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The Sons of Elia: Essayists of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

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LAMB, IT IS GENERALLY AGREED, is inimitable. It is frequently also agreed—as T.S. Eliot suggested of Milton—that the great writer of a mode has an inheritance that is largely a falling-off. He may well be right that Milton's influence on English blank verse was largely deleterious. My argument is slightly different. It is that a number of essayists after Charles Lamb had the way to their own kinds of excellence and delight opened for them by Lamb's Elia essays.

This talk will be a short trip through the essay in the century and a half since Elia, looking at those who take their lineage from him. This is to avoid largely the rest of Charles Lamb—the poetry, the letters, the dramatic criticism and scholarship—in order to show that Elia, who laments so poignantly in 'Dream Children' that he had no offspring of his own, had descendants in a different sense, one that he never in his modesty contemplated or envisaged.

The two chief of them I offer you will be Max Beerbohm and A.A. Milne. There will be visits to others, who inherit some of his characteristics, who—to be whimsical—might be nephews, great nephews, and cousins several times removed.

The aspects of Elia that I want to concentrate on are what have often been agreed, over nearly two centuries of comment. These are his use of personal experience, which is an aspect of the use of autobiography; his attitude to his material, which is of *enjoyment*, is truthful, sympathetic, often humourous, and has the power to be pathetic without being mawkish; his attitude to his reader, which is friendly, intimate, confidential and sharing all his own enjoyment; his power to surprise by taking a wholly unexpected, unconventional view; his language, which is at bottom good plain English, though consciously varied by archaism and coinage; and lastly his ability to write at the right length for what he has to say.

It seems worth mentioning that Elia did not appear until Charles Lamb was 35. Pehaps the poise needed for such writing comes only with maturity. Beerbohm is a case in point: his precocious volume *The Works of Max Beerbohm*, witty and elegant maybe, published when he was only 24 in 1896, has no flavour of Elia. That flavour only begins to emerge in *More* (age 27) and what follow: *Yet Again* (age 39), *Seven Men* (age 47) and *And Even Now* (age 48). I'll pick that up again later.

There is undoubtedly a long gap between Lamb and Beerbohm, between Elia (*Essays* 1820-23) and *More* (1899). It would be nice to fill it, and establish a lineage. There are relatively few echoes of Elia in the intervening years. Once the ear is tuned, though, they come at some perhaps unlikely moments: Walter Bagehot—more associated with editing *The Economist* and with concern for economic and political matters—discussing Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning in 1864, suddenly remarks:

> There should be a word in the language of literary art to express what the word 'picturesque' expresses for the fine arts. *Picturesque* means fit to be put in a picture; we

> want a word *literatesque*, 'fit to be put in a book.'[1]

And a little later:

> Poetry should be memorable and emphatic, intense, and *soon over*. [. . .] Criticism we know must be brief – not like poetry, because its charm is too intense to be sustained – but on the contrary, because its interest is too weak to be prolonged.[2]

The smile that such comments raise (I hope) is the Elian smile, of surprise in the first place at the happy coinage, and in the second, of pleasure at the quirky truth and the unexpected ending.

R.L. Stevenson, too, shows kinship in *Virginibus Puerisque*. Let me offer you a couple of paragraphs (abridged) from the opening of his essay on 'English Admirals':

> There is one story of the wars of Rome which I have always very much envied for England. Germanicus was going down at the head of the legions into a dangerous river – on the opposite bank the woods were full of Germans – when there flew out seven great eagles which seemed to marshal the Romans on their way; they did not pause or waver, but disappeared into the forest where the enemy lay concealed. 'Forward!' cried Germanicus, with a fine rhetorical inspiration, 'Forward! and follow the Roman birds.' It would be a very heavy spirit that did not give a leap at such a signal, and a very timorous one that continued to have any doubt of success. To appropriate the eagles as fellow-countrymen was to make imaginary allies of the forces of nature.
>
> If an Englishman wishes to have such a feeling, it must be about the sea. The lion is nothing to us; he has not been taken to the hearts of the people, and naturalised as an English emblem. We know right well that a lion would fall foul of us as grimly as he would of a Frenchman or a Moldavian Jew, and we do not carry him before us in the smoke of battle. But the sea is our approach and bulwark; it has been the scene of our greatest triumphs and dangers; and we are accustomed in lyrical strains to claim it as our own. The prostrating experiences of foreigners between Calais and Dover have always an agreeable side to English prepossessions. A man from Bedfordshire, who does not know one end of the ship from the other until she begins to move, swaggers among such persons with a sense of hereditary nautical experience. To suppose yourself endowed with natural parts for the sea because you are the countryman of Blake and mighty Nelson, is perhaps just as unwarrantable as to imagine Scotch extraction a sufficient guarantee that you will look well in a kilt. But the feeling is there, and seated beyond the reach of argument.[3]

The enjoyment here, the friendly tone to the reader, the plain English, and above all the unconventional view and the pleasure of surprise are what recall Elia, and are what Elia might have enjoyed.

[1] Bagehot, Walter. 'Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning', 1864, reprinted in *English Critical Essays (XIX Century)*, Oxford UP: The World's Classics, 1916.
[2] Bagehot.
[3] Stevenson, Robert Louis. 'The English Admirals', *Virginibus Puerisque*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1897.

A few paragraphs later comes a digression on names:

> Most men of high destinies have high-sounding names. [. . .] And you could not find a better case in point than that of the English Admirals. Drake and Rooke and Hawke are picked names for men of execution. Frobisher, Rodney, Boscawen, Foul Weather, Jack Byron, all are good to catch the eye in a page of a naval history. Cloudesley Shovel is a mouthful of quaint and sounding syllables. Benbow has a bulldog quality that suits the man's character, and it takes us back to those English archers who were his true comrades for plainness, tenacity, and pluck. Raleigh is spirited and martial, and signifies an act of bold conduct in the field. It is impossible to judge of Blake and Nelson, no names current among men being worthy of such heroes.[4]

and a little later still, this:

> Duncan, lying off the Texel with his own flagship, the *Venerable*, and only one other vessel, heard that the whole Dutch fleet was putting to sea. He told Captain Hotham to anchor alongside of him in the narrowest part of the channel, and fight his vessel till she sank. 'I have taken the depth of the water,' added he, 'and when the *Venerable* goes down, my flag will still fly.' And you observe this is no naked Viking in a pre-historic period; but a Scotch member of Parliament, with a smattering of the classics, a telescope, a cocked hat of great size, and flannel underclothing.[5]

The same qualities are evident, with the bonus of comic anticlimax.

Stevenson will offer other similar echoes elsewhere. That was a sample. But little of this kind can be gleaned from *Travels with a Donkey* (1879) when Stevenson was 29. At age 31, though, he has attained (if I may be whimsical myself) the maturity to be, if only by fits and starts, Elian. The kinship is astonishing: as you remember from Lamb's 'Imperfect Sympathies',

> I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair. They cannot like me—and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it.[6]

Stevenson was a Scot, who did.

Moving on to G.K. Chesterton, we find he has his own quirky humour and only rarely the Elian tone, but the whole body of his occasional essays offers the notion that he could not have written on such idiosyncratic topics had not Charles Lamb opened up the area. 'Cockneys and their Jokes', 'On Running after one's Hat', 'Tom Jones and Morality', 'The Innocence of the Criminal', 'A Defence of the Dramatic Unities', 'The Terror of a Toy': these are topics that might have been from some hitherto undiscovered essays of Elia, with their mixture of the literacy, like 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', the paradoxical, like 'Sanity of True Genius', and the apparently inconsequential, like 'A Chapter on Ears'.

[4] Stevenson.
[5] Stevenson.
[6] Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia*, London: Dent: Everyman's Library, 1907.

At times, even, there is the echo of the Elian tone, like this, from 'Cockneys and their Jokes':

> . . . in some strange world beyond the stars, I may become at last a Cockney humourist. In that potential paradise I may walk among the Cockney humourists, if not an equal, at least a companion. I may feel for a moment on my shoulder the hearty hand of Dryden and thread the labyrinths of the sweet insanity of Lamb. But that could only be if I were not only much cleverer, but much better than I am. [. . .]
>
> No; London is in this matter attacked upon its strongest ground. London is the largest of the bloated modern cities; London is the smokiest; London is the dirtiest; London is, if you will, the most sombre; London is, if you will, the most miserable. But London is certainly the most amusing and the most amused. You may prove that we have the most tragedy; the fact remains that we have the most comedy, that we have the most farce. We have at the very worst a splendid hypocrisy of humour. We conceal our sorrow behind a screaming derision. You speak of people who laugh through their tears; it is our boast that we only weep through our laughter.[7]

This has the qualities of enjoyment, of friendliness to the reader, the subversion of the expected, and the plain English with the sudden unexpected connection in the phrase 'a splendid hypocrisy of humour'. Here is another example, from 'The Terror of a Toy':

> It would be too high and hopeful a compliment to say that the world is becoming absolutely babyish. For its chief weak-mindedness is an inability to appreciate the intelligence of babies. On every side we hear whispers and warnings that would have appeared half-witted to the Wise Men of Gotham. Only this Christmas I was told in a toy-shop that not so many bows and arrows were being made for little boys; because they were considered dangerous. It might in some circumstances be dangerous to have a little bow. It is always dangerous to have a little boy. But no other society, claiming to be sane, would have dreamed of supposing that you could abolish all bows unless you could abolish all boys. With the merits of the latter reform I will not deal here. There is a great deal to be said for such a course; and perhaps we shall soon have an opportunity of considering it. For the modern mind seems quite incapable of distinguishing between the means and the end, between the organ and the disease, between the use and the abuse; and would doubtless break the boy along with the bow.[8]

As a final example, from 'On Loneliness', comes a truly Elian flight of fancy:

> I suggest that it would be a good thing for those isolated Victorian households if they had a Human Library for circulating human beings instead of books. I suggest that Mudie's Omnibus would call once a week, depositing two or three strangers at the door; who would be duly returned when they had been adequately studied. There is a list of rules, dealing with what should happen if somebody kept Miss Brown out too long, or

[7] Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. 'Cockneys and their Jokes', *All Things Considered*, London: Methuen, 1908.
[8] Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. 'The Terror of a Toy', *Fancies Versus Fads*, London: Methuen, 1923.

returned Mr Robinson in a damaged condition.[9]

Chesterton in general is too eager to grind an axe, too eager to startle his reader with epigram or paradox, not sufficiently *modest* perhaps, to be a true son of Elia. Even so, without having Elia in his ancestry he could not have written as engagingly as he sometimes does.

Chesterton and Beerbohm are contemporaries, and knew one another's writings. It might be strictly fairer to treat Chesterton after Beerbohm, since Beerbohm preceded Chesterton into print. Yet Chesterton is less out of step with his age, whether Victorian or Georgian, than Beerbohm, who begins by being of the '90s and the *Yellow Book*, and goes on until 1936 being *sui generis*. Apart from *Zuleika Dobson* and *The Happy Hypocrite*, Beerbohm writes no fiction. The inimitable and immortal *Seven Men*, containing the if possible even less imitable *Savonarola*, is, though imaginary, not to be counted in the general category of fiction, but very much in the Elian (*not* the Coleridgean) category of fancy. Beerbohm, apart from being a superb caricaturist (many of these being very perceptive literary criticism in visual form) and for a time a theatre reviewer, was essayist *tout simple*.

To show Beerbohm's affinity with the Elian spirit of humility and willingness to see himself as part of the fun, here is a piece from 'No. 2 The Pines'—a very engaging account of Beerbohm's meetings with Swinburne. Swinburne shows Beerbohm his books, none of which Beerbohm has read, and confesses so in the various ways in which we all show embarrassment. We read and enjoy (I hope) the humorous turn of events:

> It was with intense relief that I beheld the title-page of yet another volume which (silently, this time) he laid before me – THE COUNTRY WENCH. '*This* of *course* I have read,' I heartily shouted.
>
> Swinburne stepped back. 'You have? You have read it? Where?' he cried, in evident dismay.
>
> Something was wrong. Had I *not*, I quickly wondered, read this play? 'Oh yes,' I shouted, 'I have read it.'
>
> 'But when? Where?' entreated Swinburne, adding that he had supposed it to be the sole copy extant.
>
> I floundered. I wildly said I thought I must have read it years ago in the Bodleian.
>
> 'Theodore! Do you hear this? It seems that they have now a copy of "The Country Wench" in the Bodleian! Mr Beerbohm found one there – oh when? in what year?' he appealed to me.
>
> I said it might have been six, seven, eight years ago. Swinburne knew for certain that no copy had been there *twelve* years ago, and was surprised that he had not heard of the acquisition. 'They might have told me,' he wailed.
>
> I sacrificed myself on the altar of sympathy. I admitted that I might have been mistaken—must have been—must have confused this play with some other. I dipped into the pages and 'No,' I shouted, 'this I have *never* read.'
>
> His equanimity was restored. He was up the ladder and down again, showing me further treasures with all pride and ardour. At length, Watts-Dunton, afraid that his old friend would tire himself out, arose from his corner, and presently he and I went

[9] Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. 'On Loneliness', *Come to Think of It*, London: Methuen, 1930.

> downstairs to the dining-room. It was in the course of our session together that there suddenly flashed across my mind the existence of a play called 'The Country Wife', by—wasn't it Wycherley? I had once read it – or read something about it. . . . But this matter I kept to myself. I thought I had appeared fool enough already.[10]

How many Elian qualities there are here!: the use of reminiscence; the attitude to the material—truthful, sympathetic, humorous, unsatirical enjoyment; the element of surprise (one needs to be a well-read reader to guess what is coming); the friendly, confidential relation between writer and reader; and perhaps above all the author's modesty.

The essay concludes with Beerbohm imagining Swinburne and Watts-Dunton in heaven, with casual and elegant remarks *en passant* on Rossetti and others:

> I wish I had Watts-Dunton's sure faith in meetings beyond the grave. I am glad I do not disbelieve that people may so meet. I like to think that some day in Elysium I shall – not without diffidence – approach these two and re-introduce myself. I can see just how courteously Swinburne will bow over my hand, not at all remembering who I am. Watts-Dunton will remember me after a moment. [. . .] I've a great deal of work on hand just now – a great deal of work, but if we shall sit down together on the asphodel, and I cannot but think we shall have whisky-toddy even there. He will not have changed. He will still be shaggy and old and chubby, and will wear the same frock-coat, with the same creases in it. Swinburne, on the other hand, will be quite, quite young, with a full mane of flaming auburn locks, and no clothes to hinder him from plunging back at any moment into the shining Elysian waters from which he will have just emerged. I see him skim lightly away into that element. On the strand is sitting a man of noble and furrowed brow. It is Mazzini, still thinking of Liberty. And anon the tiny young English amphibian comes ashore to fling himself dripping at the feet of the patriot and to carol the Republican ode he has composed in the course of his swim. 'He's wonderfully active – active in mind and body,' Watts-Dunton says to me. 'I come to the shore now and then, just to see how he's getting on. But I spend most of my time inland. I find I've so much to talk over with Gabriel [Rossetti]. Not that he's quite the fellow he was. He always had rather a cult for Dante, you know, and now he's more than ever under the Florentine influence. He lives in a sort of monastery that Dante has here; and there he sits painting imaginary portraits of Beatrice, and giving them all to Dante. But he still has his great moments, and there's no one quite like him – no one. Algernon won't ever come and see him, because that fellow Mazzini's as Anti-Clerical as ever and makes a principle of having nothing to do with Dante. Look! – there's Algernon going into the water again! He'll tire himself out, he'll catch cold, he'll –' and here the old man rises and hurries down to the sea's edge. 'Now, Algernon,' he roars, 'I don't want to interfere with you, but I do think, my dear old friend,' – and then, with a guffaw, he breaks off, remembering that his friend is not deaf now nor old, and that here in Elysium, where no ills are, good advice is not needed.[11]

The joyful imaginative leaps here are such as one imagines Elia relishing, whilst they have the

[10] Beerbohm, Max. 'No. 2 The Pines', *And Even Now*, London: Heinemann, 1920.
[11] Beerbohm, 'No. 2 The Pines'.

same delightful visual qualities as appear in Beerbohm's drawings.

Beerbohm shows these and other Elian qualities. We remember Elia's 'A Chapter on Ears' and its opening:

> I have no ear. –
> Mistake me not, reader, - nor imagine that I am by nature destitute of those exterior twin appendages, hanging ornaments, and (architecturally speaking) handsome volutes to the human capital. Better my mother had never borne me – I am, I think, rather delicately than copiously provided with those conduits; and I feel no disposition to envy the mule for his plenty, or the mole for her exactness, in those ingenious labyrinthine inlets – those indispensable side-intellegencers.
>
> Neither have I incurred, nor done anything to incur, with Defoe, that hideous disfigurement, which constrained him to draw upon assurance – to feel 'quite unabashed', and at ease upon that article. I was never, I thank my stars, in the pillory; nor, if I read them aright, is it within the compass of my destiny, that I ever should be.
>
> When therefore I say that I have no ear, you will understand me to mean – *for music*.[12]

This opening is both developed and abridged in Beerbohm's 'Going Out for a Walk':

> It is a fact that not once in all my life have I gone out for a walk. I have been taken out for walks; but that is another matter. Even while I trotted prattling by my nurse's side I regretted the good old days when I had, and wasn't, a perambulator.[13]

Here is the apparently bland title, instantly subverted by a provocative first sentence; and the urge to stimulate us to read on and have more. Admittedly Lamb loads every rift with the ore of exotic thought, vocabulary, and imagery. Beerbohm, wisely no mere imitator, confines himself to one elegant play on one word: 'the good old days when I had, and wasn't, a perambulator'.

Let me move on to an essay which is actually inspired by Elia: 'Books within Books'. Here is the impetus Beerbohm refers to, 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading':

> I can read anything which I call a *book*. There are things in that shape which I cannot allow for such.
>
> In this catalogue of *books which are no books – biblia a-biblia* – I reckon Court Calendars, Directories, Pocket Books, Draught Boards, bound and lettered on the back, Scientific Treatises, Almanacks, Statutes at Large, the works of Hume, Gibbon, Robertson, Beattie, Soame Jenyns, and, generally, all those volumes which 'no gentleman's library should be without:' the Histories of Flavius Josephus (that learned Jew), and Paley's Moral Philosophy. With these exceptions, I can read almost anything. I bless my stars for a taste so catholic, so unexcluding.[14]

[12] Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia*, London: Dent: Everyman's Library, 1907.
[13] Beerbohm, Max. 'Going Out for a Walk', *And Even Now*, London: Heinemann, 1920.
[14] Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia*, London: Dent: Everyman's Library, 1907.

Beerbohm discourses on quite a different kind of *a-biblia*, books written by characters in fiction:

> Charles Lamb let his kind heart master him when he made that too brief list of books that *aren't*. [. . .] How eagerly would I devour these books within books! What fun, what a queer emotion, to fish out from a fourpenny-box, in a windy by-street, WALTER LORRAINE, by ARTHUR PENDENNIS, or PASSION FLOWERS, by ROSA BUNION! I suppose poor Rosa's muse, so fair and so fervid in Rosa's day, would seem a trifle fatigued now; but what allowances one would make! Lord Steyne said of WALTER LORRAINE that it was 'very clever and wicked'. I fancy we should apply neither epithet now. Indeed, I have always suspected that Pen's maiden effort may have been on a plane with 'The Great Hoggarty Diamond'. Yet I vow would I not skip a line of it.
>
> WHO PUT BACK THE CLOCK? is another work which I especially covet. Poor Gideon Forsyth! He was abominably treated, as Stevenson relates, in the matter of that grand but grisly piano; and I have always hoped that perhaps, in the end, as a sort of recompense, Fate ordained that the novel he had anonymously written should be rescued from oblivion and found by discerning critics to be not at all bad.
>
> > He had never acknowledged it, or only to some intimate friends while it was still in proof; after its appearance and alarming failure, the modesty of the author had become more pressing, and the secret was now likely to be better kept than that of the authorship of 'Waverley'.
>
> Such an humiliation as Gideon's is the more poignant to me because it is so rare in English fiction. In nine cases out of ten, a book within a book is an immediate, an immense success.[15]

This is yet another instance, eighty years later, of a notion that we feel Elia must have enjoyed – in that heaven, perhaps, where Beerbohm imagines Swinburne. May I go on quoting Beerbohm in 'Books Within Books'?:

> In how many a three-volume novel is mentioned some 'slim octavo' which seems, from the account given, to have been as arresting as 'Poems and Ballads' without being less acceptable than 'Idylls of the King'! These verses were always the anonymous work of some very young, very poor man, who supposed they had fallen still-born from the press until, one day, a week or so after publication, as he walked 'moodily' and 'in a brown study' along the strand, having given up all hope now that he would ever be in a position to ask Hilda to be his wife, a friend accosted him – 'Seen "The Thunderer" this morning? By George, there's a column review of a new book of poems,' etc. In some three-volume novel that I once read at a seaside place, having borrowed it from the little circulating library, there was a young poet whose sudden leap into the front rank has always laid a special hold on my imagination. The name of the novel itself I cannot

[15] Beerbohm, Max. 'Books Within Books', *And Even Now*, London: Heinemann, 1920.

> recall; but I remember the name of the young poet – Aylmer Deane; and the forever unforgettable title of his book of verse was POMENTS: BEING POEMS OF THE MOOD AND THE MOMENT. What would I not give to possess a copy of that work?[16]

But I must stop. Those who want more must go back to the essay for themselves.

Of course Beerbohm's tastes are not all Lamb's tastes: he writes more than once of his delight in the seaside in winter; his feeling for buildings being demolished; his pleasure in being alone, and on the continent. But when he does so it is in a way parallel to Lamb's attitudes to and treatment of his own tastes.

A topic for which there is no parallel at all in Elia that I've noted, but which yet has the Elian slanted look and surprise, is the opening of 'A Study in Dejection'. This merits and demands a quotation of some length. The argument for including it is not so much that it resembles Lamb as that it shows the progress made by the English essay in the years between Elia and Beerbohm:

> Riderless the horse was, and with none to hold his bridle. But he waited patiently, submissively, there where I saw him, at the shabby corner of a certain shabby little street in Chelsea. 'My beautiful, my beautiful, thou standest meekly by,' sang Mrs Norton of her Arab steed, 'with thy proudly-arched and glossy neck, thy dark and fiery eye.' Catching the eye of this other horse, I saw that such fire as might once have blazed there had long smouldered away. Chestnut though he was, he had no mettle. His chestnut coat was all dull and rough, unkempt as that of an inferior cab-horse. Of his once luxuriant mane there were but a few poor tufts now. His saddle was torn and weather-stained. The one stirrup that dangled therefrom was red with rust.
>
> I never saw in any creature a look of such unutterable dejection. Dejection, in the most literal sense of the word, indeed was his. He had been cast down. He had fallen from higher and happier things. With his 'arched neck,' and with other points which not neglect nor ill-usage could rob of their old grace, he had kept something of his fallen day about him. In the window of the little shop outside which he stood were things that seemed to match him – things appealing to the sense that he appealed to. A tarnished French mirror, a strip of faded carpet, some rows of battered, tattered books, a few cups and saucers that had erst been riveted and erst been dusted – all these, in a gallimaufry of other languid odds and ends, seen through this mud-splashed window, silently echoed the silent misery of the horse. They were remembering Zion. They had been beautiful once, and expensive, and well cared for, and admired, and coveted. And now . . .
>
> *They* had, at least, the consolation of being indoors. Public laughing-stock though they were, they had a barrier of glass between themselves and the irreverent world. To be warm and dry, too, was something. Piteous, they could yet afford to pity the horse. He was more ludicrously, more painfully, misplaced than they. A real blood-horse that has done his work is rightly left in the open air – turned out into some sweet meadow or paddock. It would be cruel to make him spend his declining years inside a house, where no grass is. Is it less cruel that a fine old rocking-horse should be thrust from the

[16] Beerbohm, 'Books Within Books'.

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[17] Beerbohm, Max. 'A
[18] Beerbohm, Max. 'D
[19] Beerbohm, Max. 'S

nursery out into the open air, upon the pavement?[17]

A similar effect is produced by the essay 'Dulcedo Judicorum', where Beerbohm confesses that he frequents the courts 'whenever I have nothing better to do' and gives his reason:

> Is the prisoner in the dock guilty or not guilty of the offence with which he is charged? That is the question in the mind of the court. What sort of man is he? That is the question in my own mind. I cannot but follow in my heart the example of the English law and assume (pending proof, which cannot be forthcoming) that the prisoner in the dock has a character at any rate as fine as my own. The war that this assumption wages in my breast against the fact that the man will perhaps be sentenced is too violent a war not to discommode me. Let justice be done. Or rather, let our rough-and-ready, well-meant endeavours towards justice go on being made. But I won't be there to see, thank you very much.
>
> It is the natural wish of every writer to be liked by his readers. But how exasperating, how detestable, the writer who obviously touts for our affection, arranging himself for us in a mellow light, and inviting us, with gentle persistence, to note how lovable he is! Many essayists have made themselves quite impossible through their determination to remind us of Charles Lamb – 'St Charles', as they invariably call him. And the foregoing paragraph, though not at all would-be-Lamb-like in expression, looks to me horribly like a blatant bid for your love. I hasten to add, therefore, that no absolutely kind-hearted person could bear, as I rejoice, to go and hear cases even in the civil courts.[18]

This is perceptive criticism—and sharp self-observation. I read it as in no way an animadversion on Lamb himself, but only on his imitators.

Beerbohm indeed is not an imitator. But I suggest that he is an heir, and an essayist after Lamb's heart. So would *Savonarola*, that extraordinary drama, have been. There is no time to relish this as it deserves—a wonderful pastiche of a play (in miniature) whose felicities Lamb would have relished. I'll quote only one stage direction, which requires a share of Lamb's crazy humour to be appreciated:

> *Re-enter Guelis and Gibellines fighting.* SAV[ONAROLA] *and* LUC[REZIA BORGÁ] *are arrested by Papal officers. Enter* MICHAEL ANGELO. ANDREA DEL SARTO *appears for a moment at a window.* PIPPA *passes. Brothers of the Misericordia go by, singing a Requiem for Francesca da Rimini. Enter* BOCCACCIO, BENVENUTO CELLINI, *and many others, making remarks highly characteristic of themselves but scarcely audible through the terrific thunderstorm which now bursts over Florence and is at its loudest and darkest crisis as the Curtain falls.*[19]

It is time to move on a little further in the twentieth century to a figure not much later in date, but still feeling to us 'modern' because of four ever-popular works: *When We Were Very*

[17] Beerbohm, Max. 'A Study in Dejection', *Yet Again*, London: Heinemann, 1909.
[18] Beerbohm, Max. 'Dulcedo Judiciorum', *Yet Again*, London: Heinemann, 1909.
[19] Beerbohm, Max. '*Savonarola* Brown', *Seven Men*, London: Heinemann, 1919.

Young, *Now We Are Six*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *The House at Pooh Corner*. A.A. Milne is now little known as a dramatist, and even less as an essayist. It is in this last capacity that he concerns us here.

Milne brings us on to different ground. He was a full-time professional writer and journalist in a way that Beerbohm can hardly be said to be, since he was by nature a dilettante all his life. Milne, as well as being after the war a popular and successful dramatist, was deputy editor of *Punch*. The effect on his writing causes considerable difference from our other figures, as well as continuing the blood-line back to Elia.

What he shares with Elia are his attitude of enjoyment of his own material; his intimate, friendly, attitude to his readers, to whom he communicates his enjoyment; his delight in surprise; his use of plain correct conversational English; and his consistent writing at the right length for what he has to say. The differences are that on the whole he has little to do with reminiscence; that his material is much slighter—even, if one is being critical, possibly trivial; and that he tailors his writing to a far less learned and well-informed public, who are unlikely to enjoy erudite reference or Latinate coinages or archaism. One has only to think of the effect an Elia essay would have had on a reader opening his issue of *Punch* in the 1920s to see that the differences are inevitable. Times change, and essayists perforce change with them.

Wit is not Milne's forte; good-humour, humour, some irony, and the unexpected opinion are. And so is modesty, even when he pretends to the opposite, as in the opening of 'The Case for the Artist':

> By an 'artist' I mean Shakespeare and Me, and Bach and Myself, and Velasquez and Phidias, and even You if You have ever written four lines on the sunset in somebody's album, or modelled a Noah's Ark for your little boy in plasticine. Perhaps we have not reached the heights where Shakespeare stands, but we are on his track. Shaekspeare can be representative of all of us, or Velasquez if you prefer him.[20]

Milne's choices of subject have the charm of the unexpected, ranging from 'My Library' to 'Goldfish', to 'The Friend of Man' (which turns out to be not a dog but a walking-stick), to the seasonal 'A Christmas Number' (comparable to, though very different from, Elia's 'New Year's Eve' or 'All Fools' Day'), to 'Smoking as a Fine Art'. These and others are, like Elia's, titles which tempt the reader to investigate what is to be said. In the matter of titles, he is perhaps better even than Beerbohm.

To remind you of the flavour of Milne, here is some of 'My Library':

> When I moved into a new house a few weeks ago, my books, as was natural, moved with me. Strong, perspiring men shovelled them into packing-cases, and staggered with them to the van, cursing Caxton as they went. On arrival at this end, they staggered with them into the room selected for my library, heaved off the lids of the cases, and awaited orders. The immediate need was for an emptier room. Together we hurried the books into the new white shelves which awaited them, the order in which they stood being of no matter so long as they were off the floor. Armful after armful was hastily stacked, the only pause being when (in the curious way in which these things happen)

[20] Milne, Alan Alexander. 'The Case for the Artist', *If I May*, London: Methuen, 1920.

> my own name suddenly caught the eye of the foreman. 'Did you write this one, sir?' he asked. I admitted it. 'H'm,' he said non-committally. He glanced along the names of every armful after that, and appeared a little surprised at the number of books which I *hadn't* written. An easy-going profession, evidently.[21]

This short essay speaks to all of us who own books, and all of us who have ever moved house. He then faces the problem we have all had—organisation:

> Let us suppose that we decide to have all the poetry together. It sounds reasonable. But then Byron is eleven inches high (my tallest poet), and Beattie (my shortest) is just over four inches. How foolish they will look standing side by side. Perhaps you don't know Beattie, but I assure you that he was a poet. He wrote these majestic lines: -
>
> > The shepherd-swain of whom I mention made
> > On Scotia's mountains fed his little flock;
> > The sickle, scythe or plough he never swayed –
> > An honest heart was almost all his stock.
>
> Of course, one would hardly expect a shepherd to sway a plough in the ordinary way, but Beattie was quite right to remind us that Edwin didn't either. Edwin was the name of the shepherd-swain. 'And yet poor Edwin was no vulgar boy,' we are told a little further on in a line that should live. Well, having satisfied you that Beattie was really a poet, I can now return to my argument that an eleven-inch Byron cannot stand next to a four-inch Beattie, and be followed by an eight-inch Cowper, without making the shelf look silly. Yet how can I discard Beattie – Beattie who wrote: -
>
> > And now the downy cheek and deepened voice
> > Gave dignity to Edwin's blooming prime.
>
> You see the difficulty. If you arrange your books according to their contents you are sure to get an untidy shelf.[22]

Times have changed indeed: Lamb would have had no need to make that digression on Beattie (he put him amongst his *abiblia*). But he might have used that ironic yet good-humoured tone as a form of critical exposé of *someone*, if not of Beattie. Milne, though not expecting his readers to be erudite, does assume they are literate. One of his least engaging titles is 'Daffodils'. Milne's subject is specific: the joy of daffodils cut, indoors, and in a bowl. It produces the entertaining unexpectedness of this:

> A house with daffodils in it is a house lit up, whether or no the sun be shining outside. Daffodils in a green bowl – and let it snow if it will.
>
> Wordsworth wrote a poem about daffodils. [. . .] But he did not write about daffodils in a bowl. The daffodils which I celebrate are stationary: Wordsworth's lived on the

[21] Milne, Alan Alexander. 'My Library', *Not That It Matters*, London: Methuen, 1919.
[22] Milne, 'My Library'.

banks of Ullswater, and fluttered and tossed their heads and danced in the breeze. He hints that in their company even he might have been jocose – a terrifying thought, which makes me happier to have mine safely indoors. When he first saw them there (so he says) he gazed and gazed and little thought what wealth the show to him had brought. Strictly speaking, it hadn't brought him in anything at the moment, but he must have known from his previous experiences with the daisy and the celandine that it was good for a certain amount.

> A simple daffodil to him
> Was so much matter for a slim
> Volume at two and four.

You may say, of course, that I am in no better case, but then I have never reproached other people (as he did) for thinking of a primrose merely as a primrose.

But whether you prefer them my way or Wordsworth's – indoors or outdoors – will make no difference in this further matter to which finally I call your attention. Was there ever a more beautiful name in the world than daffodil? Say it over to yourself, and then say 'agapanthus' or 'chrysanthemum', or anything else you please, and tell me if the daffodils do not have it.

> Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies,
> Let them live upon their praises;
> Long as there's a sun that sets,
> Primroses will have their glory;
> Long as there are violets
> They will have a place in story;
> But for flowers my bowls to fill,
> Give me just the daffodil.

As Wordsworth ought to have said.[23]

Unfair to Wordsworth? Perhaps. But Wordsworth can take it, and Milne knows it, being himself neither a great literary figure nor a noble poet.

Milne the advocate of the contemporary writer—to put things in balance—is a surprise, and shows how tastes have changed since 1919. Here he is in an essay called 'A Household Book':

> For I am going to speak of another discovery; of a book which should be a classic, but is not; of a book of which nobody has heard unless through me. It was published some twelve years ago, the last-published book of a well-known writer. [. . .]
>
> Well, the writer of my book is Kenneth Grahame. You have heard of him? Good, I thought so. The books you have read are *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*. Am I not right? Thank you. But the book you have not read – my book – is *The Wind in the Willows*. Am I not right again? Ah, I was afraid so.[24]

[23] Milne, Alan Alexander. 'Daffodils', *Not That It Matters*, London: Methuen, 1919.
[24] Milne, Alan Alexander. 'A Household Book', *Not That It Matters*, London: Methuen, 1919.

The essay comes to a wonderful last paragraph:

> Well, of course, you will order the book at once. But I must give you a word of warning. When you sit down to it, don't be so ridiculous as to suppose that you are sitting in judgement on my taste, still less on the genius of Kenneth Grahame. You are merely sitting in judgement on yourself. [. . .] You may be worthy; I do not know. But it is you who are on trial.[25]

I repeat: times change, and the essay perforce changes with them. After A.A. Milne, and up to the present day, the essay is no longer a major genre of literature. When many of us who are over 60 were at school, we read Addison's Sir Roger de Coverley papers, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt (and of course Elia) both before and after our Matriculations, Higher School Certificates, O levels, A levels or whatever they were. Asking around suggests that no child does now. Where the occasional essay persists, however—as in *Times* third leaders, or Miles Kington, or in *The Oldie*'s 'The World According to Enfield Senior'—the Elian blood, though it may run thin, still, happily, runs.

It is, alas, impossible to say that the sons of Elia are his equals—except perhaps for Max Beerbohm, who is a worthy descendant. As Robert Frost says, comparing them to stars, fireflies

> though they never equal stars in size
> (And they were never really stars at heart)
> Achieve at times a very star-like start,
> Only, of course, they can't sustain the part.

Perhaps it is more generous, though,—and more hopeful—to adapt Tennyson's 'Ulysses':

> They are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven; that which they are they are.

What they are is to be cherished. Lovers of Elia may cherish it more than most.

The aged Ulysses hopes that 'we shall touch the Happy Isles / And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.' Although we shall not see Elia's like again, yet his blood-line persists. It is possible that times and audiences may change again, that the genes of Elia may produce another who, though undoubtedly different, will richly prove his ancestry.

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[25] Milne, 'A Household Book'.

Christ's Hospital a Second Time Revisited

By Margareta Eurenne Rydbeck

CHARLES LAMB WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD when he was enrolled at Christ's Hospital, the appeal for him to be admitted having been signed by his mother Elizabeth Lamb and one Timothy Yeats, who also guaranteed the '£100 against any loss the scholar's serious misdemeanours might involve'.[1] He was only fourteen when he left the venerable institution, and seven more years elapsed before his mother's tragic death put an end to what aspirations and hope of normal family life he might have had. The years at Christ's had a decisive effect on his mind, and throughout his life he felt indebted to his old school for its education and for the enduring friendships he formed there. Two essays, superficially on the same subject but fundamentally different, bear witness to his feelings of obligation to the school which was to remain his one and only alma mater, 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital (RoCH) and 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' (CH35).

RoCH belongs to the period of comparative barrenness between 1812 and 1820, the first year marking the end of Lamb's contributions to the *Reflector*, and the second the beginning of his writings for the *London Magazine*.[2] It was first published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1813 and reprinted twice in Lamb's lifetime: in the *Works* (1818) and in a history of Christ's Hospital (1820); then, after his death, by some friends and schoolfellows (1835).[3] It seems to have been written in defence of his old school and its governors, who had been charged with favouritism. The accusation was that they had admitted to the school sons of families that could have provided education for their offspring without taxing the means of King Edward's charitable institution. Christ's Hospital had been founded in 1552 by the boy-king Edward VI at the suggestion of Bishop Ridley, originally as an institution that could and would 'take out of the streets all the fatherless children and other poor men's children that were not able to keep them'.[4] The former house of the Grayfriars was 'devised to be a Hospital for them, where they should have meat, drink, and clothes, and lodging and learning, and officers to attend upon them'. Now Lamb defended the governors' policy, arguing that the coarseness of the dress—coarse blue coat (hence the name 'Blue-coats') and yellow hose—would effectively prevent 'the Aristocracy of this country, cleric or laic,' from pushing their sons into 'this seminary'. He could not 'but think that a sprinkling of the sons of respectable parents among them has an admirable tendency to liberalize the whole mass'. For those belonging 'to the very lowest classes' there had been, since the days when Christ's Hospital was founded, a material change and now there were 'parochial schools, and Bell's and Lancaster's with their arms open to receive every son of ignorance'.[5]

[1] Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (*Life*), 5th rev. ed., London 1910, p. 56 and Katherine Anthony, *The Lambs*, London 1949, p. 16. But it was his father, John Lamb, who appeared as petitioner, having 'a wife and three children'.
[2] *Misc*., 'Preface', p. ix.
[3] *Misc*., 436.
[4] King Edward's instructions to Bishop Ridley, quoted from Lucas, *Misc*., 437. To many young readers this school was first known through Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*.
[5] *Misc*., 435. The quoted words belong to the original opening of the article as it was printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* but were omitted when RoCH was reprinted in the *Works*.

The style of RoCH is, at least at a first perusal, objective, dry, and matter-of-fact, without the humorous exaggerations and outbursts of the later essay, and without its illustrating episodes. There is also a striking disparity in the description of the factual conditions; in this respect the author of RoCH shows much more reserve than Elia. Things are always, when possible, shown *ad meliorem partem*, and some repellent practices are embellished so as to appear hardly recognizable. However, a reader familiar with Lamb's tongue-in-cheek mode of telling truths, and comparing the representation of facts in RoCH with Elia's outspokenness on the same matters in CH35, is led to think that Lamb is protesting too much here and there. One instance of this is when the boys' reluctance to eat the fat of boiled meat, the so-called 'gags', is put down to 'ceremonial observances'. When Lamb added the following footnote he must have been writing in the full assurance that he would not be taken seriously by those who were in the know (among others by former Blue-coats) and that they would be able to read between the lines.

> I am told that the late steward * who evinced on many occasions a most praiseworthy anxiety to promote the comfort of the boys, had occasion for all his address and perseverance to eradicate the first of these unfortunate prejudices, in which he at length succeeded, and thereby restored to one half of the animal nutrition of the school those honors which painful superstition and blind zeal had long conspired to withhold from it.[6]

The same goes for what he has to say about the Reverend James Boyer, the 'excellent Upper Grammar Master', to whose cruel teaching methods Coleridge and Hunt, other alumni of Christ's Hospital, have testified. With a wonder of meiosis he is said to have possessed

> a temper a little too hasty to leave the more nervous of us quite at our ease to do justice to his merits in those days.[7]

All details of the cruel punishments meted out by the school for different offences against it as a corpus (such as fetters, imprisonment on bread and water in solitary cells, and whipping) are omitted in RoCH but are revealed in the later essay. However, corporal chastisement for deficiencies in the schoolroom are not suppressed, probably because they belonged to the routine of most educational establishments. Bullying at the hands of monitors and some of the older co-pupils is admitted, too.

It is interesting to see how differently Lamb treats the same subject before and after he has adopted the character of Elia. There is a seeming paradox in the fact that when Lamb at last decided to speak more openly—and seriously—about his old school, he had to resort to the mocking mask of Elia. Was the truth so awful that it could not be expressed but by jesting exaggerations and very black humour? In any case, RoCH serves as a foil to the Elian essay, which in its turn shows that a later literary product can adjust and enrich the reader's response to and appreciation of an earlier one.

Beside the difference of style and the different ways of representing life at Christ's Hospital there are curious shifts of standpoint in CH35, both compared with RoCH and within the essay itself. While it is evident that the voice one hears in RoCH belongs to one person, Mr. Charles

[6] *Misc*., 148. The star in the text indicated an additional footnote, giving the name of the steward, one Mr. Hathaway.
[7] *Elia*, 145. See also note 107.

Lamb, the identity of 'I' in CH335 is more difficult to determine. Elia sets out to correct Mr. Lamb's too enthusiastic eulogy of his old school, as if Elia were the 'I' and somebody different from Lamb. At the same time we obtain a portrait of Lamb as seen by an 'I' with Coleridge's eyes; what is said about the 'I' of the beginning of the essay tallies with out knowledge of Coleridge's early years, when he might well have considered himself 'a poor, friendless boy'.[8] The mixed nature of the author's 'I' is displayed with the words 'I was a hypochondriac child' (*Elia*, 16); from here and four pages on 'L.' is not mentioned which seems to favour a more autobiographical interpretation, equating Elia with Lamb. However, the attempt at mystification is renewed later (II, 20:29-30) when the author talks about both Elia and Coleridge in the third person. Lamb himself alludes to this instance when, in the 'Preface' to *The Last Essays of Elia*, he makes the friend of the late Elia say about him that

> What he tells us, as of himself, was often true only (historically) of another; as in a former Essay (to save many instances) – where under the *first person* (his favourite figure) he shadows forth the forlorn state of a country-boy placed at a London school, far from his friends and connections – in direct opposition to his own early history. If it be egotism to imply and twine with his own identity the griefs and affections of another – making himself many, or reducing many unto himself – then is the skilful novelist, who all along brings in his hero, or heroine, speaking of themselves, the greatest egotist of all.[9]

* * * * *

While it is known what caused Lamb to write RoCH—the attack on the governors of his old school—it is more difficult to fix with certainty upon any such extrinsic stimulus for CH35. It is one of the earliest essays for the *London Magazine*; Lamb started his contributions there in August 1820, and CH35, his third Elian essay, was published in the November issue. As so many commentators and biographers have already observed, a longing for the past in general and for his own childhood in particular underlies much of his writing. Thus, for instance, the last words of another Elian essay, *The Old Benchers of Inner Temple*, bear witness to the overwhelming importance of childhood to Lamb.

> While childhood, and while dreams, reducing childhood, shall be left,
> Imagination shall not have spread her holy wings totally to fly the earth.[10]

If this attitude might be said to be due to the spirit of the age (and Lamb was in many respects a true child of the Romantic Movement), there were other reasons why Lamb should regard his childhood as belonging to a lost Eden. The death of his mother at the hands of a much-loved sister must have meant the definite ending of childhood and relatively carefree youth. In the best-known of all Lamb's poems, 'The Old Familiar Faces', written in January 1798,[11] the first stanza, omitted from publication, runs

[8] *Elia*, 13 and 317. *Cf* also below p. 11.
[9] *Elia*, 151.
[10] *Elia*, 90. The *London Magazine*, September 1821. The word *reducing* has here the etymological meaning of 'bringing back' (*OED* I 5).
[11] Probably when Mary Lamb had had another attack of her mania. See *P*, 294.

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

And in the next stanza, which became the first in the version published in 1818, Lamb remembers childhood and schooldays:

I have had playmates, I have had companions
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days,
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.[12]

But after the catastrophe he 'ghostlike'

Passed round the haunts of my childhood,
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse.[13]

In the 'Preface' to *The Last Essays of Elia* he characterizes himself through the persona of the late Elia's friend and concludes thus:

> He was too much of the boy-man. The *toga virilis* never sate gracefully on his shoulders. The impressions of infancy had burnt into him, and he resented the impertinence of manhood. These were weaknesses; but such as they were, *they are a key to explicate some of his writings*.[14]

While it is necessary not to equate Elia with Lamb, so much in these lines tallies with what is known about Lamb's personality from sources outside the Elian essays that the reader is entitled to take the statement as autobiographically valid. Apart from the fact that Lamb adopts the mask of a friend of the late Elia's there is nothing in his words to contradict an unmistakable note of sincerity. Another 'key to explicate some of his writings' is handed over in 'New Year's Eve', written shortly after CH35, where Elia abuses Elia. 'Say what you will', he says.

> Lay it on, and spare not; I subscribe to it all, and much more, than thou canst be willing to lay at his door - - - but for the child Elia – that 'other me', there, in the background – I must take leave to cherish the remembrance of that young master – with as little reference, I protest, to this stupid changeling of five-and-forty, as if it had been a child of some other house, and not of my parents. I can cry over its patient small-pox at five, and rougher medicaments. I can lay its poor fevered head upon the sick pillow at Christ's [. . .]. I know how it shrank from any the least colour of falsehood. – God help thee, Elia,

[12] *Ibid.*
[13] *Ibid*. *Cf* also RoCH (*Misc*., 46): 'For I do not know whether a constitutional imbecility does not incline me too obstinately to cling to the remembrances of childhood; [. . .] nothing that I have been engaged in since seems of any value or importance, compared to the colours which imagination gave to everything then.'
[14] *Elia*, 153. My italics.

> how art thou changed! Thou art sophisticated. – I know how honest, how courageous (for a weakling) it was – how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful! From what have I not fallen, if the child I remember was indeed myself [. . .]![15]

In the poignant words 'From what have I not fallen' there speaks a desperate yearning not only for the joys of childhood but also for its innocence. But retracing the steps to this Eden was to prove a painful undertaking.

In February 1817, Lamb attended a dinner party given by the Society of the Blues, and it has been suggested that this party inspired CH35.[16] The lapse of more than three years between the alleged source of inspiration and the essay is in itself no obstacle to the theory, but until more evidence has appeared, it remains a hypothesis. If an outside impetus is to be found, it seems at least equally proper to look for it in the Elian essay which preceded it in the *London*, that is 'Oxford in the Vacation' (October 1820). In this essay, which in its turn was inspired by Lamb's visit to Cambridge in the summer of 1820, two fifths are dedicated to a former scholar at Christ's, George Dyer, a friend of Lamb's and his senior by twenty years, who was, in the 1820s, a resident at the university of Cambridge. The memories evoked by the Cambridge visit and the Oxford essay may well have served as incitement to the following one.

But the answer to the question where Lamb found the inspiration for this and other Elian essays might be found nearer at hand though yet not so easily recognized. My theory is that the existence of the Elia mask made it possible for Lamb to penetrate to and talk about things which had previously lain too deep and been too delicate to touch. He had reached maturity, he was 'in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets'.[17] The *London Magazine* had provided the medium that fitted the message, and he was in demand. So, at last, he felt free and able to speak about things which concerned him most deeply. And, in case he met with lack of sympathy, there was a protection—Elia.

> That I am fond of indulging, beyond a hope of sympathy, in such retrospection, may be the symptom of some sickly idiosyncracy. Or is it owing to another cause; simply, that being without wife and family, I have not learned to project myself enough out of myself; and having no offspring of my own to dally with, I turn back upon memory, and adopt my own early ideas, as my heir and favourite? If these speculations seem fantastical to thee, reader – (a busy man, perchance), if I tread out of the way of thy sympathy, and am singularly-conceited only, I retire impenetrable to ridicule, under the phantom cloud of Elia.[18]

With the very first words of CH35 Elia alienates himself from 'Mr. Lamb' and, arguing that Lamb has dropped everything but what could 'be said in praise of [the cloisters]', he implies that he, Elia, is going to give a truer picture of life at Christ's Hospital thirty-five years ago. Elia's approach to the matter in hand is also different from Mr. Lamb's. Whereas RoCH, for all its details on principles, dress, and behaviour seems rather dry and abstract, regarding everything

[15] *Elia*, 28.
[16] Barnett, *Charles Lamb, The Evolution of Elia.* Bloomington, 1964, p. 49.
[17] 'New Year's Eve', *Elia*, 29.
[18] *Ibid*., *Elia*, 28-9.

from a distance, CH35 by singling out one boy—the young 'L.'—inspecting him closely through the eyes of a Coleridge-I and comparing his comparatively favoured situation with that of the other, less fortunate boys, vividly exposes the hospitallers' pleasures and hardships.

Another striking contrast lies in the frequency and use of allusions. IN the ten pages of RoCH there is one expression from Juvenal, quoted in Latin, and a longish quotation from a poem by Dyer, which concludes the essay. IN CH35 there are some thirty allusions, unevenly distributed over the eleven pages, the greater part of them gathered in clusters.

In RoCH the author could not find the time to

> enumerate all those circumstances, some pleasant, some attended with pain, which, seen through the mist of distance, come sweetly softened to the memory.[19]

But behind the mask, without glossing over and yet without bitterness, Elia dared mouth a few home truths about badly cooked food, and hunger, and loneliness.

'L.' is said to have been privileged in several respects. He could visit 'his friends', that is Lamb's own family, 'almost as often as he wished'.[20] His diet was enriched by diverse delicious things, tea and hot rolls for breakfast, extra sugar for the 'mess of millet', and, best of all, tasty meat was brought to him four days a week.

> In lieu of our *half-pickled* Sundays, or *quite fresh* boiled beef on Thursdays (strong as *caro equina*), with detestable marigolds floating in the pail to poison the broth – our scanty mutton crags on Fridays – and rather more savoury, but grudging, portions of the same flesh, rotten-roasted or rare, on the Tuesdays (the only dish which excited our appetites, and disappointed our stomachs, in almost equal proportion) – he had his hot plate of roast veal, or the more tempting griskin (exotics unknown to our palates), cooked in the paternal kitchen (a great thing) and brought him daily by his maid or aunt! I remember the good old relative (in whom love forbade pride) squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters, disclosing the viands (if higher regale than those cates which the ravens administered to the Tishbite): and the contending passions of L. at the unfolding.[21]

Here, in a few lines, Lamb comprises both a condemnation of the boys' poor food and an account of how 'L.'s' situation was relieved. His mixed feeling at receiving these additions to the school's menu,

> Love for the bringer; shame for the thing brought, and the manner of its bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it; and, at top of all, hunger (eldest, strongest of the passions!)

in themselves human and understandable in a boy, may account for Elia's resorting to an allusion to a biblical incident of a similar nature, one connected with a near name-sake, Elijah the Tishbite.

[19] *Misc*., 148.
[20] *Misc*., 121.
[21] *Misc*., 12:30-13:8.

The story of how the Tishbite was fed by birds is told in 1 *Kings*, xvii. Elijah had prophesied about a period of drought when

> (2) [. . .] the word of the Lord came unto him saying, (3) Get thee hence, and turn eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan, (4) And it shall be, that thou shall drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. (5) So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. (6) And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening: and he drank of the brook.

The story is referred to in *Paradise Regained* (*PR*) II, when the Son of God, after his forty days of fasting, falls asleep.

> And dreamed, as appetite is wont to dream,
> Of meats and drinks, nature's refreshment sweet.
> Him thought he by the brook of Cherith stood
> And saw the ravens with their horny beaks
> Food to Elijah bringing even and morn,
> Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought.[22]

Whether the biblical text or Milton's was uppermost in Lamb's mind is impossible to decide; they were equally familiar to him.[23] The circumstance that Elijah is not called 'the Tishbite' in the quoted passage has no significance, particularly as he is mentioned by that name earlier in *PR* (II, 16). Furthermore, Elia quotes, in 'Grace before Meat', the same long passage about 'the famished Son of God' in *PR* 11, 264-78, and comments on it: 'Nothing in Milton is finlier fancied than these temperate dreams of the divine Hungerer'.[24]

There is, anyway, much more than a mere decoration in the allusion to Elijah the Tishbite: all the feelings connected with childish hunger, which are brought to life with this reminiscence, are softened and allayed by putting the young 'L.'s' hunger on a par with that of Elijah or 'the divine Hungerer'. The complexity of his feelings is incorporated in the verbal texture. The effect is one of both heightening and contrast.

While the circumstances connected with 'L.'s' privileged situation are autobiographical as related to Lamb himself, the 'I' of 'I was a poor, friendless boy' (*Elia*, 13:14) would be identical with Coleridge.[25] The views expressed here are in sharp contrast with those that Mr. Lamb had aired in 1813. Then he had said that Christ's was an Institution

> To separate a child from his family for a season, in order to render him back hereafter, with feelings and habits more congenial to it, than it could have attained by remaining at home in the bosom of it. It is a preserving and renovating principle, an antidote for the

[22] *Paradise Regained*, 264-9.
[23] Lucas gives both references; see *Elia*, 317.
[24] *Elia*, 94.
[25] *Elia*, 317.

> *res angustae domi*, when it presses, as it always does, most heavily upon the most ingenuous natures.[26]

But the desperate voice of the 'poor, friendless boy' forms a jarring contrast to the sober, almost smug tone of RoCH. It would seem as if Lamb wants to make a clean break with his earlier, Godwin-influenced views as presented in RoCH.

> O the cruelty of separating a poor lad from his early homestead! The yearning which I used to have towards it in those unfledged years! How, in my dreams, would my native town (far in the west) come back [. . .]! How I would wake weeping, and in the anguish of my heart, exclaim upon sweet Calne in Wiltshire![27]

Here one also notices a faint Shakespearian echo, from *The Winter's Tale*: 'In those *unfledged* days was my wife a girl.' It is Polixines, remembering his youth when he and Leontes were as 'twinned lambs, that did frisk in the sun'. The next two sentences in the same paragraph are loaded with strong sentiments. They are phrased as exclamations, recalling a 'native town', and voicing childish sorrow with words reminiscent of Job's.

> (10) He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. (Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.)[28]

The speaker's 'anguish of my heart' concerns his home, as does Job's 'anguish of my spirit'; it is not only a verbal similarity.

Another circumstance which is barely hinted at in RoCH, that is the boys' 'delightful excursions in the summer holidays',[29] is expanded in CH35 over almost a page and is shown, through many illuminating details, in a quite different light.

> To this late hour of my life, I trace impressions left by recollections of those friendless holidays. The long warm days of summer never return but they bring them a gloom from the haunting memory of those *whole-day-leaves*, when, by some strange arrangement, we were turned out, for the live-long day, upon our own hands, whether we had friends to go to, or none.[30]

As the boys got no food to take out with them, nor had any money to buy for, they returned 'faint and languid' to their

[26] *Misc*., 140; Lucas gives the reference to Juvenal's *Third Satire*, I. 164, and translates the full sentence: 'Not easily do they rise, whose abilities are hampered by straitened means at home.' 'Straitened means at home' is the same as *res angustae domi*; and as Riehl has shown, Godwin's (and for some time Lamb's) views were in full accordance with the staunch Roman's.
[27] *Elia*, 13:22-27. Coleridge was born in Devonshire, not in Wiltshire, but has recorded himself how unhappy he was at school.
[28] *Job*, 7, 10-11.
[29] *Misc*., 148.
[30] *Elia*, 13:28-33.

> desired morsel, half-rejoicing, half-reluctant, that the hours of our uneasy liberty had expired.[31]

Thus Mr. Lamb's 'delightful excursions' are exposed as dictated rather by the school's self-interest and thrift than by concern for the hospitallers' welfare and comfort. And Christ's was generous with whole-day-leaves: a list from 1834 enumerates no less than thirty-two to which should be added every second Wednesday and royal anniversaries.[32] The Coleridge-I remembers that 'L. was a home-seeking lad',[33] thus implying that 'L.' had less bitter memories of the hungry summer excursions and even worse winter-day leaves when they went 'prowling about the streets objectless – shivering at cold windows of printshops'.[34]

In the like, almost schizophrenic manner, 'L.' is described as being screened off, through the protection of his patrons, from the harshness of masters and monitors. One wonders if old feelings of guilt made Lamb disown his youthful self; probably he had been exempted from the experience of being called out of bed at night by older pupils acting as 'overseers' and 'punished' without having committed any offence. The factual circumstances of the monitors' bullying and tyranny are mentioned in RoCH, too, but palliated and mainly serving to enhance the noble nature of the Grecians.

> The task of blows, or corporal chastisement, they left to the common monitors, or heads of wards, who, it must be confessed, in our time had rather too much licence allowed to oppress and misuse their inferiors; and the interference of the Grecians, who may be considered as the spiritual power, was not unfrequently called for, to mitigate the heavy unrelenting arm of his temporal power, or monitor.[35]

Either at least one of these bullies later in life overstepped society's boundaries, or poetic justice was meted out by Lamb, since we are told that a certain H-, having expiated 'some maturer offence in the hulks', ended his life in the gallows.[36] This H- had been the dubious hero of the incident in the dormitory.

> This petty Nero actually branded a boy, who had offended him, with a red hot iron; and nearly starved forty of us, with exacting contributions, to the one half of our bread, to pamper a young ass, which incredible as it may seem, with the connivance of the nurse's daughter (a young flame of his) he had contrived to smuggle in, and keep upon the leads of the *ward*, as they called our dormitories. This game went on for better than a week, till the foolish beast, not able to fare well but he must cry roast meat – happier than Caligula's minion, could he have kept his own counsel – but foolisher, alas! than any of his species in the fables – waxing fat and kicking, in the fullness of bread, one unlucky minute would needs proclaim his good fortune to the world below; and laying out his

[31] *Elia*, 13:44-14:2.
[32] Trollope's *History of Christ's Hospital*, quoted from *Elia*, 317.
[33] *Elia*, 13:35.
[34] *Elia*, 14.
[35] *Misc*., 147:6-13.
[36] He was called Hodges, if we are to believe the accurateness of a document which passes under the name of 'Lamb's Key' and which Lamb himself drew up, identifying people who appeared under initials.

> simple throat, blew such a ram's horn blast, as (toppling down the walls of his own Jericho) set concealment any longer at defiance.[37]

In these two sentences there is a wealth of allusions, classical and biblical, and at least one more which could be styled literary or proverbial; to which should be added verbal puns. All this is, with one exception, twined together in the lat sentence.

The author of this prank, which was carried out at the expense of forty boys, who had to give up one half of their bread portions to feed an ass, this 'petty' tyrant calls forth the reminiscence of two disreputable historic tyrants, the Roman emperors Nero and Caligula. The latter raised *his* minion, his favourite horse, to the status of his *collega* in consulship. When Lamb says that the ass would have been happier than the horse-consul, if he had 'kept his own counsel', he is probably punning on an implied *consul* and *counsel*, two words which are etymologically akin.

The meaning of the expression *to keep one's counsel* is the opposite of the semi-proverbial *to cry roast meat*. This saying, which Fielding in *Tom Jones* calls 'a vulgar phrase', seems to have become a household word meaning 'to be foolish enough to announce to others a piece of private luck or good fortune' (*OED*). But it is interesting to note that the phrase is to be found in Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, and here in connection with the words 'fare well', which appear in the same context in CH35. Gerard and Monsieur de Paris address the two ladies.

> *Ger*. Pshaw! pshaw! – I know the vanity of women; you could not contain yourselves from bragging.
> *Mons.* Ma foi! is it certain? ha! ha! ha! – Hark you, madam, can't you fare well but you must cry roast-meat?
> You spoil your trade by bragging of your gains;
> The silent sow (madam) does eat most grains. – da - [38]

The similarity of the texts does not stop at the verbal parallels. Wycherley lets his Monsieur underline the advantage of keeping mum with the exemplum of the silent sow. In fact, what Elia says about Caligula's minion, who spoiled his trade of bragging of his gains, is a direct paraphrase of the last two lines in the Wycherley quotation. My conclusion is that this scene, rather than the 'vulgar phrase' worked on Lamb's mind here.

After this half proverbial, half literary allusion and the reference to ancient history there follow first a comparison to all, unspecified, asses of the fables and then two other, biblical allusions.

> [The foolish beast] – waxing fat, and kicking, in the fullness of bread, one unlucky minute would needs proclaim his good fortune to the world below; and laying out his simple throat, blew such a ram's horn blast, as (toppling down the walls of his own Jericho) set concealment any longer at defiance.[39]

The reference to 'Joshua's toppling of the walls of Jericho' is fairly apparent, and it is not too difficult to pin down the 'waxing fat, and kicking' to Moses' speech, or song, in the 32nd chapter

[37] *Elia*, 14:34-15:3.
[38] Act I, scene ii. Wycherley, ed. with instructions and notes by W.C. Ward. Mermaid Series, London 1948, p. 150.
[39] *Elia*, 14:44-15:3.

of Deuteronomy, the book that precedes the book of Joshua in the Bible. The Lord had found Jacob 'in a desert land', had 'instructed him' and made him

> [. . .] to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the bread of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; [. . .][40]

Jeshurun was the poetic name of Jacob-Israel. Personifying the whole country, he got fat on milk and honey and 'kicked' against God, that is, became disobedient and provoking. The ass, too, got fat on the boys' bread portions and 'in the fullness of bread', which sounds like a travesty of the biblical *fullness of heart, fullness of joy*, he kicked, literally, with his hoofs. Thus Lamb expresses with the nine word *waxing . . . bread* both the greediness and the stupid 'ingratitude' of the 'foolish beast'. There is a comic incongruity between the two parts, the chosen people and the 'pampered' ass whose misbehaviour is juxtaposed; the pejorative associations of the allusion add up to the total effect of absurd humour.

The animal's vocal powers call forth another biblical parallel, and the short step from Moses to Joshua, his assistant and heir, makes the association of thought very clear. In the sixth chapter of the book of Joshua, the Lord tells Joshua in what manner to attack Jericho, and the fall of the town is foretold.

> (4) And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of *ram's horns*; and the seventh day [. . .] the priests shall *blow with their trumpets*. (5) And it shall come to pass, that when *they make a long blast with the ram's horn* [. . .] the wall of the city shall fall down flat.[41]

One notices here how single words from the biblical text, when appearing in Lamb's, serve to confirm the connection between the fall of Jericho and the end of the ass's adventure. When Lamb writes that the ass *blew such a ram's horn blast* his words recall *the ram's horn* and *the priests shall blow* in Joshua 6.4, *they make a long blast with the ram's horn* in 6.5, and again, almost verbatim in 6.8 and *passim*. Anyway, his contemporary readers could not fail to recognize the allusion The association with the fall of Jericho implies nothing bad *in se*; the equaling of the ass with Joshua's people is, if anything, flattering to the animal; but Lamb manages to turn the table at the ass (and his master, who could not control it): the ass destroyed his own Jericho. The contrast between the high context in Joshua and the low context in this particular incident in CH35 contributes to the humorous effect.

When telling the end of the story – the ass was sent to Smithfield, to be slaughtered, no doubt, - Lamb resorts to terminology borrowed from his classical studies.

> The client was dismissed, with certain attentions, to Smithfield; but I never understood that the patron underwent any censure on this occasion.[42]

[40] *Deuteronomy* 32:10-15.
[41] My italics.
[42] *Elia*, 15:5-6.

The Roman *cliens* was a man of more or less humble plebeian origin, whose life and interests were looked after by his *patronus*, a patrician; the client, in his turn, had to assist his patron on certain occasions and perform a number of different duties. Even the word *censure* has a classical ring to it; here it is used in the already then obsolete meaning of 'condemnatory judgment'.[43]

This tangled web of allusions, biblical, classical, literary, is cut short with a very short sentence, perhaps conveying some criticism of a period in Christ's Hospital's history which 'Mr. Lamb' had praised in RoCH.[44]

> This was in the stewardship of L.'s admired Perry.[45]

Without another word Lamb here sums up his present assessment of Mr. Perry, and its finality seems rather impressive. Perhaps this impact ought to be somewhat modified by the circumstance that there may be here another echo of Lamb's classical schooling, an attempt at imitating Greek prose style. When Herodotos and Thucydides, the Greek historians, changed the subject of their exposition, they did so with a short transitional phrase that to the modern reader often has the character of a rather impressive summing-up. There was no such intended emphasis in the transitional phrase in classical Greek.[46] It is, however, not improbable that Lamb was influenced by the Greek usage. Though he was never elevated to the status of a Grecian, he studied some Greek at Christ's.

The whole story about the ass in the dormitory is said to be cock-and-bull story of Lamb's invention, but as Lucas remarks 'it has the air of being true'.[47] Anyway, exemplifying what could pass unpunished under Mr. Perry's regime, it serves to modify the maybe too benevolent picture of this steward which the reader is presented with in RoCH.

> It is a pleasure to me even now to call to mind his portly form, the regal awe of which he always contrived to inspire, in spite of a tenderness and even weakness of nature that would have enfeebled the reins of discipline in any other master; [. . .] He had his faults, with which we had nothing to do; but with all his faults, indeed, Mr. Perry was a most extraordinary creature.[48]

The next short paragraph, which deals with another instance of abuse under Mr. Perry's slack regime (Lamb uses the understatement '*facile* administration'), is another example of the tightly woven texture of Lamb's prose. He shows his sleight-of-hand in making the two layers of RoCH and CH35 merge into one another, and in letting Elia argue somewhat ironically with L.[amb] the 'connoisseur'. The subject is serious enough; the food intended for the boys was eaten by their nurses.

[43] The last entrance for this meaning in *OED* is from 1727 (Swift).
[44] *Misc*., 144.
[45] *Misc*., 15:15-6.
[46] See 'Grekisk och modern prosastil' in Wifstrand, *Tider och stilar*, Lund 1944, p. 15.
[47] *Elia*, 318.
[48] *Misc*., 141.

> These things were daily practiced in that magnificent apartment, which L. (grown connoisseur since, we presume) praises so highly for the grand paintings 'by Verrio, and others', with which it is 'hung round and adorned'.[49]

The words within quotation allude to a line in RoCH, where Mr. Lamb talked about the

> stately dining-hall, hung round with pictures by Verrio, Lely, and others, one of them surpassing in size and grandeur almost every other in the kingdom[50]

omitting, though, to mention that the boys sat hungry in this splendid dining-hall. The grand Verrio picture was, says Mr. Lamb in a footnote,

> representing James the Second on his throne, surrounded by his courtiers, (all curious portraits), receiving the mathematical pupils at their annual presentation, a custom still kept up on New-year's-day at Court.[51]

The 'mathematical pupils' were the same Blue Coats as those mentioned in the next sentence in CH35.

> But the sight of sleek well-fed boys in the pictures was, at that time, I believe, little consolatory to him, or us, the living ones, who saw the better part of our provisions carried away before our faces by harpies; and ourselves reduced (with the Trojan in the hall of Dido)
>
> To feed our mind with idle portraiture.[52]

By separating the last line typographically Lamb signals that there is here a true allusion to an underlying text. 'The Trojan in the hall' is of course Aeneas in Dido's temple admiring the pictures the theme of which was the Trojan war. In a modern translation Virgil's

> Sic ait atque *animum pictura pascit inani*
> Multa gemens, largoque umectat flumine vultum.

runs

> He broke off
> *To feast his eyes on a mere image*
> Sighing often, cheeks grown wet with tears,[53]

However, still closer to Lamb's choice of words is Dryden's translation. He says that Aeneas

[49] *Elia*, 15:11-14.
[50] *Misc*., 140:44-141:1.
[51] *Misc*., 141.
[52] *Elia*, 15:14-20.
[53] *Aeneid* I, 464-5. Translation by Robert Fitzgerald, Penguin 1983, p. 20. My italics.

With an empty picture fed his mind.[54]

In a way, the boys watching a painting showing scenes from their own life, mirror the metapoetic scene when Virgil makes Aeneas halt and with tears in his eyes regard and live over again the battle of Troy. Naturally, a boy would gather little comfort from dining in a magnificent hall while regarding blue-coats of an earlier generation in such a doubly exalted position, when the grim reality was of a nature to remind him of what he used to read about in his Latin school-book. But the grown man could see and appreciate the rather harsh humour in the situation.

Furthermore, there can be no doubt that Lamb is thinking of Virgil when he likens the nurses, who were probably nothing worse than underpaid, underfed, and overworked servant girls, to thieving harpies. And the harpies appeared first in Roman literature with Virgil, who borrowed the description of the harpies from Apollonios Rhodios' *Argonautica*. Before the harpies appeared at the Strophades, the islands where Aeneas and his comrades met them, they had been sent by the gods to swoop down on one king Phineus and snatch the food from his table; later they were driven from there by the Argonauts. The food-snatching seems to have grown into a habit with them, and etymologically the Greek word for harpies means 'snatchers'. In some of the best known lines in the *Aeneid* the harpies are described in horrid detail.

> tristius haud illis monstrum, nec saevior ulla
> pestis et ira deum Stygiis sese extulit undis.
> virginei volucrum vultus, foedissima ventris
> proluvies uncaeque manus et pallida semper
> ora fame.[55]

Lucas refers to another instance further on in the same song (v. 247-58), where Celano, the head harpy, curses Aeneas and threatens the Trojans with a famine which will make them eat their tables for want of food, but these lines seem less to the point than those which I quote.[56]

When the Trojans had landed at the Strophades, they slaughtered some unguarded cattle and goats, sacrificed to the gods, and settled down to a sumptuous feast on the shore.

> at subitae horrifico lapsu de montibus adsunt
> Harpyiae et magnis quatiunt clangoribus alas,
> diripiuntque dapes [. . .][57]

[54] Derocquigny, *Charles Lamb, Sa vie et ses oeuvres*, Lille 1904, p. 380.

[55] No wiler monstrosity than they, no pest more atrocious
Did ever the wrath of god conjure up out of hell's swamp.
Bird-bodied, girl-faced things they are; abominable
Their droppings, their hand are talons, their faces haggard with hunger
Insatiable. *Aeneid* III, 214-8. Transl. by C. Day Lewis, *The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil*, London OUP (1966), 1974.

[56] *Elia*, 318. Lucas here mentions that Lamb makes the same allusion in 'Grace before Meat' and draws attention to the fact that it appears close to a reference to Jeshurun waxing fat.

[57] But the next moment, we hear a hoarse vibration of wing-beats –
The Harpies are on us, horribly swooping down from the mountains.
They tear the banquet to pieces [. . .] *Aeneid* III, 225-8. Transl. By Lewis.

The two allusions to the *Aeneid* seem to illustrate different aspects of the scenes in the dining hall: the food being carried away from the boys and the picture of former glories among Blue Coats mocking their present comrades. As Virgil was one of those classical authors that were studied most intensely at Christ's,[58] the frame of reference is very apt, and the associations which were brought to Lamb's mind are such as might have come to the boys themselves when turning their eyes from the rifled tables and the 'harpies' to Verrio's 'grand painting'. Again the reader notices how tightly the text holds together: one Virgilian association spills over into another, and the latter association picks up the thread left hanging from Lamb's reference to the earlier essay, RoCH.

The passage is also an example of how Lamb could employ allusions in a manner quite distinguished from, for instance, Hazlitt, who used them *instead of* expressions of his own making. Lamb, now, first tells the story straightforwardly in some seven lines. Then the story is retold, illuminated and tightened by the two Virgilian allusions.

The food was not only to some degree insufficient; a part of it was also, though nutritional, shunned because the 'young palates' disliked, even hated it. Mentioning the fact in RoCH, Lamb quoted the boy's loathing of 'the fat of certain boiled meats' as an example of 'supererogatory penances' and 'selfdenying ordinances'.[59] In CH35 Lamb is more openly honest about the so-called gags: 'these unctuous morsels' were considered 'detestable':"

> L. has recorded the repugnance of the school to *gags*, or the fat of fresh beef boiled; and sets it down to some superstition. But these unctuous morsels are never grateful to young palates (children are universally fat-haters) and in strong, coarse, boiled meats, *unsalted*, are detestable.[60]

And whereas, in RoCH, the boys' attitude to the gags is mentioned merely as a specimen of their 'peculiarly tender and apprehensive' sense of what was right and wrong, Lamb, in CH35, takes the gag as the starting-point for the story about an awkward, unprepossessing lad, whose manner at the dinner table made him the object of suspicious attention.

> A *gag-eater* in our time was equivalent to a *goul* [sic], and held in equal
> detestation. ----suffered under the imputation.
> ---- 'Twas said
> He ate strange flesh.[61]

The anonymous, supposed gag-eater collected and stowed away what was left of the 'disreputable morsels'; no one saw him eat them, but he was suspected of devouring them on the sly, at night.

> He was watched, but no traces of such midnight practices were discoverable. Some reported, that on leave-days, he had been seen to carry out of bounds a large blue check handkerchief, full of something. This then must be the accursed thing.[62]

[58] Barnett, *op. cit.* p. 222.
[59] *Misc*., 142. *Cf* also above p. 3.
[60] *Elia*, 15:21-25.
[61] *Elia*, 15 and 318. Lucas draws attention to the fact that Dickens tells a similar story in *David Copperfield*.

As he was believed to sell the gags to beggars, the other boys sent him to Coventry. The icy brutality of their behaviour is mirrored in a series of short, almost abrupt sentences.

> Some said he sold it to beggars. This belief generally prevailed. He went about moping. None spoke to him. No one would play with him. He was excommunicated; put out of the pale of the school. He was too powerful a boy to be beaten, but he underwent every mode of negative punishment, which is more grievous than many stripes. Still he persevered.[63]

The conclusion of the story is that he was observed handing over the gags to a poor couple, who on closer investigation turned out to be his own parents, obviously belonging to 'the very lowest classes'. The filial piety was considered praiseworthy: the parents were supported financially, the boy himself was suitably rewarded while his school fellows had to listen to 'the lesson which the steward read upon RASH JUDGMENT'.[64]

The episode of the supposed gag-eater is interesting both in itself and seen against the background of how relevant circumstances were related in RoCH. Even when discounting something from the later version, it seems much more probable that the boys loathed the boiled, unsalted fat rather than held it in religious awe. Two allusions serve to stress the horror and repulsion with which this 'food' was regarded. The first one is separated from the text typographically.

> 'Twas said
> He ate strange flesh.

The words, though here changed from the second to the third person, are Octavianus Caesar's bitter complaint over Antony's changed behaviour. They are directed to the absent Antony, who, once during a campaign, had endured and fought against severe famine,

> With patience more
> than savages could suffer, Thou didst drink
> The stale of horses [. . .]
> The barks of tress thou browsed. On the Alps
> It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
> Which some did die to look on. And all this
> [. . .]
> Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek

[62] *Elia*, 15:36-40.
[63] *Elia*, 15:41-16:2.
[64] The perplexity of 'the sons of respectable parents (*cf* above p. ??) when confronted with real poverty shows that the criticism leveled at the governors of Christ's Hospital for having deviated from the founders' intentions when recruiting new Blue Coats was not entirely unfounded. – The end of the story is not entirely happy, though. Its selfdenying hero had no bright future ahead; besides having 'a cast in his eye, not at all calculated to conciliate prejudice', he was at a later stage seen 'carrying a baker's basket', a sure indication of social decline.

So much as lanked not.[65]

When seen in its Shakespearian context, the allusion gives gruesome proportions to the horridness of the gags. There are both parallels and disparities: both Antony and the alleged gag-eater were victims of hunger but whereas Antony showed his heroic qualities in eating even the 'strange flesh' in order to sustain the hardships of the campaign, the Blue Coat did not allay *his* hunger with *his* strange flesh, the gags, but saved it for what he thought better use. The other boys, however, were said to abstain from eating the unsalted, boiled fat for religious reasons; it was an example of the 'ceremonial observances' mentioned in RoCH and the eating of the gags was forbidden with 'more than Judaic rigour'.[66]

The horror it inspired serves as a connecting link to the next allusion connected with the gags:

This then must be the accursed thing.

It is not quite certain what the accursed thing really was, only that it was something that Joshua warned his people against before the fall of Jericho. Perhaps it was the spoils in general—*Joshua* 6-7 seems to point that way—and it was a capital offence to touch it.

> And [. . .] Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. And the city shall be accursed, even it and all that are therein, to the Lord: [. . .] And Ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing [. . .].
>
> But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan [. . .] took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel.[67]

The story of the anonymous offender at Christ's offers an analogy to the story of Achan, who by taking the accursed thing brought upon himself and Israel the anger of God and had to be punished. He who took the accursed thing at Christ's, the gags, had ruined the good name of the schoolboys and was turned out of the community: 'he was excommunicated; put out of the pale of the school', a punishment almost as sever as Achan's. But the parallel ends here: the misjudged boy, who had not in fact eaten of the accursed thing, reaped virtue's reward and his parents' distress was relieved. And again the reader is struck by the discrepancy between the low context of the episode of the gag-eater and the high context of the fall of Jericho and Achan's trespassing.

Occupying two and a half pages in the very middle of the essay, an account of punishments for lesser and greater offences forms the darkest chapter in Lamb's 'history' of Christ's Hospital. With the words 'I was a hypochondriac lad' he begins describing the different punishments

[65] *Antony and Cleopatra*, I.iv.60-62, 66-68, 71-72. Here Shakespeare leans on Plutarch: 'and moreover it is reported, that even as they passed the Alpes, they did eate the barks of trees, and such beasts, as never man tasted of their flesh'.
[66] *Cf* above, p. ??.
[67] *Joshua*, 6:16-18 and 7:1.

which he had witnessed being meted out to less fortunate boys. The chastisements were of three degrees according to the severity of the offence. A first offender, a boy who had run away, was put in fetters; this was what the seven-year-old Charles Lamb had seen on his very first day at school. For the second offence, the nature of which is not mentioned in the essay, the culprit could be put in solitary confinement both day and night in 'little, square Bedlam cells, where a boy could just lie at his length upon straw and a blanket'. In a footnote to the essay, Lamb gives the doubtful credit for having invented the 'dungeons' to a former steward, John Howard, whose statue is in St. Paul's Cathedral. Lamb says that he '(saving the reverence due to Holy Paul) [. . .] could willingly spit upon his statue'. In the *London Magazine* the footnote ended differently: 'Methinks I could willingly spit upon his stony gaberdine', words that seem to echo a line in *The Merchant of Venice*:

> You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
> And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine.[68]

For some reason Lamb changed the wording of the note before the essay was reprinted, but there remains enough of the matrix to convey to the sensitive reader the aura of contempt that clings to Shylock. For Howard, Lamb had nothing but dislike.

The punishment for the third and last offence was expulsion, and it was surrounded by rites of such cruelty, mental and physical, that Lamb's associations to the atrocities of the Spanish Inquisition seem quite appropriate. The final act took place in the hall; with pointed irony Elia calls it 'L.'s favourite state-room' as if wishing to alienate himself from his former ego.

> The culprit, who had been a third time an offender, and whose expulsion was at this time irreversible, was brought forth, as at some solemn *auto da fe*, arrayed in uncouth and most appalling attire – all trace of his late 'watchet weeds' carefully effaced, he was exposed in a jacket, resembling those which London lamp-lighters formerly delighted in, with a cap of the same. The effect of this divestiture was such as the ingenious devisers of it could have anticipated. With his pale and frighted features, it was as if some disfigurements in Dante had seized upon him. In this disguisement he was brought into the hall (*L.'s favourite state-room*), where awaited him the whole number of his school-fellows, whose joint lessons and sports he was thenceforth to share no more; the awful presence of the steward, to be seen for the last time; of the executioner beadle [. . .]; and of two faces more, of direr import, because never but in these extremities visible. These were governors; two of them [. . .] were always accustomed to officiate at these *Ultima Supplicia*; not to mitigate (so at least we understood it), but to enforce the uttermost stripe. [. . .] The scourging was, after the old Roman fashion, long and stately. The lictor accompanied the criminal around the hall. We were generally [. . .] too faint [. . .] to make accurate report with our eyes of the degree of corporal suffering inflicted. Report, of course, gave out the back knotty and livid. After scourging, he was made over, in his *San Benito*, to his friends, if he had any [. . .] or to his parish officer [. . .].
>
> These solemn pageantries were not played off so often as to spoil the general mirth of the community.[69]

[68] *The Merchant of Venice* I.iii.109.

Of course one wonders what made a boy risk incurring such punishments, at the same time losing all opportunity of further education, and also what made the school authorities inflict cruel bodily chastisement on the delinquent as if expulsion from school were not in itself enough. The vagueness seems intentional and leaves it to the reader to imagine what the crime was. Beside lying and theft there were things so bad that they could not be put into words.

Lamb does not question the circumstances; he merely reports and mentions his abhorrence. His way of coming to grips with all too grim reality was, it seems, to keep aloof from it by exaggerating it further. The use of the expression *auto da fe* (Spanish for 'act of faith') would signify that the 'criminals' at Christ's were devoid of real guilt as were the victims of the Inquisition; *their* yellow dress was called *San Benito* and this is the name that Lamb borrows to describe the ex-Blue-Coat's 'uncouth and most appalling attire'. The boy's imminent social degradation is also hinted at through the comparison with the discarded dress of lamp-lighters.

That the boy knew what was coming to him was shown by 'his pale and frighted features', the memory of which made the adult Lamb think of the 'disfigurements in Dante', probably those found in *Inferno*, Cantos 28-30. Dante himself says that he cannot tell of what he saw there, in the ninth and tenth chasms of the eighth circle, where the 'sowers of scandal and schism' are being punished.

> e tutti gli altri, che tu vedi qui,
> seminator di scandalo e di schisma
> fur vivi, e paro son fessi cosi.[70]

Here the unhappy beings, in life acting as subversive elements, now with bodies split open from the chin 'infin dove si trulla' (28:34), with pierced throats and cut-off hands and noses, constitute, according to Elia, suitable comparisons to those bad boys, whose misdemeanour and 'sowing of scandal' had made them unfit for the society of the Blue Coats.

This fact was further emphasized by the loss of their outward dignity, the blue coats, with which they were clothed on being accepted at Christ's. To 'be clothed' was synonymous with entering the school. Here 'blue coats' is replaced with 'watchet weeds', an expression identified by Lucas as probably borrowed from vv. 67-68 of Collins' 'Ode to Manners'.

> [, , ,] him, whom Seine's blue nymphs deplore,
> In watchet weeds on Gallia's shore.[71]

With his choice of words Lamb stresses the venerable status of the dress, as the words *weeds* (or *weed*) signifies 'a garment [. . .] distinctive of a person's sex, profession, state of life', or 'defensive covering, armour, mail' (*OED*). The distinguishing or protective garments, a symbol of the boy's former status, had now been taken from him, and he was left unprotected and exposed to cruel secular punishment. The grave formality of the ceremony is expressed with the word *divestiture*, which draws a parallel to such priests as were defrocked for misdemeanour, a

[69] *Elia*, 17:8-18:1.
[70] *Inferno*, Canto 28:34-36.
[71] The man whom the nymphs deplored on Gallia's shore is Le Sage, the author of *Gil Blas*, who had then died.

thought which is close at hand when one considers how much the long blue coat resembles a clergyman's dress.

From the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, Elia takes the reader via Dante's *Inferno* further back to ancient Rome. The allusion in this paragraph to Roman jurisdiction is factual and perhaps literary, too. *Ultima Supplicia*, Latin for the last, the most extreme punishment, was the death penalty. The connection with classical times is furthermore strengthened when the beadle is called *lictor* which was how the Roman policeman-executioner was styled. Also, the scourging was said to be 'after the Roman fashion, long and stately'. It is highly probable that Lamb and his school-fellows had seen similar expressions while reading Caesar's *De Bello Civili* or some other source.[72] What he says about 'the old Roman fashion' might refer to *supplicium antiqui moris* which implies scourging followed by beheading, another example of Elian school-boy exaggeration.

With all due consideration paid to the hyperbole in the presentation, Elia cannot have exaggerated the factual circumstances. Had this been the case, he would have been contradicted, but no such protests are known.[73]

After this dire exposition Lamb seems anxious to stress the brighter side of life at Christ's:

> We had plenty of exercise and recreation *after* school hours; and, for myself, I must confess, that I was never happier, than *in* them.[74]

While the description of the darker aspects of life at Christ's Hospital is at the same time revealing and somber, the three pages on the teachers Field and Boyer are the wittiest and most interesting, sparkling with lively temperament and thronged with felicitous expressions. A large group of allusions, in fact the largest in this essay, is found within the portraits of the kind and inefficient Field and the awe-inspiring and efficient Boyer. The latter was mentioned in RoCH as an 'excellent Upper Grammar Master' and 'a disciplinarian'.[75] Much admiration was mingled with the horror Boyer inspired, and the doubtful praise bestowed on Field was tinged with scoffing.

Lamb claims to have had 'the good fortune' to be a member of Field's 'portion' of the school, but besides the circumstantial evidence that the liveliness of Boyer's portrait shows that it was drawn from life, there is proof of Lamb having been Boyer's pupil in an MS book that Boyer kept from 1783 to 1799. Here those of his scholars who excelled themselves (and they were mainly so-called 'Grecians') were allowed to enter diverse compositions, sixty-five in all. Among those in verse is 'Mille Viae Mortis', a poem of no particular merit by Lamb.[76]

The boys who were intended for the University were placed in the grammar-school; their eventual fate was to take holy orders (though there were exceptions, *e.g.*, Coleridge.) Those in the upper forms were called Grecians and Deputy Grecians. According to Wordsworth, 'Lamb

[72] E.g.: Itaque se victos confiteri; orare atque obsecrare, si quis locus misericordiae relinquatur, ne ad ultimum supplicium progredi necesse habeat. (*Bell. Civ.* 1,84) (And so they confessed themselves beaten: they prayed and beseeched, if any room for compassion was left that he [Caesar] should not think it necessary to proceed to the extreme of punishment.)

[73] Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb*, p. 41.

[74] *Elia*, 18:1-3.

[75] *Cf* above p. 3.

[76] *Life*, p. 66. Though the title is in Latin, meaning 'The Thousand Ways to Death', the author describes in English a dreamed visit to the 'King of Terrors' in 'Death's dark court'.

was a good Latin scholar and would probably have gone to college upon one of the school foundations but for the impediment in his speech'.[77] While his stammer put a stop to every hope of a career within the church, Lamb was spared being placed in the Writing-school at Christ's, the usual school for a boy intended for commerce.[78] It remained a source of melancholy happiness to remember that he was once a Deputy Grecian; as late as in 1831, when he had retired from East India House, situation in Leadenhall Street, he writes to George Dyer, who was a Grecian before Lamb entered Christ's:

> I don't know how it is, but I keep my rank in fancy still since school days. I can never forget I was a Deputy Grecian! And writing to you or to Coleridge, besides affection, I feel a reverential deference as to Grecians still [. . .] Alas! what am I know? what is a Leadenhall clerk, or India pensioner, to a Deputy Grecian? How art thou fallen, O Lucifer![79]

The timetable for the two higher classes at Christ's in the 1830s, recorded in Trollope's history of Christ's Hospital, was, with little variation, the same as Boyer had used. The morning lessons of the Deputy Grecians could contain Homer, Virgil, or Horace 'by heart, Greek Testament ex tempore, Cicero, Sallust, Xenophon, Demosthenes, or Greek or Latin grammar. In the afternoon Greek or Hebrew grammar alternated with Mathematics or Geography but also with Horace or 'Poetic Recitation'. Exercises comprised translation into Latin or Greek. The Grecians' lessons were, of course, even more advanced.[80]

It may thus be assumed with certainty that Lamb, for some time at least, benefited from Boyer's tuition, but it is equally certain that for the main part Field was his teacher in the Lower Grammar School. If Lamb's picture of Field is a true one, and it is corroborated by Leigh Hunt's, it is a wonder that the boys learnt anything under such a master. He was characterized not only by an unfamiliar mildness, which made him shun the rod, but also by a 'handsome incompetence for his situation'. He used to bear 'his cane as if it were a lily'.[81]

> We talked and did just what we pleased and nobody molested us. We carried an accidence, or a grammar, for form; but, for any trouble it gave us, we might take two years in getting through the verbs deponent, and another two in forgetting all that we had learned about them. There was now and then the formality of saying a lesson, but if you had not learned it, a brush across the shoulders (just enough to disturb a fly) was the sole remonstrance. Field never used the rod; and in truth he wielded the cane with no great good will – holding it 'like a dancer'. It looked in his hands rather like an emblem than an instrument of authority; and an emblem, too, he was ashamed of.[82]

[77] *Ibid*., p. 69.
[78] Barnett, *op. cit*. p. 112. 'Indeed, if Lamb had been subjected to the curriculum of the Commercial School at that formative and impressionable time of childhood, he might never have come to write his famous essays'.
[79] *Letters*, III:305-6.
[80] William Trollope, *A History of the Royal Foundation of Christ's Hospital*. London 1834, p. 183.
[81] *Life*, p. 64. The description is Hunt's.
[82] *Elia*, 18:11-20.

Here Lamb makes a joke of their grammar studies, punning on the words: the grammar book, *accidence*, which is about forms, was carried 'for form' as if for form's sake only; what the boys learnt none too actively and hastily forgot is exemplified by *verba deponentia*, which are passive in form though active in meaning (and the term *deponentia* is from the Latin verb meaning 'lay down', 'put away'!); finally, 'the saying of a lesson' was a mere 'formality'. What ought to be considered a good thing in a teacher, a reluctance to use the cane, is seen as another proof of inefficiency. The words within quotation marks allude to a line in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

> He at Philippi kept
> His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
> The lean and wrinkled Cassius . . .[83]

'He' is Antony's former ally Octavius/Octavianus, the future emperor Augustus, whom Antony charges with unheroic behaviour: he had not used his sword but worn it sheathed like a dancer's rapier, leaving the killing to Antony. Wearing the cane in the same way, Field was equally inefficient, implicitly leaving the necessary 'killing' to Boyer, the school's sever Antony.

Field came and went as he pleased—

> And when he came, it made no difference to us – he had his private room to retire to, the short time he staid, to be out of the sound of our noise. Our mirth and uproar went on. We had classics of our own, without being beholden to 'insolent Greece or haughty Rome', that passed current among us – Peter Wilkins – the Adventures of the Hon. Capt. Robert Boyle – the Fortunate Blue Coat Boy – and the like.[84]

The adventures the boys liked to read were thus put on par with Shakespeare's works and made the classical Greek and Roman authors superfluous. Again words within quotation marks point to another text, this time to Ben Johnson's 'To the memory of My Beloved, the Author, Mr William Shakespeare'.[85]

> To hear thy buskin tread
> And shake a stage: or when thy socks are on,
> Leave thee alone, for the comparison
> Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughty Rome
> Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.

Field's pupils, who from their teacher had poor tutoring in Latin and Greek, had to resort to seeking compensation in other interests among which were sound English authors. There is of course much conscious irony at his own expense when Elia, indirectly, compares the objects of his and the other boys' youthful literary interest with Shakespeare. The works mentioned are either very minor classics or 'sheer hackwork'.

[83] *Antony and Cleopatra*, III.xi.35-37. Both Derocquigny and Lucas noticed a fondness in Lamb for the expression 'like a dancer', which he also used about Mrs Battle who did not hold her cards 'like a dancer'.
[84] *Elia*, 18:23-30.
[85] *Elia*, 319.

Still humorously exaggerating Lamb gives fine names to the boys' classical games and entertainments, calling them 'mechanic or scientific operations' or 'studying the art military'. They had

> A hundred other such devices to pass away the time – mixing the useful with the agreeable – as would have made the souls of Rousseau and John Locke chuckle to have seen us.[86]

Rousseau and Locke advocated educational systems which followed the Horatian maxim of 'mixing the useful with the agreeable': *omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*. It is doubtful whether Lamb himself could have 'chuckled' when recalling the reckless 'studies' under Field, had he not profited from Boyer's instruction, too.

As the Upper and Lower Grammar School shared the same room—'an imaginary line only divided their bounds'[87]—Boyer, the Upper Grammar Master, could not help knowing what was going on. Lamb suspected, he says in CH35, that Boyer had private reasons for refraining from meddling, reasons that were not entirely creditable to him.

> How things were suffered to go on thus, I cannot guess. Boyer, who was the proper person to have remedied these abuses, always affected, perhaps felt, a delicacy in interfering in a province not strictly his own. I have not been without my suspicions, that he was not altogether displeased at the contrast we presented to his end of the school. We were a sort of Helots to his young Spartans.[88]

This factual allusion was very aptly culled from the sphere of classical studies. The comparison is also neat: the noisy Lower Grammar boys were like Helots, Sparta's serfs, who were a constant threat, always ready to revolt.[89] Lamb, however, seems to have another aspect of the Helots in mind: according to popular belief, they served, as a consequence of their unbridled behaviour, as *exempla*: Spartan parents used to exhibit to their sons drunken Helots or slaves.[90] This observation of Lamb's, though clothed in an innocent allusion, shed a rather unpleasant light on Boyer's character.

If Field was too slack, Boyer must have created an atmosphere that ought to have been little more profitable for studies. When the Upper Grammar Master hovered over his Spartans, they unwittingly made the Helots of the Lower Grammar School feel that the difference between the classes might be favourable to *them*.

> While his pale students were battering their brains over Xenophon and Plato, with a silence as deep as that enjoined by the Samite, we were enjoying ourselves at our ease in our little Goshen. We saw a little into the secrets of his discipline, and the prospect did but the more reconcile us to our lot.

[86] *Elia*, 18:34-37.
[87] *Elia*, 18:4-5.
[88] *Elia*, 19:2-8.
[89] *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. 'Helots'.
[90] *Elia*, 320.

The Samite, that is the man from the Greek island Samos, was Pythagoras, the philosopher and mathematician who made his students remain silent for five years, listening to his lectures, before they were allowed to speak themselves. In spite of the fantastic exaggeration the allusion conveys, through the comparison Pythagoras/Boyer, a semi-reluctant compliment to the exacting master. The opposite could be said about the biblical allusion to Goshen. 'Our little Goshen' sounds innocent and idyllic enough, but when seen in its biblical context, the name's implications are horrific in respect to Boyer's part of the classroom. The name appears in the *Exodus* in connection with the visitations of Pharao.

> And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up [. . .] and stand before Pharao [. . .] and say unto him [. . .] Let my people go, that they may serve me. Else if thou wilt not let my people go, behold I will send swarms of flies upon thee [. . .] and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. And I shall sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there [. . .].
> And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail [. . .], and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt [. . .]. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.[91]

The Egyptian thunder is also mirrored in CH35 and spills over into another biblical allusion.

> His thunders rolled innocuous for us; his storms came near, but never touched us; contrary to Gideon's miracle, while all around were drenched, our fleece was dry.[92]

If Field's department was a Goshen, it follows that Boyer's sphere equals Pharao's country, fly-infested and afflicted by thunderstorms. To a late generation that has almost completely lost touch with biblical history, it is hard to imagine how such an innuendo could work, but it must be assumed that Lamb's reading public knew their Bible and could absorb the context, be it more or less unconsciously. Anyway, there would hardly have been anyone who would not have equated Goshen with a peaceful resort.

Gideon's miracle is told in *Judges* 6, and if Lamb had not explicitly referred to Cowley in a footnote, there would not have been any need to go further than to the biblical source.

> And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou will save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.[93]

This was Gideon's first miracle; he then asked God for another.

[91] *Exodus*, 8:20-22 och 9:32-26.
[92] *Elia*, 19:16-18.
[93] *Judges*, 6:36-38.

> [. . .] let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.[94]

What happened in Field's part of the classroom was the *opposite* of the *first* miracle; none of Boyer's thunderstorms poured down over them—their fleece was dry.

The reading of Lamb's text is indeed rendered more difficult by his footnote, *Cowley*. Lucas points at the poem in question, 'The Complaint', and even quotes a few lines from stanza seven, but he seems to have missed two points. First, the miracle mentioned in Cowley's poem is the one where the fleece is left dry, and Lamb talks of a case where all was left dry '*contrary* to Gideon's miracle'. Secondly, what Cowley describes in 'The Complaint' is the disappointment of a poet whose 'Muse's fleece' alone was left dry when the returning King's bounty dropped on everything else. The complaining poet suffers in a state of barrenness, where everyone but he has benefited from the King's 'enriching moysture'.

The instance exemplifies how Lamb could use the original text and bend it to his own purpose, borrowing here a little and there a little. The substance of Gideon's miracle is that God could work wonders to sustain his faithful people. In he essay the parallel is limited to showing how Field's pupils remained 'safe' from interfering from Boyer's side, a momentary relief of dubious value, it seems. The dropping of Cowley's name is somewhat mystifying, since the biblical text must have been equally if not better known, but it is futile to look for a hidden meaning in it, as if Boyer's wrath were the 'enriching moysture' and thus a boon to be wished for. It is hardly likely that Lamb, even in retrospect, would have adopted such a dispassionate view.

That the absence of a more rigorous régime was not altogether fortunate was clear to Lamb, though, as is seen from his comparison of the different pupil's attitude towards their masters: while Boyer's boys felt gratitude mixed with terror,

> The remembrance of Field comes back with all the soothing images of indolence, and summer slumbers, and work like play, and innocent idleness, and Elysian exemptions, and life itself a 'playing holiday'.[95]

The mild criticism intimated by the words 'soothing images of indolence' is strengthened (but how delicately!) by the addition of the reference to Prince Hal.

> If all the year were playing holidays,
> To sport would be as tedious as work;
> But when they seldom come, they wished for come
> And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.[96]

In Lamb's text 'playing holidays', especially when coupled with 'Elysian exemptions', seems to have positive connotations only, but once the context is remembered (and it can safely be assumed that Lamb, the eminent Shakespeare critic, remembered it) it becomes difficult to

[94] *Judges*, 6:39.
[95] *Elia*, 19:21-24.
[96] *1 Henry IV*, I.ii.227-230.

overlook the circumstance that the about-to-be-reformed Prince is talking about the evils of eternal holidays, uninterrupted by work.

Summing up the portraits of the two teachers so far, the rather surprising discovery is made that several of the allusions related to Field, though superficially of a favourable nature, have rather doubtful implications. Field's pupils stand out as a fairly wretched bunch, neglected by one master and held in contempt by the other, while the master himself becomes the object of his former pupil's indulgent censure. Thus Lamb belies his own words that he had the 'good fortune' to study under Field. The pattern produced by the blending of positive and negative connotations reflects Field's character with its fusing of good and bad qualities.

The portrait of Boyer, on the other hand, shows an unmitigated tyrant; if the tyrant has a sense of humour it is dark and sarcastic. There is a cluster of allusions on the one and a half pages dealing with Boyer exclusively, none of which favours a pleasant construction. The first is recognized by Lucas as a reminiscence of Virgil.

> Though sufficiently removed from the jurisdiction of Boyer, we were near enough (as I have said) to understand a little of his system. We occasionally heard sounds of the *Ululantes* and caught glances of Tartarus.[97]

Lucas translates 'the *Ululantes*' with the 'howling sufferers', suggesting for a source a single line from Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 557 ('Hence [Tartarus] are clearly heard groanings and the sound of cruel scourge') and leaves it at that. However, the suggestion leads up to an interesting possibility of an underlying stratum forming a much wider context from which several expressions in Lamb's text could be said to rise like just discernible reefs over the sea level. The text I have in mind is, indeed, *Aeneid VI*, though not only v. 557, but some fourteen lines between lines 540 and 559.

> Hic locus est, parties ubi se via findit in ambas.
> dextera quae Ditis magni sub moenia tendit,
> hac *iter Elysium nobis*; at laeva malorum
> exercet poenas at ad impia *Tartara* mittit.
>
> (Here is the place where the roads part in twain;
> there to the right, as it runs under the walls of the great Dis,
> *is our way to Elysium*, but the left
> wreaks the punishment of the wicked and sends them to pitiless *Tartarus*.)
>
> *respicit Aeneas subito* et sub rupe sinistra
> moenia lata videt, triplici circumdata muro,
> quae rapidus flammis ambit torrentibut amnis
> *Tartareon Phlegeton*, torquetque sonantia saxa.
> [. . .]
>
> (*Suddenly Aeneas looks back* and under a cliff on the left

[97] *Elia*, 19:25-28.

sees a broad castle, girt with triple wall
and encircled with a rushing flood of torrent flames
Tartareon Phlegeton, that rolls along thundering rocks.)
[. . .]

stat ferrea turris ad auras
tisiphoneque sedens palla succincta cruenta
vestibulum exsomnis servat noctesque diesque.
hinc *exaudiri gemitus*, et *saeva sonare*
verbera, tum stridor ferri tractaeque catenae.
constitut Aeneas *strepituque exterritus* haesit.

(There stands the iron tower soaring high.
And Tisiphone, sitting with bloody pall
keeps sleepless watch o'er the portal day and night
Therefrom *are heard groans* and *sound of savage*
Lash; withal the clank of iron and dragging of chains.
Aeneas stopped, rooted to the spot *in terror of the din*.)[98]

The earlier mentioned 'Elysian exemptions' (see above p. 25), becomes more meaningful when seen as a reflection of *iter Elysium*, 'our way to Elysium'. *Respicit Aeneas subito* could then be echoed by 'caught glances of', since what Aeneas saw was Tartaros, exemplified by 'Tartareon Phlegeton'. These are but two of the noticeable traces of Virgil. Implicitly, the way which did not lead to Elysium, *laeva /via/* led to Boyer's Tartarus. There is no word *ululantes* within the quoted Virgilian verses, but Aeneas heard 'groans', *gemitus*, and 'sound of the savage lash', *saeva sonare verbera* and the young Lamb could have heard the same from Boyer's part of the classroom.

The verb *ululare* also appears elsewhere, though not in the *Aeneid*, in connection with Tisiphone, who is mentioned in the Virgilian context (lines 555 and 571); she was a fury, sometimes acting as a patroness of marriage. Ovid, for instance, says that she shrieked in the bridal chambers, *Tisiphone thalamis ululavit in illis*.[99] The name Tisiphone would supply an admittedly tenuous link between the Tartarean vicinity and the *Ululantes*. The verb *ululare* is found elsewhere in the *Aeneid*, and it is frequent in Latin literature. Pinning down the word *ululantes* to a definite *locus* is neither necessary, nor possible. It is enough to ascertain that it has a Virgilian ring and is an apt designation for the grumbling and lamenting that the boys in Boyer's division gave forth.[100] The general impression evoked by the references to classical Hell, Tartarus, is one of great distress, but the violent exaggeration, underlined by the comparison with Elysium, could but tinge it with humour, which somewhat blunted the edge of the accusation. This was a way for Lamb to handle difficult subjects.

[98] *The Aeneid*, VI. 540-3, 548-551 and 554-559. My italics.
[99] *Heroides*, II, 117.
[100] Some other words in verse 558, *stridor ferri tractaeque catenae*, recall a factual circumstance, relating to the conditions of Hospitallers. As a punishment for 'the first offence' boys were actually put in fetters so the 'clank of iron' was familiar to the boys. *Cf. Elia* 16:32-37.

The awe-inspiring and gruesome master, who demanded clarity and simplicity from his pupils, was himself a poor stylist.[101]

> B. was a rabid pedant. His English style was crampt to barbarism. His Easter anthems (for his duty obliged him to those periodical flights) were grating as scrannel pipes.[102]

The allusion to Milton's *Lycidas*, v. 124, though unmarked by any typographic means, is striking in itself but gains in depth from the underlying significance of the Miltonian context.

> Blind mouth! that scarce themselves know how to hold
> A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least
> That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!
> What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
> And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
> Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;
> The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
> But swoin with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
> Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;[103]

Milton's words are crushing as they stand in the essay, only slightly changed, and the *Lycidas* context fortifies the impression. Milton here accuses the Episcopalian ministers, and the words 'blind mouths' express his contempt for them as unworthy spiritual shepherds; their teaching is without substance, 'lean and flashy songs' and furthermore painful to listen to. It should be borne in mind that the Upper Grammar Master was the *Reverend* James Boyer; Lamb's mind could not have procured for him a more fitting expression than one which would lead the perceptive reader to remember Milton's attack on showy and worthless clerical rhetoric.

The quality of Boyer's sense of humour is exemplified with his appreciation of a Horatian pun on *Rex* and some feeble jokes in two Terentian comedies.

> He would laugh, ay, and heartily, but then it must be at Flaccus's quibble about *Rex* - - or at the *tristis severitas in vultu*, or *inspicere in patinas*, of Terence – thin jests, which at their first broaching could hardly have had *vis* enough to move a Roman muscle.[104]

'Flaccus's quibble about *Rex*' refers to a satire by Horace (here called by his third name) where Rex has the double meaning of a monarch and a private surname. The first Terentian line meant 'puritanic rigour in his countenance' and is found in the comedy *Andria*, where it characterizes a palpable liar; I hazard the guess that the schoolroom tyrant rejoiced at looking at the sullen

[101] Coleridge writes about Boyer in his *Biographia Literaria*: 'In our English compositions (at least for the last three years of our school education), he showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image, unsupported by a sound sense, or where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words. *Lute, harp* and *lyre, Muse, Muses* and *inspirations, Pegasus, Parnassus* and *Hippocrene*, were all an abomination to him. In fancy I can almost hear him now exclaiming, "Haep? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, muse? Your nurse's daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh, aye! the cloister pump, I suppose!"' Qtd. From Lucas, *Elia* 321.
[102] *Elia*, 19:28-30.
[103] *Lycidas*, 119-127.
[104] *Elia*, 19:31-35.

sadness in the boys' faces in front of him. The second Terentian allusion, *inspicere in patinas*, 'to look into the kitchen pans' goes back to the 'funny' incident in *Adelphi*. A father has advised his son 'to look into everybody's live as into a mirror (and follow their examples', and the slave interprets the advice and rephrases it when talking to another slave:

> Postremo tamquam in speculum in patinas, Demea,
> Inspicere iubeo.
>
> (Finally my advice to you, Demea, is to look into your pots
> as into a mirror.)[105]

The related examples of Boyer's sense of humour speak for themselves. Other pupils, for instance Coleridge and Leigh Hunt, confirm that he was unpredictable in his humours.[106] He could make 'a headlong entry into the school room', threaten a boy with a whipping, 'fling back into his lair', and then rush back 'with the expletory yell – "*and I will, too*"'. Lamb says that Boyer 'in his gentler moods' used to read the parliamentary debates and whip a boy at the same time – 'a paragraph and a lash between', and that this was 'when the *rabidus furor* was assuaged'.[107] It is probable, says Lucas, that Lamb had Catullus's *Attis* in mind.

> Piger his labante languore oculos sopor operit:
> Abit in quiete molli rabidus furor animi.
>
> (A heavy sleep falls on their eyes while they are still benumbed.
> And the rabid rage of their mind is assuaged.)

The context of these lines is that Catullus has in the foregoing verses related how Attis, a beautiful youth loved by the Phrygian goddess Cybele, in a fit of frenzy, inspired by Cybele, unsexed himself and consecrated his life to her service. He then roamed the country as a man-woman, until the frenzy, *rabidus furor*, left him and he fell asleep.

The man with a raging temperament inspiring such dreadful associations must have been formidable. 'Once, and but once, the uplifted rod was known to fall ineffectual from his hand.' Elia leaves it to the reader's imagination to make out what the unaccountable 'droll, squinting W-' really was doing when he was

> Caught putting the inside of the master's desk to a use for which the architect had clearly not designed I [and] to justify himself, with great simplicity averred, that *he did not know that the thing had been forewarned.*

Whatever it was, 'remission was unavoidable'. The story comes as a welcome relief. It is another proof of Boyer's eccentricity, if it is not merely a piece of Lamb's invention.

[105] *Elia*, 320; Lucas comments generously on these lines.
[106] Lucas, *Life*, 70-74.
[107] *Elia*, 20:14 och 320.

Elia now refers his readers to what L., that is Mr Lamb of RoCH, had to say about 'B's great merits as an instructor'.[108] Coleridge is said to have praised these, and the future first Bishop of Calcutta, Middleton, here mentioned as 'the author of the Country Spectator', had compared him with 'the ablest teacher of antiquity'. But Elia's last word about Boyer, though on the surface forgiving, form a true *damnatio memoriae*, as he could not

> dismiss him better than with the pious ejaculation of C.[oleridge] – when he heard that his old master was on his death-bed – 'Poor J.B.! – may all his faults be forgiven; and may he be wafted to bliss by little cherub boys, all head and wings, with no *bottoms* to reproach his sublunary infirmities.[109]

The catalogue of Grecians, 'good and sound scholars bred under him [Boyer]', that concludes the essay is, appropriately enough, interspersed with references to Greek, Latin and ecclesiastical writers. Of course two life-long friends had studied *De Amicitia* together: Stevens and T-e succeeded Boyer and Field as Grammar Masters at Christ's. They retired at the same time, or as Elia puts it, laid down their rods, here suitably styled *fasces*, the Roman lictor's symbol of his power to punish:

> What an edifying spectacle did this brace of friends present to those who remembered the anti-socialities of their predecessors! [. . .] Generally arm in arm, these kindly co-adjutors lightened for each other the toilsome duties of their profession, and when, in advanced age, one found it convenient to retire, the other was not long in discovering that it suited him to lay down the fasces also. Oh, it is pleasant, as it is rare, to find the same arm linked in yours at forty, which at thirteen helped it to turn the *Cicero De Amicitia*, or some tale of Antique Friendship, which the young heart even then was burning to anticipate.[110]

Among the allusions proper there is a last Virgilian echo when Elia is talking about the already mentioned Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, Bishop of Calcutta.

> M. is said to bear his mitre high in India, where the *regni novitas* (I dare say) sufficiently justifies the bearing.[111]

The expression *regni novitas* appears in a speech when Dido addresses the Trojans:

> tum breviter Dido vultum demissa profatur
> 'Solvite corde metum, Teucri, secludite curas.

[108] 'He was a disciplinarian, indeed, of a different stamp from him whom I have just described [Mr Perry]; but now the terrors of the rod, and a temper a little too hasty to leave the more nervous of us quite at our ease to do justice to his merits in those days, are long since over, ungrateful were we if we should refuse our testimony to that unwearied assiduity with which he attended to the particular improvement of each of us' (*Misc*., 145:3-9). When Lamb wrote this, Boyer was still alive; he died in 1814.
[109] *Elia*, 20:34-38.
[110] *Elia*, 20-21.
[111] *Elia*, 21:15-17.

res dura etbregni novitas me talia cogunt
moliri et late finis custode tueri.

(Then Dido hung her head and said in a few words:
Oh, Trojan men, don't you be afraid anymore and cast away your cares.
Harsh times and the recent state of the foundation of my kingdom force me
To undertake such enterprises and guard my frontiers far and wide.)[112]

The parallel to Dido, who explains (or excuses) her measures with a reference to the recent date of the foundation of her realm (*regni novitas*), seems to indicate that Middleton, the *first* Bishop of Calcutta, was, or was rumoured to be, a sever spiritual master, perhaps even haughty, bearing 'his mitre high'. No 'humility quite as primitive as that of Jewel or Hooker' (the former once Bishop of Salisbury, the latter the eminent ecclesiastical author)[113] was to be practiced in India, when the newly established bishopric was at stake. Though Lamb here veils his criticism of Middleton in a Virgilian allusion, at least some contemporary readers did read it as criticism of the Bishop, as is apparent from the disapproval expressed in the *Blackwood's Magazine* in November 1820. It mentions Elia's

> often abusive allusions to every individual who had the misfortune of being educated at the same school with himself.[114]

That Middleton was one of those whom *Blackwood's Magazine* had in mind as a target for Elia's 'abusive allusions' is apparent from the May issue in 1821, where the censure of 'Elia's impertinence', which was ascribed to the influence of 'Cockney scribblers', was modified. But his alleged sneer at Middleton was not forgiven.[115]

This is a case when Lamb resorted to an allusion when conveying his opinions. The connecting words, the signal *novitas regni*, were not in themselves offensive, but might and did make perceptive readers remember the context, which put the Bishop of Calcutta on par with the Queen of Carthage in severity and haughtiness, quite opposed to the humility of a Jewel, a Hooker.

Very likely, the *Blackwood's Magazine*'s 'abusive allusions' included the mentioning of, by praeteritio,

poor S--, illfated M--! of these the Muse is silent.
Finding some of Edward's race
Unhappy, pass their annals by.[116]

The text that Lamb alludes to, with a slight travesty of two lines in Prior's *Carmen Saeculare*, provides a striking parallel.

[112] *The Aeneid*, I.561-564.
[113] *Elia*, 21 and 322.
[114] *Elia*, 323. Here *allusion to* does not carry any other meaning than 'mentioning of' or 'reference to'.
[115] *Elia*, 323-4.
[116] *Elia*, 21:24-27.

JANUS, mighty Deity
Be kind; as Thy searching Eye
Does our Modern Story trace
Finding some of STUART's Race
Unhappy, pass Their Annals by:

By 'Edward's race' are meant the boys belonging to the school of Edward's foundation, Christ's Hospital. Prior's *Carmen Saeculare* for the year 1700 was dedicated to King William of Orange. At the same time the poet and diplomatist, who excelled in having a foot in two camps at a time, wanted to heal former wounds caused by the dispute concerning the deposed Stuarts. And he goes on with words that could equally well have bearing on those unhappy members of Edward's race.

No harsh Reflection let Remembrance raise:
Forbear to mention, what Thou canst not praise:

And from thence Lamb proceeds to mentioning those whom he *can* praise. The most eloquent part of this 'catalogue of Grecians' is devoted to an apostrophe of Coleridge.

> Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee – the dark pillar not yet turned – Samuel Taylor Coleridge – Logician, Metaphysician, Bard! – How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, intranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the *speech* and the *garb* of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those days thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar – while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy*![117]

Lamb strikes a melancholy chord when he recalls the image of a youthful and promising Coleridge. The phrase he uses, 'hope like a fiery column before thee – the dark pillar not yet turned' seems to indicate an underlying, meaningful stratum, and one reference leads over to another. The 'fiery column' resembles Moses' pillar of fire which guided the Lord's people.

> And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light . . .[118]

Another association that offers itself is that of *metae*, the turning-points, marked by pillars, at the Roman circus; metaphorically the word was used to indicate that point in man's life when he has turned into the way that leads to death.[119] Thus are united, in the imagery surrounding Coleridge, two of the most important influences in Lamb's mind, the Bible and the Classics.

[117] *Elia*, 21:28-38.
[118] *Exodus* 13, 21. I am indebted to M. Thormählen for this suggestion.
[119] Virgil has, e.g., *met aevi*, *meta ultima*; Ovid has *vitae metam tangere.*

To express Coleridge's excellence, Lamb calls him 'the young Mirandula', thus evoking the memory of Lorenzo di Medici's eminent friend.

The names of the two Neo-platonic philosophers, Jamblichus and Plotinus, call forth the faint echo of a Horatian line. In the first of his 'literary letters', *Epistulae*, Horace mentions an otherwise unknown Titius, who belonged to the future Emperor's literary staff and accompanied Tiberius on a journey to the Orient.

> Quid Titius, Romana brevi venturus in ora?
> Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus,
> fastidiri lacus et rivos ausus apertos.
>
> (What will Titius do, he who soon will be on the lips of the Romans?
> He did not grow pale when drinking at the spring at which Pindar drank,
> And he dared to scorn the open water-tanks and streams.)[120]

Thus Lamb paraphrases, without marking it with any typographic device, a line from Horace, changing *Pindarici fontis . . . haustus* to 'philosophic draughts' and applying it to the philosophers. But Pindar appears in the same sentence though linked with Homer. This passage sheds much light on the nature and intensity of the classical studies at Christ's and also on the art of Lamb's allusive technique.

In paraphrasing a long passage from Fuller's *Worthies*, Lamb compares Coleridge to Ben Johnson in learning while the easily recognized initials of another friend, Charles Valentine Grice, are substituted for Shakespeare's name. The long passage is quoted almost verbatim, which is rather unusual with Lamb.

> Many were the 'wit-combats', (to dally awhile with the words of old Fuller,) between him and C.V.Le G--. 'which two I behold like a Spanish great gallion, and an English man of war; Master Coleridge, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in performances. C.V.L., with the English man of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.[121]

This passage should be compared with the following from Fuller's *Worthies*.

> Many were the wit-combats betwixt him [Shakespeare] and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great gallion, and an English man of war: Master Jonson (like the former), was built far higher in learning, solid, but slow in performances. Shakespeare, with the English man of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.[122]

[120] *Epistulae* I.3.9-11. Lucas stated emphatically that Lamb is thinking of these Horatian lines (*Elia* 322).
[121] *Elia*, 21:39-22:2.
[122] Fuller, *Worthies of Warwickshire*, ed,

Here are exemplified, side by side, two ways in which Lamb could use allusions. In the latter, he cites in the manner of a travesty, in full, almost verbatim and with quotation marks, and even mentions the source, Fuller. In the other passage there is no hint of any other source; the paraphrased text has all but melted into the new context.

The exceptionally beautiful Allen, who, by the time CH35 was written, had been dead for fifteen years, was the next Grecian to be addressed.

> Extinct are those smiles, with that beautiful countenance, with which (for thou wert the *Nireus formosus* of the school), in the days of thy maturer waggery, thou didst disarm the wrath of infuriated town-damsel [. . .][123]

The italicized *Nireus formosus* goes back to the *Iliad*, II.671 ff. In the catalogue of ships Homer apostrophizes him three times in as many consecutive verses, each beginning with his name, Nireus.

> Nireus next, came from Sume with three trim ships;
> Nireus, son of Aglaia and King Charopus;
> Nireus the handsomest Danaan that came to Ilium
> excepting only the flawless son of Peleus.
> And yet he was a weakling and his following was small.

Nireus formosus, Latin for 'handsome Nireus', had probably become almost proverbial. Line 675 comes as somewhat of a surprise, and one wonders whether this testimony about the handsome but weak Greek had bearing on Allen, too. Lucas mentions that Christ's Nireus had died of apoplexy in 1805 'after a varied and not fortunate career'.[124]

After this reference to Homer's catalogue of ships, Lamb brings both his own catalogue of living and dead Grecians and the essay to an end. He mentions some more Grecians only with an initial and a dash and gives a short summary of their lives. Through all his life he kept his poignant admiration for the Grecians, as is testified in the letter to Dyer, quoted above.

It is a true Deputy-Grecian hand that holds the "enfranchised quill" in CH35.[125] Superficially seen, Elia addresses the same audience in the *London Magazine* as Mr. L. had done seven years earlier in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. But *then* the public were aliens, criticizing Christ's Hospital from the outside, and the issue was to defend the old cherished institution. *Now* the former Blue Coat and Deputy-Grecian is speaking to his own compeers, using their initiated language. Another difference is that Lamb no had found a means to talk candidly about delicate things, paradoxically enough using more or less veiled allusions: *sat sapienti*. It is true that the essay can be read in two ways, with or without being familiar with every allusion and their connotations; it makes charming reading without this knowledge, too. Compared to CH35, the earlier RoCH seems rather pedestrian, marching on along the same line. The different points of view in CH35 answer for a greater liveliness and intensity. But first and last, there is in the later

[123] *Elia*, 22:7-10.
[124] *Elia*, 323.
[125] See "Oxford in the Vacation," *Elia*, 8:6. "The enfranchised quill, that has plodded all morning among the cart-rucks of figures and ciphers, frisks and curvets so at its ease over the flowery carpet-ground of a midnight dissertation."

essay a variety in depth; there is an almost constant tension between the surface text and the underlying stratum. Without the allusions, the portraits of the two masters would have been flat and stale; the picture of the boys' lives at Christ's a chamber of horror and privation. Now the created effect is all pervading, redeeming humour.

It is also remarkable how well the reference frame of the allusions fits the world of the former school-boys. The texts they read are brought to mind and made to reinforce and set off in relief what Lamb has to say in his manifold characters.

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Reviews

ROY PORTER. *Madness: A Brief History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. 233, illustrations. ISBN 0-19-280266-6. £11.99 cloth.

JULIA SWINDELLS. *Glorious Causes: the Grand Theatre of Political Change, 1789–1833*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. 202, illustrations. ISBN 0-19-818729-7. £40 cloth.

Before I looked into the late lamented Roy Porter's valuable survey, I had only a sketchiest notion of what may have befallen Mary Lamb had her brother eventually decided to forego a family life to care for her. At the time of her temporary incarceration in the Islington madhouse there were around fifty licensed private asylums in Britain, only a handful of which could be said to have been run as compassionately as the one chosen by Lamb. The most feared, not least by Mary herself, was of course 'Bedlam', but at this time, there were a number of equally monolithic institutions springing up around the edges of London to house the shell-shocked casualties of the war with Napoleon. Madness was very much a 'business' in which the inadequately qualified physician as well as the grossly unqualified amateur could make a great deal of money. Nathaniel Cotton's tiny asylum at St Albans, where William Cowper stayed contentedly for eighteen months, housed no more that half a dozen patients at five guineas a week. Then there was Ticehurst House in Sussex, where residents might live in private houses on the estate, perhaps with a servant. However, the vast public mental hospitals, like Friern Barnet and Colney Hatch, did not come about until after an act of Parliament of 1845 stipulated that public funds be used for the provision of asylums. And yet by 1850 more than half the insane were still in private institutions. Nor, despite the fact that so many establishments were run by physicians, was there any mandatory medical provision until the 1820s. Even if he could have afforded the expense, which he could not, Lamb would have thought deeply before abandoning Mary to the care of even the kindliest of madhouse keepers. We know the choice he made in 1799, but under pressure from his brother John, who urged him to consider his own future, the final decision couldn't have been any easy one to make.

The sort of care and consideration expended on the privileged insane was seen as essential to the healing process. Moreover, such an approach enabled one particular proto-psychiatrist, William Battie, to develop a radical new theory of madness. This was the notion that insanity was not something one was born with—like 'original sin'—and thus incurable—but was the result of events in one's life, and, therefore, treatable. But while in England such enlightenment came with a price tag, across the Channel the Revolution fostered an egalitarian attitude towards mental health care. In Paris the physician Pinel recommended removing the manacles from the lunatics of the Salpetriere and Bicetere asylums. In London Bedlam's Thomas Monro declared to a Commons Commission in 1815 that while to a pauper the use of manacles was bearable, 'a gentleman . . . would not like it'. William Blake was, of course, a pauper by the standards of Monro. One shudders to think how this patron of Turner might have treated the visionary had he mentioned seeing the ghost of a flea. They manage these things better in France, evidently. Thanks to the Revolution and to Pinel and others, public asylums were established in each department seven years before the United Kingdom made similar provisions. And in the United States a number of asylums combining private and charity provisions on the Pinel model were built in the years immediately following the end of hostilities.

The social history of madness in the age of Reason seems to interest Porter much more, perhaps, than the developments in psychiatry that followed the recognition of a 'mad' type in the late 19th century. Consequently, we are given a rather breathless tour through the history of psychiatry (it is, after all, a 'brief' history). During this part of the book what we most notice is the singular absence of British figures in these pioneering years. Note the names—Lombroso, Charcot, Freud, Adler, Jung; it is only until we get to Freud's interpreter, Ernest Jones, in the early twentieth century and later, Donald Winnicott, that major figures emerge. Porter attributes this singular lack of interest in the study of the psyche to a British 'phlegm'—what he calls a suspicion of navel gazing. This depressing tendency, which is as prevalent today as it was then, has given us British the stiff upper lip we are so proud of, a distrust of 'intellectuals', the conviction that boarding schools taught character and bred 'moral fibre', and the idea that children should be seen and not heard. Worst of all, as we have seen, it has justified the bourgeois hypocrisy which has made us capable of defending the incarceration of an insane relative for the sake of 'appearances'. Perhaps the fact that Lamb eschewed this particular option says a lot for his humanity.

Lamb makes a fleeting appearance in Julia Swindells' study of the 'political character of theatricality and the theatrical character of politics' between 1789 and 1832, as do Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Clare, Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. But Ms Swindells is less concerned with the theatre that Hunt or Hazlitt reviewed, and more with the work of contemporary playwrights like Thomas Morton, which tackled the iniquities of slavery; W.T. Moncrieff, who openly urged political and theatrical reform; and the proto-feminists Elizabeth Inchbald and Joanna Baillie. Ms Swindells also considers the ways in which political activists like Thomas Hardy of the London Corresponding Society used theatrical language to dramatise their role as victims of persecution, which Ms Swindells argues that in an era of radical debate, playwrights interested in social progress saw the stage as a natural ' theatre' in which topical debate could be aired in a way that evaded the government censure that stymied the more openly critical radicals. She also emphasises the role of melodrama, which was brought to England from France by Hazlitt's mentor, Thomas Holcroft, as a vehicle in which issues affecting the common people rather than the middle and upper classes, could be played out before an audience of the same class. Ms Swindells is convincing in the weight she gives to drama hitherto neglected as 'minor'. There can surely be no doubt that the very naturalism of this popular art form had a strongly radical effect on already radicalised theatregoers and helped create a climate in which political change could be achieved.

I feel, however, that the book could have extended its scope to explore the ways in which orators like Eliza Sharples, the Rev Robert Taylor, and others exploited theatricality in the service of radical reform. I was also disappointed, given the quasi-political dimensions that Gary Dyer has revealed, not to find at least a mention of 'Mr H'; moreover, the omission of any reference to Cobbett's anti-Malthusian play 'Surplus Population', is a fault. But all the same this is a valuable study of a neglected area.

R.M. Healey

Society Notes and News From Members

NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Annual General Meeting of the Alliance of Literary Societies, 27 April 2002

Last year it was Ledbury; this year Burslem. Is there no beginning to the list of exciting venues for the ALS AGM? It was Burslem because exactly a hundred years ago Arnold Bennett, who was born at nearby Hanley, brought out *Anna of the Five Towns*, and thus a reputation was forged. Actually, there are *six* towns, but Bennett thought the word five sounded more euphonious.

The venue was the George Hotel, Burslem's finest, and the turnout was better than expected, thus vindicating the idea of a roving AGM. Business was dispatched with little debate. It was announced that nine new societies, including the Friends of Coleridge and the Martineau Society, had joined the Alliance in the past year, bringing the total to 109. Finances were in good shape, although it was resolved to increase the subscription for larger societies by five pounds. The decision to confirm our President, Miss Susan Hill, in her office for a further year, despite her life-like impersonation of a large lump of stone, did not meet with general approbation. Other names were proposed, and it was felt that these could be considered in committee. All officers were re-elected *en bloc*.

On the questions of publications, it was felt that there was no need to mail a list of events to member societies; these would be posted on the Net instead. *The Open Book* has continued to grow and this year featured an interview with our Chairman, Mr Nicholas Reed, the writer on art and literature. The problem of how to accommodate blatantly commercial outfits masquerading as 'literary societies' generated the most heat. One delegate rightly pointed out that although information of use to businesses was freely available in the public arena, the ALS should be aware of its rights and duties under the Data Protection Act. Presumably, second-hand book-dealers would not become members of the ALS if they didn't think it worth their while. The ALS had a duty either to charge such dealers for privileged access to potential customers, or to expel them from the Alliance. It was therefore resolved that a special corporate subscription rate of forty pounds be implemented.

The announcement that our industrious secretary, Rosemary Culley, had created an extensive literary gazetteer on the AGM website (to which your delegate had contributed sections on Lamb), was greeted with unbridled joy. The proposal to establish a book of publicity cuttings was approved, but no-one could actually produce a cutting. It was generally felt that the ALS could benefit from a higher profile and a few delegates came forward with ideas on how this could be achieved. Sadly, an hour-long profile on 'The South Bank Show' was not felt to be practicable.

After lunch delegates were given a short tour of Burslem town centre by the appropriately named Mr Potter. Naturally, the focus was on buildings featured in Arnold Bennett's novels, but for non-Bennettians, such as your delegate, the big surprise was that so much fine Georgian and Victorian architecture had survived, including a gem of a Regency shopfront c. 1820. After returning to the hotel for some readings from Bennett's works there was time to make contacts and catch up on Alliance news before most delegates dispersed. For fans of Bennett, however, the weekend continued with film shows, and on Sunday a museum visit was followed by a talk by Mr Roy Hattersley, the newspaper columnist, in the quite excellent Stoke on Trent Art Gallery.

Next year the venue will be Swansea, where the hosts will be the fan club devoted to Dylan Thomas, who had been a pupil of the same Grammar School that your faithful delegate was to attend many, many years later.

R.M. HEALEY