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Hazlitt, Lamb, and the Philosophy of Familiarity

By UTTARA NATARAJAN

The Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture, 2002

THE TOPIC OF THIS LECTURE is a distinctly romantic prose genre, the familiar essay.[1] The qualifier 'familiar' is definitive, and separates from the great critical and thematic writings of the romantic period, the kind of prose essay categorised by its randomness and spontaneity. This is published prose in a private and informal guise, which, appearing under such titles as 'On Reading Old Books', 'On the Want of Money', 'Poor Relations', or 'Old China', remains 'miscellaneous', 'occasional', 'conversational'. The assumption implicit in all of these descriptors, an assumption by which the familiar essay has traditionally been marked, is of a fundamental lack of seriousness or purpose. My object is to undo that assumption. The familiar essay is yet to be recognised as being, at its best, a primary form of a distinctly romantic creativity, embodying and affirming a philosophical position that we are used to identifying elsewhere in romantic literature, and especially in its poetry.

Conversation: the Common Ideal

In the past, poetry and poets' statements about poetry have exemplified to critics and scholars a monolithic and unifying 'romanticism', to which the familiar essay has borne little if any relevance at all. More recently, having grown to prize the discontinuous, non-linear, and fragmentary qualities that the essay so fashionably manifests, we are even less minded to recognise its common ground with an increasingly problematic canon. Yet the common ground of poetry and prose is the subject of one of the most powerful and influential statements of romantic poetics. In his 1800 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously insists that 'between the language of prose and metrical composition . . . there neither is nor can be any essential difference,' claiming, by that insistence, to move poetry out of an inaccessible celestial realm into the workaday world of common humanity:

> . . . where shall we find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes

[1] This lecture condenses the larger argument, developed in considerably greater detail, in my article, 'The Veil of Familiarity: Romantic Philosophy and the Familiar Essay', *Studies in Romanticism* 42.1 (spring 2003), 27-44.

> her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.[2]

In thus humanising poetry, and despite his language of celestial and terrestrial, Wordsworth is not of course lowering, but lifting, both poetry and humanity, and in so doing, reveals his common ground with the German romantic theorists. Kant's disciple Schiller, in his essay *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature* (1795), writes that poetry 'means nothing else than *to give humanity its most complete expression possible*.'[3] By identifying poetry and humanity, Wordsworth is endorsing an idealist aesthetics, where poetry is the fullest expression of the human ideal. The ideal must begin in the human, here, prose; poetry, in Wordsworth's account, can be vindicated as ideal only by establishing its common ground with prose, and in particular, with conversational prose, the 'very language of men'.

In Coleridge's 'conversation' poems, again, poetry is simultaneously humanised and idealised by taking its origin from spoken prose. The model of 'conversation' allows Coleridge to do away with high literary content, and evoke in its place what is human, domestic, familiar—a man with his young wife by their cottage at twilight, or at home while his friends are out walking, or with his baby by the fireside—as the ground of the ideal, poetry. 'Conversation' also facilitates the Coleridgean ideal of organic form, enabling Coleridge to replace, in these poems, the traditional stanza structure of poetry with one that follows the more natural breaks and pauses of spoken prose; in this regard too, poetry, beginning in the human, may, by that token, attain the ideal.

If human discourse, as the origin of the ideal, can become the basis of an idealist aesthetics, then in a different domain from Wordsworth's and Coleridge's, conversation can embody the ideal without being metamorphosed into poetry. The Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* announces as experimental Wordsworth's recourse in poetry to 'the very language of men.' But it is the familiar essay that most effectively deploys conversation as a model for writing, not in an isolated instance, or on an uncertain, experimental basis, but widely and without apology. This is a less advertised departure than Wordsworth's, but for all that, an important one, so much so that Hazlitt's *Table-Talk* essay 'On Familiar Style' may be placed alongside Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* as the manifesto for an altogether new kind of writing. Recognisably allusive to the Preface, 'On Familiar Style' adapts that great contemporary manifesto for poetic diction to prescribe for and vindicate a newly-established prose genre. Wordsworth's championing of 'the very language of men' becomes Hazlitt's objective, 'to write as any one would speak in common conversation' (*Table-Talk*; viii. 242).[4]

Conversation, then, is the defining model of the familiar essay, but not always for its own sake. The medium of conversation allows the essayist to become what David Hume describes as 'a Kind of Resident or Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation.'[5] Hume is writing of himself, of his own purpose and mode in his

[2] William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I. 134.

[3] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature*, trans. H. Watanabe-O'Kelly (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), 39.

[4] All quotations from Hazlitt are taken from *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930-4). References are by volume and page.

[5] David Hume, 'Of Essay-Writing' in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis:

Essays. Yet it is not Hume, but a later and wholly unregarded English metaphysician who truly fulfils this ideal of a philosophical essayist. William Hazlitt, as one of his earliest reviewers and best critics, Charles Lamb recognises, 'is continually translating his thoughts out of their original metaphysical obscurity into the language of the senses and of common observation.'[6] The metaphysical weight of the conversational essay places it at the heart of a generic development almost unnoticed in English philosophy: the migration of philosophical discourse from the eighteenth-century 'treatise', which had hitherto been chiefly its realm, into the more informal, more intimate writings of the belletrist.

Romantic Philosophy

The philosophy of the romantic essay is a romantic philosophy, and reveals itself, in so being, as belonging to a peculiarly literary phenomenon. The stock polarity of British empiricism and German idealism is undone in the emergence of a distinctly British idealism, a parallel and not always derivative version of the German, that finds its expression within the more fluid, less rigidly systematic framework afforded by literature rather than philosophy. Conversational prose, like the poetry of the romantic period, acts as a repository of that romantic idealism in Britain.

In this connection, we should register the particular resonance of the epithet 'familiar' that Hazlitt adopts as the defining attribute of his genre. That the imagination renders an ideal secreted within or behind the familiar is affirmed both by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* ('the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for . . . the film of familiarity') and by Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry* ('Poetry . . . strips the veil of familiarity from the world . . . it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity').[7] In taking the familiar as its starting-ground, the poetics of the essay 'On Familiar Style' bears a recognisable relation not only to Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, but also to two other major statements of romantic poetics. That relation alerts us to trace, in the familiar elements of the essay, the location of the ideal.

The ideal which takes its origin in human discourse may be embodied, as I have said, in prose as well as in poetry. Or rather, the essay may, like poetry, *aspire* to the ideal which, in its very nature, is unattainable. The aspiration, the effort towards the unattainable—the creative impulse of romantic theory—is infinite, but its expression is finite. The romantic essay shares with romantic poetry an aesthetic founded upon the attempt, or more pessimistically, the failure, to represent the infinite through finite means. That the poetry we call 'romantic' is concerned with, and at the same time, performing that attempt is commonplace.[8] By contrast, the understanding of a shared aesthetic and

Liberty Fund, 1985), 535.

[6] Charles Lamb, *Lamb as Critic*, ed. R. Park (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 306-7.

[7] S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. W.J. Bate and J. Engell, vol VII of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen series no. 75, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II. 7; P.B. Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. D.H. Reiman and S.B. Powers (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 505.

[8] Thomas McFarland lists 'a longing for the infinite and unattainable' among the 'fifteen hallmarks of Romanticism' that he identifies in the introductory chapter of his book on the romantic essayists. See Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 13.

philosophical impulse that we habitually bring to our reading of romantic poetry is absent when we approach the prose essay.

The aesthetic of the romantic essay, like the aesthetic of romantic poetry, is governed by a notion of the sublime familiar to the romantics from Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which grants to the sublime an empirical origin in the outside world. But despite its roots in Burke's empiricist theory, the romantic sublime in fact corroborates Kant's idealist thesis in *The Critique of Judgement*, namely, that the sublime is an attribute not of nature, but of mind. It is 'an attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature;' also, the mere capacity to think the sublime shows, 'a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense.'[9] The idealism contained in English romantic literature, subordinates, like Kant's, the senses to the mind. Yet the British idealism, manifested in literature rather than philosophy, that is, as practice rather than as theory, reveals, by that manifestation, a commitment to that very empiricist tradition, the native tradition, that it seeks to critique. Such a commitment may be discerned, for instance, in Hazlitt's anxiety to re-define 'experience'. The word 'experience', he writes, has been wrongly interpreted as 'a knowledge of things without us; whereas it in fact includes all knowledge relating to objects either within or out of the mind' ('On the Writings of Hobbes', *Lectures on English Philosophy*; ii.124). In positing a knowledge independent of the senses—our knowledge of objects within us—Hazlitt displays his idealist tendency; in calling that knowledge experiential, he exposes his empiricist roots.

The symbiosis of the experiential and the ideal is the hallmark of a British as distinct from the German idealism. The conversational essayist in particular excels in the transfiguration of the particular into the ideal. Coleridge, in the conversation poems, is so far close to the conversational essayist that he adopts the familiar subject as his context or medium for the ideal. But in general, it is the essay that habitually achieves, to a greater extent than the poetry, the symbiosis of the experiential and the ideal that is characteristic of a peculiarly British idealism. The very mode of the essay, in which conversation (the everyday, the experiential) becomes the vehicle of philosophy (the abstract, the ideal) embodies that symbiosis. The essayist can render the familiar subject sublime, and at the same time, render the sublime, familiar. Here is Hazlitt's essay 'On a Sun-Dial', for instance,

> Of the several modes of counting time, that by the sun-dial is perhaps the most apposite and striking, if not the most convenient or comprehensive. It does not obtrude its observations, though it 'morals on the time,' and by its stationary character, forms a contrast to the most fleeting of all essences. It stands *sub dio* - under the marble air, and there is some connexion between the image of infinity and eternity. ('On a Sun-Dial', *The New Monthly Magazine*, October 1827; xvii. 238-39)

Describing a sun-dial, Hazlitt evokes the image of infinity and eternity. In keeping with the Kantian account, sublimity—the infinite—is introduced into the finite and particular object by the essayist's imagination. Such a response is intellectual: the imagination surpasses sensory limitation so as to idealise the finite object. At the same time, the ideal,

[9] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 93, 99.

which we recognise as 'sublime', still retains a concrete and particular form. Sun-dials which are ideals of just that description figure also in the account of another romantic essayist. In 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple', Lamb describes '. . . the now almost effaced sun-dials, with their moral inscriptions, seeming coevals with that Time which they measured, and to take their revelations of its flight immediately from heaven' (ii. 83); 'almost', here, just anchors the super-sensory ideal to its particular form.[10]

Working with the materials and language of empiricism, the romantic essayist employs those materials to carry out an idealist agenda. An agenda of this kind is most readily recognisable *as* an agenda in Hazlitt's prose, where practice, in the familiar essay, is most readily connected with theory, the polemical theory, of the philosophical writings. To claim an equal degree of philosophical awareness in the writings of the other essayists of his time is more problematic and perhaps hardly necessary. What Hazlitt provides us is a theoretical context for understanding a genre of which he is the primary, but not the only practitioner. To the extent that the practice of his contemporaries resembles his own, it can be illuminated by his theory. This is no more than to say that the romantic essayist might, like the romantic poet, participate in an aesthetics that he has not learned or wanted to theorise and, by that participation, be recognised as belonging to a larger literary and philosophical movement, the understanding of which informs our continued use of the category 'romantic'.

Unity of Form

Hazlitt's conversational prose enacts the model of a creative, idiosyncratic, and autonomous imagination posited in his philosophical writings. Such an imagination, inseparable from the personality of the essayist, is the ground of the essay's unity of form, which is a recognisably romantic or, synonymously, an organic unity. That is, the aesthetic unity of the essay is based on the identity (or singularity) of the authorial presence. As the critic Christopher Salvesen puts it, 'The Hazlitt essay is one of the great formal achievements of English romanticism. The form derives from Hazlitt's presence therein.'[11]

The unifying power of the essayist's imagination is displayed in the characteristic mode of the essay, which is, in the first place, an associative mode. The power of the imagination generates an associated chain of images and impressions; such chains proliferate in the familiar essay, and the essay in its entirety may be figured as a single long chain of association. In Hazlitt's essays, the persona of the essayist, and the associative process of his imagination, are displayed most memorably in the famous compound sentences that are so distinctive a feature of his style. Characteristic of Hazlitt's writing is the long sentence that gathers mass and momentum from clause after clause that it picks up in its course, each clause sustaining and amplifying the force of the whole:

> To be in want of money, is to pass through life with little credit or pleasure; it is to live out of the world, or to be despised if you come into it; it is not to be sent

[10] All quotations from Lamb's essays are taken from *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, 7 vols (London: Metheun 1903-5). References are by volume and page.
[11] Christopher Salvesen, 'A Master of Regret' in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Modern Critical Views: William Hazlitt* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 43.

> for to court, or asked out to dinner, or noticed in the street; it is not to have your opinion consulted or else rejected with contempt, to have your acquirements carped at and doubted, your good things disparaged, and at last to lose the wit and the spirit to say them; it is to be scrutinized by strangers, and neglected by friends; it is to be a thrall to circumstances, an exile in a foreign land; to forego leisure, freedom, ease of body and mind, to be dependent on the good-will and caprice of others, or earn a precarious and irksome livelihood by some laborious employment: it is to be compelled to stand behind a counter, or to sit at a desk in some public office, or to marry your landlady, or not the person you would wish; or to go out to the East or West-Indies, or to get a situation as judge abroad, and return home with a liver-complaint; or to be a law-stationer, or a scrivener or scavenger, or newspaper reporter; or to read law and sit in court without a brief, or be deprived of the use of your fingers by transcribing Greek manuscripts, or to be a seal engraver and pore yourself blind; or to go upon the stage, or try some of the Fine Arts; with all your pains, anxiety, and hopes, most probably to fail, or, if you succeed, after the exertions of years, and undergoing constant distress of mind and fortune, to be assailed on every side with envy, back-biting, and falsehood, or to be a favourite with the public for awhile, and then thrown into the back-ground-or a jail, by the fickleness of taste and some new favourite; to be full of enthusiasm and extravagance in youth, of chagrin and disappointment in after-life; to be jostled by the rabble because you do not ride in your coach, or avoided by those who know your worth and shrink from it as a claim on their respect or their purse; to be a burden to your relations, or unable to do any thing for them; to be ashamed to venture into crowds; to have cold comfort at home, to lose by degrees your confidence and any talent you might possess; to grow crabbed, morose, and querulous, dissatisfied with every one, but most so with yourself; and plagued out of your life, to look about for a place to die in, and quit the world without any one's asking after your will. ('On the Want of Money'; *The Monthly Magazine*, January 1827; xvii. 186-87)

The imagination's power is in the cumulative force of its association, which produces from individual particulars, an abstract idea or ideal, in this case, 'the love of money'. What is manifest here is a practical illustration of Hazlitt's doctrine of abstract ideas; an abstraction, to him, is an ideal that is an 'aggregate' of individual particulars. That term 'aggregate', that Hazlitt uses, for instance, in the essay 'On Reason and Imagination' (*The Plain Speaker*; xii. 55), encapsulates a symbiotic relationship between the particular and the ideal which is at the heart of his philosophy: it belongs to a theory of abstraction propounded in the *Lectures on English Philosophy* and elsewhere throughout his writings. Abstraction is another name for the innate or non-empirical process that Hazlitt also calls association, whose product is an ideal ('aggregate') that does not repudiate particularity; rather, the imagination, associating, achieves a synthesis of particular and ideal.[12]

[12] For a detailed discussion of the synthesis of particular and ideal in Hazlitt's theory of abstraction, see my *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 131-41.

Lamb's Idealism

The association of particular and ideal—the heart of a poetics of familiarity—is discernible, not only in Hazlitt's essays, but also and notably, in Lamb's. Here is Lamb's view of the comedian and caricaturist, Joseph Munden:

> So the gusto of Munden antiquates and ennobles what it touches. His pots and his ladles are as grand and primal as the seething-pots and hooks seen in old prophetic vision. A tub of butter, contemplated by him, amounts to a Platonic idea. He understands a leg of mutton in its quiddity.
>
> ('On the Acting of Munden'; ii. 149)

Lamb's word for Munden's acting is the same as Hazlitt's word for the working of the imagination, 'gusto', and his 'idea', as the Platonic usage suggests, is synonymous with 'ideal', that which surpasses sensory response.[13] His humorous tone notwithstanding, Lamb is making the same large claim for Munden, the comic actor, that he makes elsewhere for Hogarth, the comic artist, of an imagination that transfigures ('ennobles') the familiar or vulgar into the ideal: 'The faces of Hogarth . . . are permanent abiding ideas. Not the sports of nature, but her necessary eternal classes' ('On the Genius and Character of Hogarth'; i. 77-78).

Lamb's idealism is displayed also in his repeated evocation of a sublime that is, importantly, obscure. In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke lists obscurity as an attribute of the sublime: that which approximates to infinity can only be dimly or partially apprehended. Burke's empirical explanation is re-formed as a thesis of non-empirical process in the romantic view of the sublime: the sublime is dimly apprehended because it is unavailable to the senses. Such a view of the sublime is characteristic of Lamb's writing. The key passage in the 'Old Margate Hoy', that describes his disappointment at his first sight of the sea, is no less 'romantic' in its import than that more canonical response, described in book VI of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, of the poet to Mont Blanc:

> But the sea remains a disappointment. –Is it not, that in *the latter* we had expected to behold (absurdly, I grant, but, I am afraid, by the law of imagination unavoidably) not a definite object, as those wild beasts, or that mountain compassable by the eye, but *all the sea at once*, THE COMMENSURATE ANTAGONIST OF THE EARTH? ('The Old Margate Hoy'; ii. 180)

Lamb's preference for obscurity, for ideal or imaginative being over sensory being, can be discerned in some of his most distinctive traits as an essayist, in his fondness, for instance, for what is out-of-the way or antique, and in his leanings towards pedantry and archaism.

Less idiosyncratically, his disparaging of sense-experience and, complementary to that disparaging, his celebration of what is dim, partial, and obscure, is manifested also in the recurrence, in his essays, of an image of the borderer, and more generally, of twilight and border conditions, half-and-half states. The infirm youth in 'The Old Margate Hoy' is such a borderer ('He was as one, being with us, but not of us'; ii. 180), as is the Convalescent and the Poor Relation; twilight spaces can be recognised in the South-Sea

[13] Johnson's dictionary glosses 'ideal' as 'Mental; intellectual; not perceived by the senses'.

House, where 'some forms of business are still kept up, though the soul be long since fled' (ii. 1) and 'Oxford in the Vacation'. The importance of borderers, border-conditions and border-perspectives is their sublime quality, and this emerges most fully, perhaps, from the humorous critique of the Scots' character that Lamb offers in the essay 'Imperfect Sympathies':

> There is an order of imperfect intellect (under which mine must be content to rank) which in its constitution is essentially anti-Caledonian. The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to, have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretences to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe (to confess fairly) has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth. . . . The brain of a true Caledonian (if I am not mistaken) is constituted upon quite a different plan. His Minerva is born in panoply. You are never admitted to see his ideas in their growth – if indeed, they do grow, and are not rather put together upon principles of clockwork. You never catch his mind in an undress. He never hints or suggests any thing, but unlades his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness. . . . Surmises, guesses, misgivings, half-intuitions, semi-consciousnesses, partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions, have no place in his brain, or vocabulary. The twilight of dubiety never falls upon him. Is he orthodox – he has no doubts. Is he an infidel – he has none either. Between the affirmative and the negative there is no border-land with him. (ii. 59-60)

Lamb's vocabulary associates the Scotsman with a philosophical tradition whose hallmarks are mechanism ('clockwork'), rationalism ('perfect order and completeness') and materialism (hence the glimpses of the marketplace in 'unlades' and 'stock'). Opposite to that tradition is the essayist's own idealism: as he paints his picture of the Caledonian, who cannot be a borderer, he paints, simultaneously, a portrait of himself as borderer, in this case, not merely someone who can be construed as sublime, like a convalescent or a poor relation, but someone who himself construes (or produces) the sublime. Elia describes himself as an occupant of a twilight realm of uncertain or half-knowledge, and in so doing, claims implicitly a sublimity of vision: a vision that is partial or fragmented because what it grasps is infinite. Keats, in his letters, makes very much the same claim, to a sublime capacity for 'half-knowledge' or 'half-seeing',[14] and the connection has long enabled Lamb scholars to recognise in 'Imperfect Sympathies' Lamb's version of Keats's more celebrated 'negative capability'.[15]

Interestingly, too, Lamb relates the partial or half-vision of the essayist to the irony of his style. Thus irony is the attribute of the anti-Caledonian essayist: 'Clap an extinguisher upon your irony, if you are unhappily blest with a vein of it' (ii. 60). In another description, in the Preface to the *Last Essays of Elia*, Lamb again names irony as Elia's

[14] In the much-quoted letters to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) October 1817 and to Reynolds, 3 February 1818 – John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, ed. H.E. Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), I. 194, 224.

[15] The parallel is drawn, for instance, by Robert Frank in *Don't Call Me Gentle Charles: An Essay on Lamb's 'Essays of Elia'* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1976), 32, and also by Roy Park in his 'Introduction' to *Lamb as Critic*, 10-12.

distinguishing characteristic, 'He too much affected that dangerous figure – irony' (ii. 152). Elia's irony is a distinctively romantic irony, a double discourse that expresses a thing and its opposite at the same time, because it belongs to a border-perspective: the perspective of an essayist whose view is of the sublime. To Lamb, such a perspective is the necessary concomitant of the conversational style. In a letter to his publisher, John Taylor, dated 7 December 1822, he writes, 'The Essays want no Preface: they are *all Preface*. A Preface is nothing but a talk with the reader; and they do nothing else'.[16] In that condition of being perpetually prefatory, achieved by the conversational mode of the essayist, we can recognise, again, the borderer's characteristic, his marginal state.

Overview

In the introduction to his widely-read *Lamb as Critic*, Roy Park writes that, 'Hazlitt began as a philosopher and, like Lamb, ended as an essayist and critic.'[17] In Park's analyses of Hazlitt and Lamb, essayistic practice, in both, represents an abandonment of philosophy, a critique of abstraction that is paradigmatic of a broader romantic shift from philosophy to poetry.[18] Park usefully points up the connections between romantic philosophy and literary practice, but his construction of the second as an abandonment or critique of the first does less than justice to a key tenet of romantic poetics, the one-ness of poetry and philosophy. If we conflate that tenet with another, no less central to romantic poetics, the one-ness of poetry and prose, we find at the basis of both tenets, the familiar element of romantic poetics, at once a prosaic and a philosophical element. That dual characteristic of the 'familiar' confirms the philosophical standing of romantic familiar prose.

The sustaining of a relation between familiar and ideal distinguishes the romantic essayist and grants to his work its philosophical standing. To make this argument is not to provide a formula by which the familiar essay of the romantic period, nor even all of Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays, might be exhaustively defined. Such a formula is no more possible for the essay than it is for romantic poetry. Nonetheless, the broader philosophical context that emerges from conversational prose of Hazlitt and Lamb, enables a new and productive reading of the familiar essay as 'romantic', not least because poetry and prose are brought to bear upon each other within that shared context.

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[16] Charles Lamb, *The Letters of Charles Lamb to which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, 3 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1935), II. 350.
[17] Park, 'Introduction' in *Lamb as Critic*, 6.
[18] See Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age*, 'Charles Lamb and the Critical Tradition', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* 15 (1976), 129-38, and 'Introduction' in *Lamb as Critic*.

Toothache and Gumboil: Biographical Dilemmas

By SARAH BURTON

THIS PAPER IS BASED ON A TALK delivered to the Charles Lamb Society while I was writing *A Double Life: a Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb* (Viking-Penguin, 2003). The talk concerned what I saw as the necessity of a joint biography of the Lambs and the problems and dilemmas that such a project inevitably involved. I argued for the impossibility of separating 'a double singleness' while sharing some of the difficulties of doubleness.

The inseparability of Charles and Mary Lamb was a legend in their own lifetime. 'As, amongst certain classes of birds, if you have one you are sure of the other,' wrote Thomas de Quincey, 'so, with respect to the Lambs (. . .) seeing or hearing the brother, you knew that the sister could not be far off.' William Wordsworth imagined the couple as 'a double tree / with two collaterel stems sprung from one root', while Edward Moxon referred to 'their blended existence'.[1] Their co-habitation lasted for all of Charles's 59 years of life, interrupted only by Mary's bouts of illness, when it was considered best for her to be under supervised care elsewhere. Even then, Charles visited his sister nearly every day, sometimes staying in the nursing home with her. Although historians and critics have tended to portray Mary as the dependent partner in their relationship, from their correspondence it is clear that Charles needed his sister at least as much. During one of Mary's absences, Charles wrote to a friend:

> I have every reason to suppose that this illness, like all her former ones, will be but temporary; but I cannot always feel so. Meantime she is **dead** to me, and I miss a prop. All my strength is gone, and I am like a fool, bereft of her co-operation. I dare not think, lest I should think wrong; so used am I to look up to her in the least & the biggest perplexity. To say all that I know of her would be more than I think anybody could believe or even understand; and when I hope to have her well again with me it would be sinning against her feelings to go about to praise her: for I can conceal nothing that I do from her. She is older, & wiser, & better than me, and all my wretched imperfections I cover to myself by resolutely thinking on her goodness. She would share life & death, heaven & hell with me. She lives but for me.[2]

Charles had many male correspondents, yet while he frequently praised his sister in those letters, he never unburdened himself in this vein. The friend to whom he wrote these words was Dorothy Wordsworth, sister of the poet, who was perhaps the one of their circle best able to comprehend that the sibling relationship could be an agonising, as well as a companionable, kind of marriage. Lamenting his own short-comings, Charles invoked connubial imagery when he

[1] Thomas de Quincey, 'Recollections of Charles Lamb', *Charles Lamb: Prose and Poetry, with essays by Hazlitt and de Quincey*, ed. George Gordon (Clarendon, 1928), 30; William Wordsworth, 'Written After the Death of Charles Lamb', *Charles Lamb: His Life Recorded by his Contemporaries*, ed. Edmund Blunden (Hogarth, 1934), 252; Edward Moxon, *Contemporary Notices of Charles Lamb* (1891).

[2] Charles Lamb (hereafter CL) to Dorothy Wordsworth, 14 June 1805, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr. (Cornell University Press, 1975-7), II 169.

wrote of his sister: 'I know that she has cleaved to me, for better, for worse.'[3] Similarly, during one of her enforced absences he described himself as 'widowed'.[4]

For better, for worse indeed; just as Mary and Charles provided mutual support and inspiration, when their periods of depression coincided they were the worst possible company for each other. As Mary wrote to Sarah Stoddart in 1805:

> You would laugh, or you would cry, perhaps both, to see us sit together looking at each other with long and rueful faces, & saying how do you do? & how do you do? & then we fall a crying & say we will be better on the morrow – he says we are like tooth ach & his friend gum bile, which though a kind of ease, is but an uneasy kind of ease, a comfort of rather an uncomfortable sort.

Despite the fact that the Lambs' double singleness makes them ripe subjects for a joint account of their lives, there is a major problem in the imbalance of material – we simply know so much more about Charles than we do about Mary. Biographers abhor a vacuum and face two possible approaches, both of which are unsatisfactory: firstly to adhere rigidly to the little information we have about Mary and accept that the book will be 90% Charles and 10% Mary; or secondly to attempt educated guesses about the prodigious gaps. As an academic, speculation makes me extremely uncomfortable, but as a writer I am obliged to keep Mary's story going. The problems of speculation are rendered greater when we fall easily into the habit of assuming that the little information we do have is typical. How likely is it, really, that Mary's surviving letters are typical of her letters in general? Were, say, twenty of all the letters you have ever written in your life randomly selected, how accurate a portrait of you could a stranger construct from them? Just as Charles maintained that his brother John made but slender guesses about what went on in other people's minds, biographers are obliged to acknowledge that much of what they can bring to the subject represents just such slender guesses. We are clutching at straws.

The further problem in Mary's case of course is her recurring bouts of derangement. We can be pretty certain that the most interesting material on this subject has been destroyed or suppressed and consequently lost. We find ourselves turning to the same passages in the same letters, reading and rereading as though we expect something new suddenly to appear between the familiar lines. The absence of information about Mary's illness and particularly on the circumstances of her confinement has been described as a deafening silence – indeed, I should probably have entitled this paper 'The Silence of the Lambs' (a pun sufficiently bad to be appreciated by our subjects). I decided that since Mary's madness played such a major role in the Lambs' drama, yet it appeared to be a role with very few lines, that I would begin by trying to find out more about madness and how it was perceived and handled at the time. While this journey appeared to offer more questions than answers, I feel they are questions that are extremely pertinent to our story.

In 1786 Margaret Nicholson attempted to attack King George III with a dessert knife. As soon as she was discovered to be deranged she was confined in the Bethlehem Hospital (usually called Bethlem or Bedlam). She was not committed for trial, nor was there any talk of her hanging. This was the usual way of dealing with the criminally insane. The same discretion was

[3] Ibid.
[4] 'Written on Christmas Day, 1797.'

widely applied and Mary Lamb was one such beneficiary: she was not treated as a criminal but as a lunatic. She did not stand trial, and was declared insane only at the coroner's court which sat to establish the cause of her mother's death.

Mary was even more fortunate than Margaret Nicholson, as she was not sent to Bedlam. At the time Mary killed her mother an insane person charged with a criminal offence could be 'liberated on security being given that he should properly be taken care of as a lunatic'. At this time it was the family, rather than the state, in cases like Mary's, who took responsibility for arranging care for the mentally ill. Had Mary committed the same crime three years later than she did, it would have been a different story.

In 1800 the King was again the victim of a deranged would-be assassin, when James Hadfield shot and wounded him. Because of the seriousness of the crime, Hadfield did stand trial, but was acquitted on the grounds of insanity. The verdict was significant on two counts. Firstly it demonstrated the triumph of a humane approach to a mentally ill individual over what might have been a more politically expedient response (Hadfield was, after all, an ex-soldier, and attacked the King during a period when revolutionary war and radical insurgence were at their height). Secondly, it exposed a legal loophole, because the law made no provision for Hadfield's future safe-keeping. An *Act for the Safe Keeping of Insane Persons Charged with Offences* (1800) was consequently rushed through Parliament, which provided that anyone charged with treason, murder, or felony who was acquitted on the grounds of insanity was to be kept in strict custody 'during His Majesty's pleasure.' Under this Act, Mary would not only have stood trial for her offence, but would have been committed to Bedlam, probably for the rest of her life.

The cases of Margaret Nicholson and James Hadfield were of course high-profile and well-documented due to the eminence of their victim, but George III made a more significant contribution to the history of mental illness: his own derangement caused the subject of madness to figure on the public opinion agenda. (His first mental disturbance occurred in 1788 and he suffered repeated bouts of illness before sinking into senility from about 1810.) His case was widely discussed at the time, from places such as the smoky rooms of the Salutation and Cat to the floor of the House of Commons. While to those like Percy Bysshe Shelley the king's physical and mental deficiencies only compounded his political failings (*vis-a-vis* Shelley's 'old, mad, blind, despised king'), more generally this factor may have contributed to the sense in which the mentally ill were objects of pity rather than of contempt.[5] The press report of the Lamb murder conveys this same sense of pity for the whole family as victims, including the deranged perpetrator of the terrible crime.

In order to be able to put Mary's situation in a meaningful context it is first necessary to understand how mental illness was viewed and managed during this period. Firstly, there are myths to debunk. The idea that the ill-treatment of inmates in lunatic asylums was both universal and seen as legitimate is wholly misleading. Similarly, the notion that the mentally ill were officially perceived as somehow less than human (which simultaneously justified their inhumane treatment) is also untrue. There were many, too many, instances of barbaric abuse of such people at this time; what is important is that such practices went against the prevailing values of the time, rather than being in line with them. Throughout the eighteenth century advertisements for madhouses promised 'gentleness and kindness', 'the greatest tenderness and humanity' towards

[5] See, for example, William Ll. Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy: A Study of Private Madhouses in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 12.

those in their care and an abhorrence of ‘any violence to any patient’. Benjamin Faulkner, a madhouse keeper in the 1780s, was not untypical in arguing for the treatment of lunatics as ‘rational creatures . . . with attention and humanity’. Private madhouses also often touted the pleasant environments they offered, the clean air and the good food. How often such standards were maintained is another matter; the point here is that such advertisements demonstrate that these were appealing ideas of how the mentally ill should be cared for, and that their ill-treatment was far from socially sanctioned. (Even the rules of Bedlam Hospital as early as 1677 expressly forbade the beating or abuse of the inmates, in fact no force was to be used except ‘upon absolute Necessity’.[6])

Neither were the insane perceived as a race apart; indeed, as Roy Porter observed, ‘insanity might be widely seen as a hazard of humanity, a fate which, under desperate circumstances, could seize anyone and everyone, for a galaxy of reasons, from the bite of a rabid dog to oppressive weather (especially during the ‘dog days’ of Midsummer Madness) to earwigs in the head (according to Cornish folklore) or overwhelming grief, pride, love or joy.’ He also notes (which we know to have been recognised in Mary’s case) that mad people were by no means necessarily mad all the time: ‘insanity was a blow afflicting by degrees, in fits, coming and going with remissions, oscillating in intensity.’[7]

Setting aside the extent of sympathy felt for Mary, there remained the practical problem of what was to be done with her. Her father was barely aware of what was going on and had for some time before the murder been in no state to make decisions. Their brother John proving characteristically unhelpful, the burden of responsibility fell to Charles, then only twenty-one years old. Immediately after the murder, probably at Charles’s suggestion, Mary was taken to a private madhouse in Islington.

The use of private madhouses was far from unusual, as there was no state provision for the care of the mentally ill. Even following the Act of 1800 (prompted by Hadfield’s case) Parliament built no asylums, nor authorised any to be built, and it was to be another 45 years before it required local authorities to provide them. The infamous Bedlam Hospital was a charity and theoretically existed only to care for paupers; it also discouraged ‘incurables’. Moreover, up until the early eighteenth century it serviced not just the capital city but the whole country, and was consequently always oversubscribed. From the pauper whose parish was prepared to pay to the aristocrat who could not be managed at home, private care was the only solution.

Private madhouses were usually much smaller than is generally imagined, caring perhaps for a dozen inmates. Care, in this largely unregulated industry, varied from the exemplary to the appalling. The Rev. Dr. Francis Willis ran a private madhouse in Greatford, Lincolnshire, where the regime astonished one visitor (Frederick Reynolds), who noticed on his approach to the town, ‘almost all the surrounding ploughmen, gardeners, threshers, thatchers, and other labourers, attired in black coats, white waistcoats, black silk breeches and stockings, and the head of each *bien poudree, frisee et arrangee.* These were the doctor’s patients: and dress, neatness of person and exercise being the principal features of his admirable system, health and cheerfulness conjoined towards the recovery of every person attached to that most valuable asylum.’ (Dr. Willis also treated George III.) Dr. Edward Long Fox’s madhouse, near Bristol, catered for the kind of patient who could not be suffered to wander in the surrounding fields; its yards were

[6] Ed. W.F. Bynum et al., *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry* (Tavistock, 1985), II 28.
[7] Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles: A history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Athlone, 1987) 23.

surrounded by twelve foot high walls, but Dr. Fox had thoughtfully provided 'large mounds of earth . . . raised in the centre, which allow the patients to enjoy the view without danger of getting over the wall.' At Dr. Fox's the visitor found each patient had an airy, clean separate bedroom, and that occupational therapies were employed, as well as music, board-games and a bowling-green for recreation. The doctor also kept 'silver pheasants', doves and greyhounds for his patients' amusement. While two or three patients were in straitjackets, none were in chains or in bed. 28 servants serviced 70 patients in premises 'delightfully and cheerfully situated'.[8]

Unfortunately, many private madhouses fell short of these high standards. Although many abuses were successfully covered up for the benefit of patients' friends and relations who visited, those on the inside - both fellow inmates and visiting doctors - testified to a catalogue of gross neglect, routine beatings, rape, torture and even murder occurring within the walls of the worst of these establishments. Corruption was *de rigeur* in such places. On the petty level, it was common practice to steal and sell new clothes brought for patients and then inform relatives that the patient had ripped them to shreds and needed more, as it was to charge exhorbitant sums for drugs which were never bought, let alone administered. More serious corruption also abused both the individual and the law. All manner of troublesome and tiresome people could conveniently be removed to the private madhouse, be they perfectly sane, for a sizeable fee to the keeper, who could even arrange to come and drag the person from their bed, at home in the middle of the night.[9] This is exactly what happened to Rev. George Chawner, aged sixty, whose adulterous wife paid to have him taken out of the way. He was incarcerated for seven years before he managed to escape. (His subsequent prosecution of the madhouse failed on a technicality.)[10] On the other hand, the madhouse also provided asylum for sane criminals - again at a price. Lord de Dunstanville paid £1200 per annum to a private madhouse to keep his brother in the luxury to which he was accustomed in order to evade legal action for presumably unmentionable crimes. 'These houses are, in a hundred cases,' asserted one ex-inmate, 'mere cloaks to avoid punishment of the law'.[11] Although madhouses had to submit to official inspections, contemporary accounts show that it was as easy a matter to hide potentially embarrassing patients, as it was to render others incapable of conversation by drugging or intimidating them beforehand. More staggeringly audacious was the substitution of a patient who had complained to the authorities with a raving maniac (in no position to question his or her ascribed identity) for questioning when the authorities investigated.

Due to the difficulty in properly regulating madhouses, they often attracted the worst kind of entrepreneur; a number of proprietors were drunkards, while others were themselves psychologically disturbed. Dr James Pownall became the proprietor of a Wiltshire madhouse in 1853, even though he was known to have suffered several attacks of mania, during which he was extremely violent and had been confined. Within a year of opening his establishment he had shot

[8] Ed. Allan Ingrams, *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader* (Liverpool University Press, 1998), 250-1.
[9] J.W. Rogers, *A Statement of the Cruelties, Abuses and Frauds, which are practised in Mad-Houses* (E Justins, 1815), 41.
[10] Arthur D Morris, *The Hoxton Madhouses* (Goodwin Bros., 1958), unpaginated.
[11] Anon., *A Description of the Crimes and Horrors in the Interior of Warburton's Private Mad-House at Hoxton, commonly called Whitmore House* (Benbow, ?1822), 12.

one of his own patients and he subsequently murdered a servant girl, slitting her throat with a razor.[12]

The practice of 'boarding out' patients was also widespread. Those who ran private madhouses would, when the madhouse was filled to capacity, commonly pay their keepers (as employees were called) or ex-keepers to maintain individuals in their own homes, or premises rented especially for this purpose; many doctors and clergymen also took in single patients. Again, the standards of care varied enormously. The advantage for the individual boarded with a caring keeper was obvious: the patient benefited from one-to-one attention, a more normal physical environment and better quality social interaction—at its best this sort of care represented a kind of foster-home for adults, an ideal of 'care in the community'. However, there was unfortunately an enormous advantage for the unscrupulous keeper: the law offered no protection, no system of inspection, and no standards of care governing the treatment of individually boarded-out patients. Worse, with no witness but the four walls around them, abuse could occur in utter secrecy.

Mary was later to experience 'boarding out' and also spent long periods in the Hoxton madhouses. The large private asylum was at this time highly exceptional. At the time of Mary's crime there were probably only three in the whole country, all within a few hundred yards of each other, at Hoxton. Hoxton (or Hogsdon) had a history of association with care for the mentally ill. A century before Mary first entered there, Hoxton was already the destination of the majority of London's private mental patients. So synonymous was the place with madness that, just as Bethlehem Hospital has given us the term 'bedlam', one of Hoxton's institutions, Balmes House (also spelt Bammes and Baumes), is believed to have given birth to the expression 'balmy' or 'barmy'. Over the ensuing years Mary was to spend time at both Balmes House (by that time renamed Whitmore House) and at Hoxton House, where Charles had also been voluntarily confined. The third institution, Holly House, catered principally for paupers, the cost of whose care was met by their parishes.

Given the extent to which these places featured in their lives, Charles and Mary's surviving writings are indeed deafeningly silent on the quality of care and living conditions in the Hoxton madhouses. It is quite likely that anything they may have written on the subject was subsequently destroyed (if not lost) as part of the veil that was drawn over Mary's history of mental illness by their closest friends. This absence of material plus the fact that Mary returned repeatedly to Hoxton, sometimes voluntarily, but always with Charles's consent, has made it easy for biographers to skim over the subject, not unreasonably assuming that the Lambs found the Hoxton madhouses satisfactory. All the extraneous evidence, however, tells quite a different story.

After the 'day of horrors', at the onset of each of her recurring bouts of insanity, Mary had been taken to one of the Hoxton madhouses. After 1817 it appears that she was instead boarded out with one of the female keepers. This change in strategy has tended to be attributed to the increased comfort and convenience of such an arrangement, and to the slight improvement in the family's finances which made it possible. However, it seems highly probable that her removal from the private madhouse is linked to a sequence of scandals, revelations and official reports concerning the management of private madhouses at this time.

[12] Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy*, 83.

A Statement of the Cruelties, Abuses and Frauds which are practised in Mad-Houses, by J.W. Rogers, which appeared in 1815, constitutes a catalogue of crimes against the inmates of these institutions which Rogers, in his capacity as visiting physician, had witnessed with his own eyes. Rogers described a regime of brutality and inhumanity which, he said, amounted to 'a combination of evils, moral and physical, sufficient to overpower the soundest intellect'. It was not unusual, he said, for patients to be left chained to their beds indefinitely; unable to turn, they developed sores which, due to the general filth, became infected: 'In this state some constitutions will hold out long, and endure the greatest torture, before death relieves them.' Patients who refused food were often brutally force fed, leading to horrible injuries: in one case Rogers knew of, 'the upper part of the mouth was forced through with the handle of a spoon'; less fortunate patients suffocated. Lunatics who talked too much were gagged, or had their whole heads bandaged, he said, 'with such indifference to the consequences, that respiration is rendered extremely difficult and painful, and it becomes a species of torture consistent with the general barbarity of the place'. One of the most disturbing sights Rogers witnessed was that of patients being beaten while chained hand and foot, secured in chairs. One man was blinded in one eye by such a beating. Almost worse than the physical cruelty towards patients was the evident indifference of the keepers to their charges. 'Dirty' patients were whipped out of bed in nothing but their shirts to be mopped down at an outside pump even when snow was on the ground. Rogers saw three wretched women occupying a bunk designed for one, naked and covered only with a piece of old carpet. He found another in a similarly pathetic state; no-one had noticed she was dead.[13] *A Description of the Crimes and Horrors in the Interior of Warburton's Private Mad-House* was anonymously published (although its writer has been identified as John Mitford) in about 1822 and painted a depressingly similar picture.

Why are these two publications significant to our story? It is apparent from minutes of the evidence submitted to the Select Committee appointed to look into the abuses in madhouses in 1815 that Rogers had been a visiting surgeon at Warburton's Madhouse; parallels between the evidence he gave to the committee and his published account (which did not mention the institution by name) strongly suggest that many of the incidents of abuse he related had occurred at Warburton's. Further parallels between these incidents and those described in Mitford's *A Description of the Crimes and Horrors in the Interior of Warburton's Private Mad-House* confirm the fact that both writers were describing Warburton's madhouse. William Warburton was master of Whitmore House, Hoxton, and just as Sir Jonathan Miles's madhouse, Hoxton House, was now known familiarly as Miles's Madhouse, so Whitmore House was now known as Warburton's Madhouse. Whitmore—or Warburton's—was the very madhouse in which Mary Lamb was regularly confined.

Is it possible that Mary Lamb, as a private patient whose care was paid for by her family rather then by her parish, and who was after all something approaching middle-class, might have been in a different bracket, a different part of the building, receiving a different standard of treatment? The evidence is not encouraging. Rogers saw 'gentlemen', including 'a gallant officer, who had highly distinguished himself', beaten while manacled hand and foot to a chair; he saw 'the wife of a respectable tradesman' treated with 'excessive cruelty by her keeper' (being beaten against the bedstead, and fed spoonsful of salt), whilst a 'young married lady' (significantly not merely a 'woman') 'died in great misery' having been so violently force fed

[13] Rogers, *A Statement of the Cruelties*, 13-30.

that her teeth were falling out and 'her gums were putrid'.[14] Mitford took advantage of publishing anonymously to name names, should anyone be in any doubt as to the indiscriminate brutality of the keepers at Warburton's. William Congreve Alcock, once MP for the county of Wexford, in Ireland, was regularly knocked down by his keeper and often had 'his mouth stuffed with human ordure, in order,' so his keeper said, 'to make him know good victuals when they were placed before him'. Mitford also happened to walk in in time to witness Miss Rolleston, daughter of Stephen Rolleston, Chief Clerk in the Secretary of State's Office, being 'beaten with a broom-stick on the breast'. He goes on: 'I have seen the person of that child, for so I must call one bereft of reason, prostituted on the steps leading to the lodge, by more than one keeper. I have heard it mentioned to Warburton, and his answer has been, "it is no matter; she don't know what is done to her." . . . Mary Wilson, her keeperess, would often say, "Go to your den, you bitch, or I'll beat your brains out."' On another occasion Mitford writes, 'Poor Miss Rolleston one morning was found in the room of Mr. Daniels, a gentleman called to the bar, but unfortunately deranged. The keeperess, who had not sanctioned this visit, dragged her out by the hair of her head, beat her head repeatedly against the wall, and then tying her legs, flogged her as children are flogged at school, in the presence of half-a-dozen monsters in the shape of men, whose remarks at the time are too indelicate - too shocking for repetition.' The author concludes: 'A greater sink of villainy never was erected than Warburton's Mad-house. A more helpless being exists not within its walls than Miss Rolleston.'[15] There are, unfortunately, many more hideous examples.

Mitford also describes a case disturbingly similar to Mary Lamb's. He writes: 'Mrs Wakefield, the authoress of many good books for little children, is frequently an inmate of Whitmore House,' he tells us. 'When she recovers, and the paroxysm goes off, she returns to society, but when she is ill they (the keepers) rob her of all she possesses. I remember - can I ever forget it? - when they stripped her in the cellar of all her apparel, which was new, and sent her up naked, all but her shift, into the parlour, pretending she had thrown them down the necessary; a new dress was ordered, and the keeperesses divided her garments amongst them.'[16] (The insane being well known to be 'great destroyers of apparel', this scam was widely employed in corrupt madhouses.) The fact that Mrs Wakefield, like Mary, was an occasional patient at Warburton's begs the question why she did not complain to her friends and family of her treatment there. Two possible explanations are admissable: that she was in such a state that she was unaware of the abuses, or could not later remember them, or that she did not think she would be believed, and would possibly be thought mad again—she would have been only too aware of the consequences of her complaint if she found herself at Warburton's again. If Mary was similarly abused, either of the same factors might explain her silence on the subject. There is also the more distressing possibility that Mary felt she had no right to complain of the treatment she received, that she bore in silence what she perceived in some sense to be a just punishment for her terrible crime.

It is an inescapable fact that these abuses were occurring within the same walls that confined Mary, at the time that she was confined there and to people like her. While we cannot conclude from this that she personally was abused, we can be far from certain that she was not. Even taking the most optimistic view, that she escaped the ill treatment which seemed universally

[14] Ibid, 31 & 39.
[15] Mitford, *A Description of the Crimes*, 6-8.
[16] Ibid, 14-15.

practised at Warburton's madhouse, she could not have failed to hear the blows, the curses and the screams, nor, unless she was kept perpetually in solitary confinement, to witness the consequences of the abuse of those women of her own class whose 'whole appearance demonstrated extreme ill treatment', or those who, as a result of being routinely punched in the face, 'exhibited an appearance truly horrible'.[17] It seems impossible that Mary could have been unaware of what went on at Warburton's unless she was completely insensible throughout her sojourns, which we know she was not. Whether Charles knew is a different, and more delicate matter. What is certain is that Warburton's keepers were adept at presenting an entirely misleading 'front' to visitors. Mitford, who was himself incarcerated there, knew that while the conditions in which pauper patients were kept excited very little interest, patients paying at the higher rate would be cleaned up and brought into the front parlour to receive visitors, who assumed this was where they generally spent their day.

It is clear from his letters that Charles placed great faith in the women who had immediate responsibility for Mary. Presumably he was under the impression that these were of a different breed from those encountered by Rogers while he was a visiting surgeon at the same madhouse at the same time, in whom he was 'sorry to be obliged to say' he observed 'even a greater degree of ferocity, if possible, . . . than in the men'.[18] Mitford's account of the methods by which visitors were deceived by the female keepers is worth quoting at length. Like Miss Rolleston, one harmless lunatic known as Crazy Jane was routinely raped by the male keepers, only to be beaten afterwards by her female keeper who declared 'she could not keep her from the men'. This was, Mitford wrote:

> . . . a burning lie to my certain knowledge; depraved in themselves, they knew not what virtue meant, and the sacred stream of pity never flowed in their corrupt veins. Mr. Chawner, the clergyman, once emphatically denounced those women to the housekeeper as 'the sweepings of Hell,' if so, it is a pity that place should ever be swept; at all events, they are the scum of the earth, and were the kennels of St. Giles's to be raked for infamy, none would be found to equal them; yet they dressed well, and could assume a look of cheerful humility, and shew tenderness to their patients when occasion called for them thus to do penance to the real sentiments of their base hearts. I have seen them receive presents from the afflicted friends for their kindness, when those, from whom they received this reward, were worse used by them than any others.
>
> One afternoon, Miss Rolleston ran up stairs before the housekeeper in a rude romping way, as might be expected from her situation. The old lady, to teach her respect, as she said, ordered her to be straight-waistcoated; it was hardly done before her parents came, when the old sycophant herself brought her down stairs into the parlour neatly dressed, and received from her mother, as a reward for her humanity, a silk dress, and when they were gone, she laughed at their folly, and ordered the punishment of the waistcoat again to be inflicted on the poor girl, unconscious of giving any offence.
>
> There was a lady confined by her husband, labouring under melancholy madness, or rather a powerful nervous complaint; he called every Sunday to see her, and she always entreated him with tears, to have her removed, but gave no reason why she wished it, and

[17] Rogers, *A Statement of the Cruelties*, 31.
[18] Ibid, 19.

> the keeperesses took care they should never be left alone together, from fear that she might tell 'the secrets of her prison-house.'[19]

This lady was sufficiently in control of her senses to know better than to be seen to tell her secrets. Another female patient whose letter of complaint was intercepted was, 'as a general admonition for her presumption, . . . well flogged with a rope, and tied to her bed-post for a week, not permitting her to retire for the purposes of nature, and the stench in the room was abominable'. Patients deemed likely to blow the whistle on their gaolers were heavily drugged when visitors were expected and Mitford confidently asserted that even 'the medical visitors of Hoxton mad-house know nothing of its general management'.[20]

While there were obvious methods of discouraging inmates from telling their stories to their families and friends, published revelations were also easily cried down. The journalist John Mitford's observations could be discredited on the grounds that he was himself mad, having been confined in the madhouse he described. Rogers, who had been a visiting surgeon at Warburton's, was a more 'reliable' witness, but accusations of lying and theft (both unsubstantiated) by the superintendant of one of Warburton's madhouses ensured his ruin and also served as a warning to other professional witnesses. However, the close consonance of the accounts of Mitford, Rogers and witnesses to the select committees repeatedly confirm the authenticity of their reports.[21]

Armed with these testimonies which are external to, and independent of, the Lambs' story, remarks in their correspondence which otherwise seemed insignificant (appearing to say nothing of Mary's experiences) now regain their full importance. For example, during Mary's first confinement following the murder, Charles told Coleridge that he and Mary wrote to each other almost every day because 'we can scarce see each other but in company with some of the people of the house'.[22] He later mentioned to Manning – *en passant* – that he had been to visit Mary but had been refused access to her.[23] We know that Mary posed no danger to Charles on the first occasion at least – she had allowed him to take the murder weapon out of her hand immediately following the murderous attack on her parents – yet her contact with him when he visited the madhouse was clearly closely supervised and subsequently controlled. It would appear, then, that Charles did not see Mary while she was confined, except on the permission of her keepers and then only in their presence.

While Charles trusted the women who had charge of his sister, he hints that their capacity for patience and kindness was not infinite. He wrote:

> They love her, and she loves them, and makes herself very useful to them. Benevolence sets out on her journey with a good heart, and puts a good face on it, but is apt to grow limp and feeble, unless she calls in the aid of self interest by way of crutch. In Mary's case, as far as respects those she is with, 'tis well that these principles are so likely to co-operate'.[24]

[19] Mitford, *A Description of the Crimes*, 25.
[20] Ibid, 8, 19.
[21] See Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy*, 240-1, 252.
[22] CL to Coleridge, [October 17 1796], Marrs I 52.
[23] CL to Manning, [June 1 1800], Marrs I 208.
[24] CL to Coleridge, October 28 1796, Marrs I 56.

In other words, though he believed Mary's keepers had good intentions, he was well aware of their all-too-human failings and of the absolute necessity of Mary ameliorating her vulnerability by making herself both agreeable and useful to them.

While regular visitors to the Hoxton madhouses—including Charles Lamb--could not be expected to suspect the crimes which were perpetrated within its walls, it does seem peculiar that Charles continued to return Mary to Warburton's after 1815-16, when a Select Committee of the House of Commons reported itself horrified by the regime and conditions in the Hoxton madhouses, stating 'a case cannot be found where the necessity for a remedy is more urgent'.[25] Presumably, Charles had some reason for giving the institution the benefit of the doubt for a further two years before changing the regular arrangements for Mary's care. The loss or suppression of any correspondence on the subject of Mary's periods in Warburton's madhouse makes it impossible to do more than speculate on how closely her experiences corresponded to those reported in accounts of the same institution at the same time. However, such evidence does suggest that Mary's bouts of confinement represented something more subtle and more disturbing than mere blank spaces in her life.

I have tried to illustrate how telling silence may be. I would like to close with a brief example of how we sometimes fail to attend to very plain speech. While there remain disagreements about the extent of Charles's interest in politics, Mary's world-view represents a further silence in our idea of her. There are a number of cues to lead me to suspect that her political views were more straightforward and—I would suggest—in some ways more radical than Charles's.

Mary's formal education did not extend beyond a few years at William Bird's Academy, a local day school where she learnt Arithmetic and English composition. After that she began her apprenticeship, probably at the age of about fourteen, as a dress-maker. By the time Charles left Christ's Hospital, she was a fully-fledged mantua-maker, and soon had a young apprentice of her own. Charles's school years are well-documented but again we know virtually nothing of Mary's life at this time.

Dress-making was labour-intensive and often tedious work, mantua-making more so, and her additional domestic duties (as the only daughter of the house) left Mary little time to call her own. Charles gives us a hint of this in his essay on the pleasures of reading. In it he considers books as physical objects, and writes of the pleasingly grubby condition of the volumes in circulating libraries:

> How they speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight! – of the lone sempstress, whom they may have cheered (milliner, or harder working mantua-maker) after her long day's needle-toil, running far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Lethean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents![26]

Mary was to take a less romantic view of this situation, writing: 'Needle-work and intellectual improvement are naturally in a state of warfare.'

[25] Cited by Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy*, 16.
[26] 'Detached Thoughts on Reading.'

While we know hardly anything about Mary's life during the period that her younger brother was at school, the only piece of non-fiction she ever published—also the only project she undertook entirely without her brother's collaboration—gives us an unparalleled opportunity to understand an aspect of Mary's intellectual and political life that is elsewhere barely hinted at. Mary wrote the essay 'On Needle-work' under the nom-de-plume 'Sempronia' for *The British Lady's Magazine*, in 1814 at the age of 50, when she was in more comfortable circumstances, but it was confessedly informed by her years as a young professional sempstress. The eminently reasonable tone of the essay went some way towards disguising the radical nature of its proposal. Her argument was that needlework was an instrument of oppression.

'On Needle-work' questioned the almost universal practice of middle-class women occupying their 'idle' moments in sewing. Sewing had long been a favoured pursuit for women of this class for many reasons: principally, it demonstrated industry (the devil being ever ready to make work for idle hands) yet was a peculiarly feminine form of industry, much more work often being entailed in the decoration of the article than in making the thing itself. It was therefore not 'real work' but a kind of physical manifestation—almost a 'sign'—of domestic femininity.

Mary's closely-argued case devolved on two premises. Firstly, there was no economic imperative for middle-class women to make their family's clothes: sewing was time-consuming and garments could be cheaply bought ready-made:

> 'A penny saved is a penny earned,' is a maxim not true unless the penny be saved in the same time in which it might have been earned. I, who have known what it is to work for *money earned*, have since had much experience in working for *money saved*; and I consider, from the closest calculation I can make, that a *penny saved* in that way bears about a true proportion to a *farthing earned*.

Moreover, women who did not *need* to produce their own linen were taking the bread from the mouths of the vast class of women who could *only* earn their living by their needle—this being at the time one of the very few respectable professions open to women who had to support themselves. The amateur needlewomen not only contracted the market for professional sempstresses, but also pushed down the prices they were able to charge, as people are generally not prepared to pay the true price for work that they could do themselves 'for nothing'.

Secondly, Mary insisted, middle-class women not only economically deprived the professional needlewomen, but also culturally disadvantaged themselves. By imposing upon themselves the quite unnecessary burden of endless needlework—turning to embroidery and elaborate patchwork when there was no essential sewing to be done—they conspired to reduce their own opportunities to improve their minds through reading, conversation and other 'leisure' pursuits to which men readily resorted. Female 'accomplishments' such as embroidery actively inhibited women from accomplishing anything more meaningful. Men, Mary reasoned, did not feel the same obligation to fill up their day with a variety of self-imposed and inconsequential tasks.

> 'They can do what they like,' we say. Do not these words generally mean they have time to seek out whatever amusements suit their tastes? We dare not tell them we have no time to do this; for if they should ask in what manner we dispose of our time we should blush

> to enter upon a detail of the minutiae which compose the sum of a woman's daily employment. Nay, many a lady who allows not herself one quarter of an hour's positive leisure during her waking hours, considers her husband as the most industrious of men if he steadily pursues his occupation till the hour of dinner, and will be perpetually lamenting her own idleness.
>
> *Real business* and *real leisure* make up the portion of men's time: - two sources of happiness which we certainly partake of in a very inferior degree.

Mary concluded that, in order to further the interests of both classes of women, needlework should *only* be undertaken as paid work. This essay has been neglected by—if it is not unknown to—modern feminists, although Jane Aaron has justly observed: 'It boldly stands out today as one of the earliest expositions in British literature of what would later be called feminism.'[27]

It seems to me that our neglect of 'On Needlework' is a classic example of how we prioritise evidence. Were this the only piece of Mary's writing ever to have been published, our view of her would be—literally—radically different. Yet we make little attempt to reconcile the Mary of 'On Needlework' with the Mary of the Juvenile Library, let alone Mary the sister, or yet Mary the mad. In fact, we take hardly any account of the Mary who wrote 'On Needlework', I suggest, because it does not 'fit' with the picture we have built out of the other random scraps of information we have about her. It is almost an anomaly.

The job of the biographer must be to forge the links between all these different Marys—or rather all these scraps of Mary—and somehow make her as real and three-dimensional as her better documented brother. If we venerate Charles—and I'm aware that that is not a very academic sentiment, but this is the Charles Lamb Society—then we are obliged to do our best to understand the woman that he venerated above all others. In order to get anywhere near this we must pay close attention to the anomalies and listen carefully to the silences.

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[27] Jane Aaron, *A Double Singleness: Gender and the Writings of Charles and Mary Lamb* (Clarendon, 1991).

Reviews

ARTHUR BRADLEY AND ALAN RAWES, EDS.. *Romantic Biography*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003. Pp. xvii + 202. ISBN 0-7546-0993-6. £40.

THE VERY TITLE OF THIS NEW MONOGRAPH, *Romantic Biography*, bears testament to the enormous scope of its content, and its editors have succeeded admirably in producing a coherent series of essays that deal with the lives of many of the major Romantic writers. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Clare, Southey, Austen, Byron, Burns, Scott, Keats, De Quincey and Shelley all receive detailed analysis in a volume that negotiates its way with assurance through many of the most contentious questions that face readers of Romantic poetry and prose. What is Romantic biography, and what are the competing notions of the self that dominate it, what, indeed, is the value of biography as a genre and is it appropriate to focus on the lives of writers when perhaps it would be better to look more closely at their writings? To the final question Wordsworth would, of course, have answered with a resounding negative, as his *Letter to a Friend of Burns* (1816) testifies to his profound distrust and dislike of the genre. These, nonetheless, are the issues at the very core of this volume which moves fluidly from a reassessment of the validity of using Frederick Martin's *Life of John Clare* (1865) for evidence of the poet's sexual activities, to an analysis of the Shelley-Byron relationship in the context of Derrida's notions of the self. With the recent upsurge in biographies of the great Romantics, part of a broader deepening of interest in biography as a whole, this book is a timely contribution to Romantic scholarship and a comprehensive survey of the lives of a number of great writers and poets.

The volume begins with Michael O'Neill's fine analysis of the complex ways in which Coleridge and Wordsworth engage with the autobiographical in their poetry. O'Neill's contribution is perhaps the highlight of the whole volume, and his subtle, nuanced, sensitive and deeply perceptive reading of Coleridge's conversation poems is particularly impressive. Engaging critically with the recent publications of David Bromwich and Kenneth Johnston, O'Neill deftly illustrates the variety of methods in which 'Romantic poetry encourages biographical interest, but bends such interest to its own artistic purposes' (15). This broad survey is immediately followed by Jonathan Bate's essay, which argues that even the most fictionalised and romanticised accounts of poets and writers do offer a level of insight that is worthwhile to a biographer. Bate, himself the author of a novel based on the life of Hazlitt, *The Cure for Love* (1998), suggests that the 'distinction between the biographer's art and the novelist's' is not always as clear as many biographers have previously suggested (21). To illustrate his point Bate takes issue with the denunciation of Frederick Martin's *The Life of John Clare* (1865) by J.W. and Anne Tibble in their biography of the same poet in 1932. The Tibbles accuse Martin of making use of archival evidence 'as a novelist rather than as a biographer', whereas Bate argues that Martin's account of Clare's sexual activities and the possibility of his fathering of an illegitimate child has been of great use to him in his own research for his forthcoming life of Clare. Mark Storey's contribution follows on from his *Robert Southey: A Life* (1997) and his attempts to bring Southey back from the periphery of Romantic studies and to counter the persistent charge of absurdity that is perennially levelled against him. Storey presents a Southey who was acknowledged by Hazlitt to be one of the greatest prose writers of the age, and whose *Poems* of 1797 is an aesthetic as well as historic achievement that anticipates the democratisation of poetry usually attributed to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Even Southey's much-maligned epics, *Madoc*,

Thalaba and *The Curse of Kehama*, are, argues Storey, beginning to be read 'as major poems in their own right' (34) and not simply as precursors to the Oriental preoccupations of Keats and Shelley. Storey's contribution is followed by the republication of Kenneth Johnston's well-known defence of *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (1998) which prefaced the second edition of that work. Johnston's discussion of the accusations of sensationalism that surrounded the biography and his controversial claim that Wordsworth biography 'needs more speculation' (*Hidden* 8) adds resonance to the recurrent themes of the volume as a whole, and this is appropriately followed by Joe Bray's analysis of the ways in which Jane Austen's biographers deal with the 'Eminent *Lacunae*' in her life. Bray takes the two 1997 biographies of the novelist by David Nokes and Clare Tomalin as his primary examples, and sides with the latter in his preference for a cautious stance when it comes to dealing with the 'awkward gaps' in the surviving evidence of Austen's life. Nokes's attempt to strongly affirm Austen's rather ambiguous position as a specifically 'Romantic' writer by drawing analogies between her art and her life is, according to Bray, fraught with peril. Indeed, this theme is pursued in Alan Rawes's forceful and convincing denunciation of the methodology underlying the biographical practices that emerge from Benita Eisler's *Lord Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame* (1999). Rawes's essay is a timely foil against the all too frequent assumption that Byron's incestuous relationship with his half-sister is a clearly proven fact. Rawes's analysis of the evidence argues persuasively that such assumptions ought not to be made without acknowledgment of the reading of other possibilities from the evidence of Byron's letters and journals. Again, the contributor warns against the distinctly Romantic tendency of drawing obtuse analogies between the poetry and the poet.

A change in focus is marked by the next two essays in the volume which, rather than focusing on recent and forthcoming biographies of Romantic writers, both analyse the work of famous biographers of the Romantic period. Gerard Carruthers's contribution is a deeply perceptive reading of Lockhart's lives of Burns and Scott. Carruthers argues that Lockhart's 'pristine moral agenda' (100) with its roots in the puritanical Calvinism that dominated much of late eighteenth century Scotland, worked in his biographies to dissociate Burns and Scott from the mainstream of Romantic literature. Lockhart's tendency to side-step the 'peasant, Presbyterian and libido-driven realities' (96) of Burns's muse, and his attempts to portray Scott as a perfect Scottish gentleman, ignore the broader literary traditions from which both writers emerged and, indeed, worked to assist in their subsequent marginalisation in the Romantic literary canon. Julian North's article deals with De Quincey's biographical essay on Coleridge and Lady Blessington's *Conversations of Lord Byron*. North's contribution analyses brilliantly the potentially dictatorial possession of the biographical subject by the biographer in De Quincey's essay, and is particularly perceptive of the subtle gender issues that are latent in Lady Blessington's account of Byron. North's attempts, however, to relate the techniques of De Quincey and Blessington to Anne Mellor's definition of feminine Romantic ideology is perhaps an unnecessary complication to an otherwise perfectly cogent argument.

The next two contributions are driven by modern literary theories about gender and the self. Jennifer Wallace discusses the bearing that the myths of Keats's physical frailty have had on the reading of his poetry, whilst Arthur Bradley calls into question the tendency of biographers of the Shelley-Byron relationship to work within the context of Hegelian dialecticism. Bradley suggests that their relationship should be viewed in the light of Derrida's concept of 'the (nondialectical) law of the (dialectical) stricture' as espoused in *Glas*, or as Bradley puts it, 'the

identity of identity and difference'. The underlying thesis that Shelley and Byron's intellectual relationship was not one of absolute opposition is undoubtedly pertinent, yet Bradley's explanation of the arguments of Derrida and Bataille is difficult for the non-specialist to follow, and his persistent use of the rather vague phrase quoted above further complicates the issue at hand. Bradley overstates the emphasis on the Hegelian perspectives of Charles Robinson (1976) and William Brewer (1994), and his warning against biographical approaches that proceed 'upon philosophical assumptions about difference which perpetuate themselves quite independently of the lives of their supposed subjects' (161) appears to implicate his own reading of the relationship in the light of Derrida's ideas on 'the identity of identity and difference'. The volume is brought to a close with Ralph Pite's survey of different models of biography and the self, particularly what he calls the 'depth self' or the individual, autonomous Romantic genius. Pite argues that alternative biographical approaches can be gauged by assessing 'the critical and biographical traditions which have helped to create the Romantic self' (178). Pite's discussion is an appropriately accomplished ending to an intriguing series of essays.

With the eminent exceptions of Blake and Hazlitt, *Romantic Biography* covers a broad range of canonical biographical subjects and is an accomplished work of scholarship. In the opening contribution to the volume Michael O'Neill discusses Shelley's remark that 'The Poet & the man are two different natures' (14) and this is the dilemma at the heart of literary biography. The strong autobiographical impulse of much of the great work of Romantic writers lends itself easily to biographical study. Yet the deliberate self-fashioning of the poetic self always creates difficulties for any reader who seeks to draw analogies between 'The Poet & the man'. This volume investigates the dilemma in a subtle and perceptive manner and ends by calling into question the degree to which any writer can be said to have a clearly definable self. The true self, as it were, often remains an amorphous entity that defies and resists definition

Stephen Burley

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The President
6 December 2003 Meeting –
The title of Professor Michael O'Neill's lecture, advertised as 'Dream Children', will now be 'Only What Might Have Been: "Lamb and Illusion"'.

IN MEMORIAM

The Somerset writer Berta Lawrence died on June 21, 2003, aged 97. The youngest of three daughters of a Buckinghamshire farmer who lived in a small Buckinghamshire village, she gained a place at Aylesbury Grammar School, then was the first female to win a County Major Scholarship. Berta read English and French at Reading, at that time part of the University of London, being awarded First Class Honours before obtaining a Diploma in Education. She moved to France in order to lecture in English Language and Literature at the University of Clermont Ferrand. She also taught English in three French schools. In France in 1930 she met her husband to be, Jack Lawrence, who was also teaching there. They married in 1932 and moved to the village of Wembdon just outside Bridgwater, where Jack Lawrence taught history at Dr. Morgan's Grammar School for Boys; he later became Deputy Head. At times Berta also taught French at the Girls' Grammar School, as well as English at the French Convent in Langport and, as occasion demanded, at other local schools. Wembdon was their home for the whole of their married lives.

Berta Lawrence wrote some verse whilst still at Grammar School, a collection of twenty-one verses: *The Great Orchestra and other Poems* (Arthur H. Stockwell, London) under her maiden name, Bertha Buckingham; it was published in 1921. She rarely mentioned this booklet, describing it as 'immature'. Her serious writing commenced when her two children were young by contributing children's stories and verses to *Child Education* for over twenty years—they published over one hundred of her verses. During the 1940s she also wrote for the BBC radio programme Children's Hour. She followed this by writing short stories for radio and magazines such as *Chambers' Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* as well as a variety of articles on literary, topographical and historical subjects for publications such as *The Lady, Guardian, The Countryman, Western Morning News, South West Catholic History, Somerset and West,* and *Dorset Life*. She also wrote for the journals of the Charles Lamb Society and the Thomas Hardy Society and between 1967 and 1987 contributed no less than twelve poems and as many articles to the *Exmoor Review*.

Berta Lawrence has written eight books, two of which are novels: *The Bond of Green Withy* (1954), a Country Book Club Choice, and *The Nightingale in the Branches* (1955), both published by Werner Laurie; two books about the Quantocks - *Quantock Country* (Westaway 1952) and *Discovering the Quantocks* (Shire 1974), two self- explanatory titles: *Coleridge and Wordsworth in Somerset* (1970) and *Somerset Legends* (1973) were published by David & Charles. Her first book was *A Somerset Journal* (Westaway 1951), and her last, *Exmoor Villages* (Exmoor Press 1984). Her husband revised and updated *Squibbs' History of Bridgwater*

(Phillimore, 1982) and with John Hamilton, wrote *Men and Mining in the Quantocks* (Town and Country Press 1970).

Berta Lawrence took an active part in local matters: she was one of the managers of the village school and also of one of the secondary schools in Bridgwater. She also anonymously funded a plaque presented by Bridgwater Civic Society to the Unitarian Chapel in the town to commemorate the fact that Coleridge preached there twice.

On July 1, her ashes were buried in the Parish Church of St George, Wembdon, alongside those of her husband who died in 1996. She is survived by her son and daughter, five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

J. C. Lawrence

FROM D.E. WICKHAM

Reginald Hine's Monument at Hitchin

In September 1999 I paid a first-ever visit to Hitchin in Hertfordshire. My day was filled with admiring the town, becoming increasingly impressed by the parish church, inspecting the unique Lancasterian Monitorial School Museum (named after Joseph Lancaster, the 'inventor', not Lancastrian), and investigating the shelves of Eric T. Moore's antiquarian bookshop in Bridge Street.

Finally I started looking at one of the more picturesque streets at the bookshop end of the town. Suddenly and by chance, I found myself approaching what I recognized as Reginald Hine's Memorial.

Reginald Leslie Hine (1883-1949) was the local solicitor, author, historian, and prototypical Elian who wrote, to name only some of his books, *Celtica Anima* (1912), *The Cream of Curiosity* (1920), *The History of Hitchin*, 2 vols. (1927-29), *Hitchin Worthies* (1932), *The Natural History of the Hitchin Region* (1934), *Confessions of an Un-common Attorney* (1945), *Charles Lamb and his Hertfordshire* (1949), and the posthumous *Relics of an Un-common Attorney* (1951). He was a great one for inscribing his books at ever increasing and therefore attractive length. (Only ten words? How very straightforward. One of my *Hitchin Worthies* is warmly inscribed to Elizabeth Bowen in sixty-odd words and further inscribed by her to Veronica Wedgwood.) Many of his readers were friends who preserved reviews and obituaries in their copies.

The memorial is at the out-of-the-way end of Tilehouse street, near the Luton Road and opposite George Colman's house, which is marked with a tablet. It is not what you might expect. It is attached to the wall behind a tiny planted area on the corner which is not really a memorial garden. The metal of the plaque looks rather sorry for itself and is hardly *aere perennius*. The memorial bears the words *Semper in libris / Præbuit speculum mundi*, which, allowing for an odd use of the past tense, of *præbeo, præbere*, seems to mean 'A mirror of the world always offered (itself) in books'.

In short, the memorial looked disappointing and neglected, but at least it survives.