' Undergraduates will find ample information here, perhaps coming to Romanticism via the 'Big Six' male authors, or by studying Mary Shelley. Lecturers and specialists will be able to take stock of some recent developments in Romantic studies – though much has of course happened since the latest dates of the books represented here. O'Neill acknowledges this very problem of treating a field of study which is multiplying, as he puts it, 'at a head-spinning rate' in the publishing houses and the mazes of hypertext. On that subject, it is interesting to note that electronic publishing has not eclipsed the necessary comfort of having information physically in the hand, and this guide supplies precisely that.

I found the book as a whole very readable, something one can't always say about critical works treating aspects of Romanticism, let alone a publication which is presenting massively unwieldy amounts of information in a concise form. This is especially true of Nicola Trott's chapter dealing with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. She places the information under short headings to make the task of navigation here even simpler and to give almost at a glance a picture of Coleridge's range of output and the range of critical output on Coleridge – an object-lesson to undergraduates who perhaps only study Coleridge-as-Ancient Mariner. The poem is dealt with under an individual heading, as are *Christabel*, the 'Conversation Poems,' *Dejection*, *Kubla Khan* and other works – an excellent device. The chapters on Wordsworth, Blake, Byron, Keats and Shelley do not achieve the clarity of Trott's layout and sometimes get bogged down in the weight of references, but they do foreground examples of the best scholarship available. David Fuller's chapter also takes pains to show Blake as writer-artist, which is refreshing. Fuller also makes timely reference to the work of the much underrated Blake scholar Steven Vine.

Outside the realm of the usual Six Patriarchs I was delighted by several of the chapters which were written with confidence and enthusiasm. Fiona Robertson injects a real sense of excitement into her account of the Scott 'manuscript treasure' and her overview of Scott scholarship in general. Fiona Stafford follows with a very approachable and solid chapter on Jane Austen, written with a confidence based on the sure knowledge of that author's enduring reputation. Similarly Pamela Clemit presents a wonderfully concise and authoritative account of Mary Shelley, secure in the knowledge that Shelley's fashionably burgeoning fame supports her remarks. Another area of expansion, *The Romantic Gothic*, is well described by Peter Garside,

who presents the Gothic as a multi-faceted, problematic genre and who succeeds, as do several contributors to this book, in creating a desire to explore the subject even further, rather than simply overwhelming the reader with too much daunting detail.

What puzzles me about this book is why Oxford could not have allowed the editor to expand the volume in order to avoid the sadly inevitable ghetto-ising of many very important authors in chapters 10, 15, 17 and 18. If someone like Peacock can be allowed a chapter to himself, then why not Charles Lamb? Or William Godwin, or William Hazlitt, or Mary Wollstonecraft?

From my own perspective, I would make the case for a chapter on Southey – and judging by the number of papers on Southey in Tim Webb's recent *Bristol: Romantic City* conference and the results of recent scholarship, find support for this. Michael Rossington rather apologetically sets out the problems of who to include and exclude in chapter 10 (*Poetry by Burns, Cowper, Crabbe, Southey, and Other Male Authors*), describing the choices as 'a kind of canon of the non-canonical'. He alerts us to the fact that there is no modern scholarly edition of Southey's works (let alone his poetry), but unfortunately gives an incomplete list of Southey's early verse, omitting *Poems by Robert Southey: The Second Volume* (1799), Southey's reaction to *Lyrical Ballads*, and his experiments with the Gothic.

I also thought that the final chapter on political writing should have been much expanded and could have dealt better with authors whose importance for their contemporary readership was immense, such as Burke and Paine. When John Whale here describes Mary Wollstonecraft's ascent into 'the new Romantic canon' I wonder which canon he is describing and whether the whole vexed question of canonicity could have been approached differently. Then perhaps Michael O'Neill would not be constrained to write that 'forgotten or marginalized figures have rarely had it so good', as if these figures represent some kind of underclass of Romanticisms seeking asylum. But then they often do.

C. J. P. Smith

The Examiner 1808-1822. Ed. James Henry Leigh Hunt. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996-8. *1808-12*: ISBN 1 85196 425 8, £550 hardback; *1813-17*: ISBN 1 85196 426 6, £550 hardback; *1818-22*: ISBN 1 85196 427 4, £550 hardback

TWENTY YEARS AGO, *The Examiner* was little read even by Romanticists. It was acknowledged for its importance as having contained the work of Keats (most notably), Hazlitt, and Wordsworth, but seldom discussed. Today, it is the focus of a new wave of critical attention focussed on the Cockney school. In *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (1998), Jeffrey Cox describes the journal founded by Leigh Hunt and his brother John as 'the textual home' of the Cockneys, 'setting forth common ideological positions and publishing the verse of the circle's members'. Nicholas Roe has testified to its centrality in his exemplary *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997) (reviewed here by John Strachan, *CLB* NS 102 (April 1998) 66-9), and will no doubt be extending those investigations in his forthcoming biography of Leigh Hunt.

This reprint of *The Examiner*, 1808-22, spanning the entirety of Hunt's editorship, is thus timely. During those years Hunt edited the journal from prison (1813-15), befriended Keats and Shelley (1816), endured the attacks of the *Blackwood's* men and the *Quarterly* reviewers (1817 onwards), and emigrated to Italy (June 1822). On the political scene it covers the years of the Peninsular Wars, the Luddite riots (1811 onwards), Napoleon's invasion of Russia (1812), his exile to Elba, the hundred days, Waterloo, the Spa Fields riots, the Peterloo massacre, Napoleon's death (1821) and Castlereagh's suicide (1822). *The Examiner* is an essential source, not just for literary scholars, but for the historian.

Pickering and Chatto present these volumes as facsimiles; that is to say, they are a photographic reprint of the set of the originals now in Cambridge University Library. This is significant because John Hunt took pains over the appearance of the journal, its typeface and paper. On occasion, pages in the Cambridge set have been damaged, and those are replaced here by facsimiles of corresponding pages of intact copies at the British Library or London Library. Also, some pages in the Cambridge set are misbound, but in reproducing them the editors at Pickering and Chatto have reordered them correctly. Despite the care he took, John Hunt necessarily used paper that, 180 years later, is fragile; happily, Pickering and Chatto have printed their facsimiles on high-quality acid-free paper that should last longer than the originals. The facsimiles are handsomely bound in a maroon cloth binding, and volume 1 contains a useful introduction by Professor Yasuo Deguchi of Waseda University. The result is the closest we will ever get to a perfect set of *The Examiner*, in a form that makes the original text available once again to generations of readers.

In order to assess the quality of reproduction here I have collated the Pickering reproduction of the 1817 *Examiner* against my own copy of the original volume for that year. The first thing to be said about the original, or at least my copy of it, is that although there is seldom any problem in deciphering words, the quality of the printing is not high. The pressure of sometimes very small type against the cheap, grainy paper used by Hunt varies; on occasion the register is almost too slight to have made an impression. The low quality of the paper has another consequence: pieces of grit, small fragments of pulp and other impurities clog up the type, reducing its clarity. Resultant small blots are not infrequent among the typesetting. Other interesting features of any original include crease marks. Most of the original copies – in my volume at least – were folded in half when first purchased. And like newspapers today, they were often read in circumstances where tea and coffee were abundantly available. Not surprisingly, therefore, one finds much evidence of earlier readers, including minor tears in the now fragile paper, damp stains, and so forth. Personally, I find such things of interest in themselves, but where they preclude smooth reading of the facsimile some readers may take exception to them.

One reason why I purchased an original copy of the 1817 volume was to have ready access to the first printed text of Shelley's 'Ode to Intellectual Beauty', published in issue 473 for 19 January 1817, page 41 (with the by-line of 'PERCY B. SHELLEY'). In my copy it is a particularly problematic page; earlier owners have evidently shared my enthusiasms. It is covered in numerous stains, and there is a tear in the centre. All the drawbacks of the cheapness of Hunt's raw materials are evident here with gloomy vividness. I don't have access to the Cambridge University Library copy, but what I can say is that the Pickering facsimile is much superior. No stains or tears are evident here. And this is typical. In general, the Pickering copy is easier to use thanks to the fact that many of the 'accidental' imperfections of the original are not picked up by the camera.

That said, it would also be fair to say that there are occasions (few, no doubt, but some) on which the reverse is true. Take for instance Pickering's 1809 page 395, 1811 page 590, 1812 page 605, or 1814 page 182, where the register of the original type, particularly in the case of pages on which Hunt used a smaller font, has been too light to permit a clear impression: definition is sometimes close to breakdown. A related problem is those pages where dirt, sometimes aggravated by creasing, has darkened the page; the 1814 volume contains a number of examples – pages 283, 349, 377, and 432. However, these are infrequent. Reproduction quality appears improved in the final volume for 1822, possibly due to a better quality of paper.

Pickering has helpfully included the Indexes issued by Hunt for bound copies of the originals. Anyone who has used them will know that they are to be treated with caution. Entries are made

casually, and without system. In 1817, for instance, there is no entry under 'Shelley, Percy B.'; the 'Ode to Intellectual Beauty' is to be found under 'Poetry. Original', along with 'Sonnet to Kosciusko [sic.], 107' (unattributed), 'Sonnets by H.S., 75, and J.K. 124', and 'To Haydon, and on seeing the Elgin Marbles, 155' (again unattributed) – none of which appear under 'Keats, John', who is not entered in the index either. Also, some of the page references are incorrect. For instance, under 'Law', the page reference for 'Wat Tyler – Southey v. Sherwood and Co.' is 101 when it should be 191 (quite an obstacle if you're pressed for time). There are no separate entries for '*Wat Tyler*', 'Southey, Robert', much less 'radicals, apostate'.

It is to be hoped that these facsimiles will prompt someone to make a fresh bibliographical survey of this paper, to draw up an attributions table, as Claude Prance and Frank Riga did for the *London Magazine*, and to write a comprehensive index, entering contributors' names alongside their works. It would be an important work of scholarship in itself, and no doubt worth a doctoral degree at an enlightened university.

No longer will scholars have to struggle with microfilms of this journal, unpleasant and difficult to use at the best of times (they have the effect on me of inducing feelings of queasiness). It is now possible to use the journal much as it appeared to contemporary readers. Having made extensive use of these facsimiles during preparation of a new edition of Hazlitt's works I am pleased to testify to their value; Pickering and Chatto are to be applauded for undertaking such an ambitious project and all institutional libraries that do not have copies are strongly urged to acquire them. Those which do not have the originals can make up the absence by acquiring these reproductions; those which do should acquire these facsimiles and save wear and tear on their originals. I need hardly add that they comprise a vital resource for all students of Lamb and his circle; all we need now is a facsimile of the *London Magazine* (something called for by Jonathan Bate in his 1987 *Elia*).

Duncan Wu

Society Notes and News from Members

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairmanship

This is my first note written as Chairman, following the AGM on 8 May. At that meeting we expressed our gratitude to our outgoing Chairman, Mary Wedd, who has chaired the Society during a period of some uncertainty regarding its future and who has always managed to do so while exhibiting to the full 'the Elian spirit of friendliness and good humour'. Although Mary has relinquished the office, we are certainly not saying goodbye! Mary continues as a member of the Council and we look forward very much to welcoming her as the Society's Guest of Honour at the Birthday Celebration Luncheon in February. Those members who, by the time this *Bulletin* arrives, have been fortunate enough to attend another Friends of Coleridge study weekend at Kilve Court will have had the opportunity to hear Mary speak on Lamb in the context of the weekend's theme of 'Coleridge, Friends and Friendship'.

The Secretaryship

The AGM also saw the departure from office of another stalwart of the Society, our long-serving General Secretary, Madeline Huxstep. To mark Madeline's years of devoted service the Society, at her suggestion, has made a donation of £250 to Christ's Hospital. Once again, we are very pleased that Madeline has agreed to continue as a member of the Council and we look forward very much to seeing her at future meetings.

It was agreed at the AGM that the many functions of the General Secretary will in future be divided between our new Minutes Secretary, Veronica Finch, the Membership Secretary, Cecilia Powell, and myself.

Addresses

In the absence of a General Secretary, we have decided that the Society should henceforth use a single postal address through a mailbox service. The new address for all correspondence (save to the *Bulletin* editor) is BM – ELIA, LONDON WC1N 3XX, as members will see from the 1999-2000 programme and the back cover of your *Bulletin*. Any general correspondence for the Society should in future be sent to that address.

Venue for Meetings

As the General Secretary reported in the July 1999 *Bulletin*, the Mary Ward Centre can no longer accommodate us and we have, therefore, been searching for a suitable alternative venue nearby. Ideally, we should like to continue having our meetings in the Bloomsbury area, which members appear to find a convenient location. After some debate, we have booked the Swedenborg Hall at 20-27 Bloomsbury Way for our two autumn lectures, on 2 October and 4 December; and a room at the Art Workers Guild, 6 Queen Square (just a few doors from the Mary Ward Centre) for the spring lectures, on 1 April and 6 May. These will be experimental visits and we hope to fix on a permanent venue from the 2000-2001 season onwards. I hope as many members as possible will come to these meetings, sample the new venues and express their opinion.

FROM THE EDITOR

Valedictory

This *Bulletin* marks the conclusion of my seventh year as copy-editor and typesetter, and of my six-year editorship: a good moment at which to take stock.

My editorial involvement with this journal began with the issue of January 1993. Shortly before, in October 1992, I had lunch at the Bonington Hotel in Southampton Row with my predecessors: Basil Savage, Mary Wedd and Bill Ruddick. In retrospect, that location was highly appropriate; we were only yards from where the Lambs had once resided in Great Russell Street. At all events, that lunch was a lengthy, leisurely affair, in fine Elian tradition, during which Basil regaled us with the story of how he had converted the former *Charles Lamb Society Bulletin* into an internationally-recognised academic publication, a feat all the more astonishing for having been accomplished at a time when he had a full-time career with the then General Post Office. Only subsequently did I realise how much the present Society owed to Basil's labours; that he established and built up the *Bulletin* enabled the Society to consolidate its membership, including many institutional libraries around the world. Had he not taken the *Bulletin* in hand, the Society might have only a vestigial existence today.

Basil was responsible for the first 18 numbers of the new series; NS 19-26 were edited jointly with Mary Wedd. He established the new *Bulletin*'s academic distinction from the outset. The first number commenced with the text of the Ernest Crowsley lecture delivered by Basil Willey in 1972. Subsequent issues contain up to the minute accounts by the most eminent scholars in the field of their work: Edwin W. Marrs on Lamb's *Letters*; Claude Prance on Lamb in 1823; Hugh Sykes Davies on Lamb's style; Berta Lawrence on Southey and Coleridge; Kathleen Coburn on a newly-discovered note from Lamb to Coleridge; Haydon's account of the immortal dinner reproduced in facsimile; George Whalley on Coleridge's marginalia. I could go on. It is a feast for anyone of the Elian persuasion. Had Basil not been in the business of commissioning some of these articles from distinguished scholars and critics of the day, few (if any) would have been written, let alone published. From the first, the *Bulletin* served a vital function in the nurturing and dissemination of Elian scholarship and criticism.

Mary Wedd was the first professional academic to edit the Bulletin; she produced her first issue in July 1979, and remained in the job until October 1988 (NS 64) – a decade in which the *Bulletin* flourished. Her close connections with the scholarly world stood her in good stead. During her tenure the established names which thronged the pages in earlier years appeared alongside those of younger, less well-known practitioners: Lucy Newlyn, Nicholas Roe, Jane Aaron, Harriet Jump, Paul Hamilton, and Jonathan Bate, to name a few. To those in the know, it was one of the few journals that provided an outlet for the best new research in the field. The Special Sesquicentennial Number of July/October 1984 is typical, containing work by Gillian Beer, John Ades, Lucy Newlyn, Winifred Courtney, and Bill Ruddick.

Mary handed the editorship to Bill in 1989, the first issue to appear under his sole editorship being that of January 1990. By this time it was well respected in academic circles with a readership far greater than the mailing list would suggest, thanks to the fact that many University libraries were now subscribers. During the four years of his tenure, Bill continued to seek out new critical talent; he was among the first editors to publish Seamus Perry, Nicola Trott, Rick Tomlinson, Mark Garnett, and the present writer. It was under Bill's auspices that the *Bulletin* was computerised and redesigned for NS 81 of January 1993. The new procedure enabled it to be typeset on word-processor. Contributions are typed onto computer, where it is copy-edited, proof-read, and printed. The advantage of this is that the editor enjoys total control over the contents and styling of the journal. Typos picked up at the last minute can be corrected on disk;

items received for inclusion in the Society Notes and News section are entered immediately prior to printing; the back cover, which contains essential information about the Society, is updated as occasion demands. The disadvantage is that a far greater investment of time and energy is required to produce each issue. Overall, however, the improvement was felt to be worth the trouble, and the production process remains much the same today.

The unfortunate thing about Bill's editorship was its comparative brevity, curtailed as it was by the illness from which he died in February 1994. In retrospect, it sometimes feels as if I took over before that, when I lunched with Bill, Mary and Basil at the Bonington in October 1992. I didn't, but the impression persists because that lunch revealed to me in the most vivid way the ethos of the *Bulletin*, as represented by those responsible for creating it. Mary and Bill were eminent and worthy successors to Basil; they worked within a distinguished tradition, and passed it from one to the other in that knowledge. Throughout the 1980s and early 90s they strove to maintain it in both its guises – as Society newsletter and academic periodical. Its peculiar, unique character derived from that combination. The section dealing with Society matters has always reflected the catholicity of opinion within an enthusiastic constituency, extending the tradition of the old Society *Bulletin* by presenting the same kind of material formerly published there: news of membership outings, donations to the Society (of books and the like), and other matters of Elian interest. At the same time, it was a model of its kind, a specialist publication dedicated to the life and works of Charles Lamb and his circle. At a period when the discipline was revolutionised by theoretical ideas, the *Bulletin* remained a distinctly uncategorized, and uncategorizable, publication. It has never advocated any critical dogma.

It has always been an aim of the Society to foster interest in Lamb and his circle, whether in the academe or outside it, and the *Bulletin* proved, first under Basil and then under Mary and Bill, to be a chief means towards that end. Articles on Lamb have appeared elsewhere, of course, but for nearly three decades this has been the only one in which full-length articles on the subject could be depended on. (There was a time when articles on Lamb in other academic journals were a rarity, but they have become somewhat more frequent in recent years.) Once again, this has been achieved through a collaboration between the Society and the *Bulletin*. The Society's meetings at the Mary Ward Centre in Queen Square have provided the occasion to commission new lectures on Lamb by writers from all over the world. It would be no exaggeration to suggest that, had the Society not established itself as the patron of Elian studies, serious work on Lamb might have come to a virtual standstill. It has been an honourable task, and one in which I hope the Society will take pride.

In addition, the *Bulletin* provided the outlet for many exemplary articles about Lamb's friends and contemporaries – Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth, to name a few. Many found a home in these pages partly, one suspects, because their authors found the disinterested stance of the *Bulletin* congenial, especially at a time when ideology had become a determining factor as to the publishability of one's work. This has always been a controversial point, as some have argued that only articles about Lamb have a place in the *Bulletin*; I would merely say that, once again, it is a commendable feature of the journal.

While it is difficult to characterise the *Bulletin* definitively, it has always maintained a predisposition towards scholarly endeavour. This is entirely in keeping with its roots in the old *Society Bulletin*, where newly-discovered letters or association items were a regular feature (a tradition continued in today's *Bulletin* by D. E. Wickham). Some of the finest contributions from my predecessors' periods in office comprise important new discoveries of this kind. There's something peculiarly satisfying about notes or articles designed to offer the answer to some

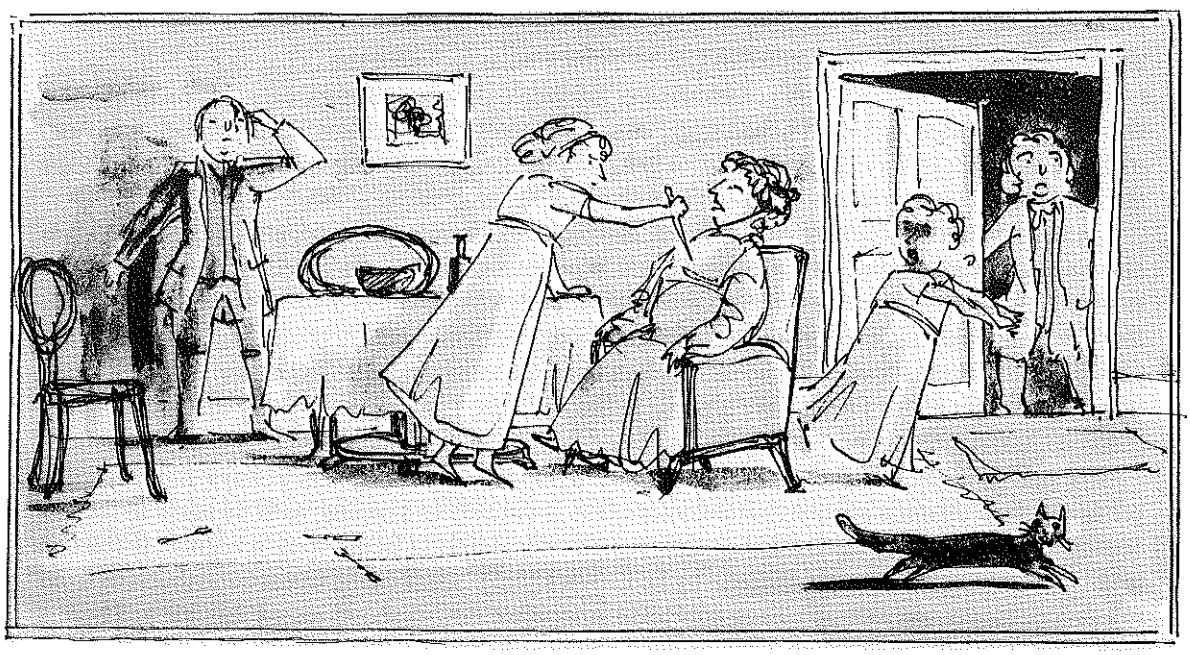
scholarly enigma, however minor. While lacking in intellectual pretension, such things might be said to advance the Elian cause better than any amount of critical disquisition.

I leave the task of judging my editorship of the *Bulletin* to others. Insofar as I have pursued a policy, it has been conservative: to continue the tradition I inherited. I have done my utmost to observe Bill Ruddick's rule that each issue should contain at least one full-length article on an Elian theme.

After 24 issues as editor, and 28 as typesetter and copy-editor, I relinquish the post with regret. I had hoped to continue indefinitely, but circumstances are such that I no longer have any choice in the matter. I am pleased to pass the baton to my friend Rick Tomlinson; there is no one better qualified for the task. I lament that his predecessors cannot assemble one last time to initiate him with a lunch. But Rick has been known to Mary Wedd for a decade, and was a friend of Bill Ruddick's, who, as I have already observed, published one of his first full-length articles in the *Bulletin*. In that sense, Rick is already part of the tradition, and will understand how best to sustain it. Were I to attempt to convey to him, in a nutshell, something of the flavour of this unsual Society and its *Bulletin*, I would merely remind him that its roots lie in a Dining Club, the Elian. The members of that esteemed body are long gone, but each time I put an issue of the *Bulletin* to bed, I ensure that it contains at least one item from which those pioneering Elians, wherever they may be, can take amusement, as they relax into their celestial armchairs, and chirp contentedly over their ambrosial cups.

Mary Lamb: Her Mental Health Issues – Illustrated

I am grateful to T. W. Craik for permission to reproduce below his useful illustration to Mary Blanchard Balle's article, 'Mary Lamb: Her Mental Health Issues', which appeared in the *CLB* NS 93 (January 1996).



FROM D. E. WICKHAM

The House in Duncan Terrace

One more rather puny twig to add to the pile of evidence about whether or not the present house was the Lamb dwelling or a later house built on the same site. In his *London Mystery and Mythology*, 1952, page 35, William Kent lists some of the points against identifying the house as the original. He admits that each of them can be explained, but adds: 'It is, however, surprising that, although a letter of Lamb's was quoted as saying that it [the house!] had six rooms and the front door opened straight into the dining room, it does not seem to have occurred to anybody to observe that this did not apply to the Duncan Terrace house'.

On the other hand, I believe it is known that alterations were made to the front of the house long ago, so why not to the interior as well? Even adding a flight of front steps to make the ground floor more obviously into servants' quarters is not impossible, given mid-Victorian attitudes and, for example, the unexpected accusations of vulgarity levelled against Jane Austen by one of her nieces.

An Epitome of Charles Lamb's London

The following verse is printed, without source or date, by Roy Porter in his *London: A Social History*, 1994. References to Bedlams, coronations (with new reigns beginning in 1714 and 1727 rather than nothing since 1760?) and rabbits (Mary Toft, the fraudulent rabbit-breeder?) may push it back into the 1730s but it surely helps to sum up Charles Lamb's London. Presumably *instalments* means *installments* or what we today would call *installations*, putting people into ceremonial offices, like clergymen or Masters of Livery Companies.

> Assemblies, parks, coarse feasts in city-halls,
> Lectures and trials, plays, committees, balls,
> Wells, Bedlams, executions, Smithfield scenes,
> And fortune-tellers' caves and lions' dens,
> Taverns, Exchanges, Bridewells, drawing-rooms,
> Instalments, pillories, coronations, tombs,
> Tumblers and funerals, puppet-shows, reviews,
> Sales, races, rabbits and (still stranger) pews.

S. E. Winbolt's Lamb Medal: An Elian Conundrum

Lamb Medals for the best English essay by a Grecian were awarded annually at Christ's Hospital between 1875 and 1948. They were of silver, bearing the profile of Charles Lamb and the school's coat of arms and motto, with the winner's name and the year of the prize engraved round the edge.

Samuel Edward Winbolt (1868-1944) won the prize in 1886, when he was a Grecian and the school was still at Newgate Street. He became a classics and history master at Christ's Hospital and retired in 1929.

He has always been understood to have presented his medal to the Charles Lamb Society in 1940. In 1994, when Deborah Hedgecock was listing the Society's collection (published as *A Handlist to the Charles Lamb Society Collection at Guildhall Library*, which was as a Supplement to *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, No. 89, January 1995), she told me that she had inspected the edge of the only Lamb Medal in the Society's possession. It bears the name of John

Whittingham Hackett and the date 1921. I have found no reference to such a gift nor to a date of presentation.

Several explanations are possible. It is perhaps most likely that there was a misunderstanding and that Winbolt gave the Society a Lamb Medal, but not his own one. Such objects still occasionally appear on the specialist medal market.

50 Years Ago: from *The C.L.S. Bulletin* No. 91 (September 1949)

Visit to Enfield, 9 July [1949] [After seeing the open-air market, St. Andrew's Church, the Grammar School, Gentleman's Row, and the Tudor Room, the party took tea.] After tea there came a visit to Chase Side where the two houses stand in which the Lambs lived; No. 87 from 1827 to 1829, and then No. 89 next door, where they boarded with Thomas Westwood and his dame. . . . This house is now in the possession of Mr Groves, one of our members, and his intention is to furnish it in the Lamb period. To this house at various times came Leigh Hunt, Tom Hood, Wordsworth, Fanny Kelly, Martin Burney and other friends for cheery talk with Lamb. Mr Groves also had for inspection by the members the Special Licence issued on 24 July 1833, by the Archbishop of Canterbury for the marriage of Edward Moxon and Emma Isola.

from *The C.L.S. Bulletin* No. 92 (November 1949)

Outing to Wisley, 13 August [1949] [This was to the house of Mr J. S. L. Gilmour, Director of the Royal Horticultural Society's Gardens there, and to his study.] A real bookman's retreat with bookcases and shelves round the room filled with volumes and pamphlets, with a table set out with special items. Mr Gilmour's collection has for its focal point the *London Magazine* of which he possesses many numbers in parts as originally issued and others in bound volumes – almost a complete run. With this as the originating interest Mr Gilmour has collected the works of those authors, the joyous spirits who wrote for the *London* or gathered with Lamb round Taylor and Hessey's table at the *London Magazine* dinners when convivial conversation made such occasions merry and memorable. Of these Mr Gilmour has taken Thomas Hood as his main starting point. [There follows a list of the obvious authors of the *London* circle and of the period.] Of all these writers Mr Gilmour had in most cases complete sets of their writings . . .

Picking up one volume after another Mr Gilmour chatted in delightfully informal fashion on how they were acquired, their special significance, their rarity and their connection with later issues – a bookman lovingly discoursing on his treasures in an atmosphere that charmed the listeners. Of special interest were the following as they passed round the sitting circle: the original manuscript of Hood's poem 'Ruth' and an unreproduced pencil sketch of the poet; 'The Battered Tar', an unrecorded parody of Wordsworth, almost certainly by J. H. Reynolds; copies of the very rare first editions of Well's [sic] 'Stories after Nature' and 'Joseph and his Brethren', and of Darley's 'Errors of Ecstasie'; and a copy of W. M. Praed's 'Lilian' with an MS annotation showing that one of the 'malicious belles' for whom it was written was Lewis Carroll's mother.