

'This Scarlet Tainted Age': The 2004 Elia Birthday Toast

By DICK WATSON

ON THIS OCCASION LAST YEAR, those of you who were present will remember that the Charles Lamb Birthday lunch took place at a time of preparation for war, and in the middle of what was probably the largest demonstration that London has ever seen. Those who managed to get here did so by starting very early, or by taking circuitous routes of one kind or another, overground or underground, or by walking. To those who took part in the demonstration it seemed important to try to make a stand against the probable war: indeed my wife slipped away before Seamus Perry's reply to the toast in order to walk across the road into Hyde Park and join it.

As we listened to Seamus Perry, we seemed so close to that demonstration, and at the same time somehow apart from it. In some ways it seemed a curiously luxurious thing to be doing, to be celebrating Charles Lamb together while the world raged around us; in another sense it was absolutely right, part of the way in which we continued to observe the ceremonies in the face of politics, strategy, economic power, systems of states, and all the other considerations of the material world that normally dominate our lives. On that occasion one year ago some of us, I suspect, would have had a divided mind: part of ourselves was here, and part was across the road. And for some of us also, there may have been some relief that we could listen to Seamus Perry rather than to those who were speaking in Hyde Park. The arguments for and against war certainly seemed to be more difficult to determine than many of them were suggesting.

I reflected on this juxtaposition of the two worlds which we experienced a year ago, and wondered about the times of Lamb himself. We know that in *The Anti-Jacobin* Lamb was lumped in with Charles Lloyd as toad and frog, and perhaps unfairly was a victim of the same kind of polarization that was found in the speakers, though not the demonstrators, in Hyde Park in 2003. It was found in *The Anti-Jacobin*, but it went on to the end of the war. It may have been one reason why Lamb was strangely quiet about it all. While Southey, by the end of the war, was thinking of Napoleon as the incarnation of evil, and calling for his execution as a war criminal, and while Hazlitt, on the other hand, was reduced to drunkenness and despair by Napoleon's loss of the battle of Waterloo, Lamb remained curiously silent. He was much less interested in Napoleon than his contemporaries were: in 1801 he took apart a copy of Napoleon's letters belonging to Coleridge to use as scrap paper: 'don't be angry', he wrote, 'waste paper has risen forty per cent., and I can't afford to buy it . . . Mary says you will be in a damned passion about them when you come to miss them; but you must study philosophy.' He was much more likely to see Napoleon as a figure of fun, as Gillray was, than as a threat to Britain: one remembers his facetious questions to Thomas Manning, in Paris during the Peace of Amiens: 'Are you & the first Consul *thick*?'

He must have seen the volunteers drilling in London, and the Royal East India Volunteers were a regiment drawn from the East India Company itself. Lamb wrote a sardonic doggerel epitaph to a young volunteer 'who like other boys in this scarlet tainted age was ambitious of playing soldiers, but dying in the first flash of his valour was at the particular instance of his relations buried with military honours! Like any veteran scarr'd or chopt from Blenheim or Ramilies.' It began

Here lies a volunteer so fine,
Who died of a decline,

and ended

And without meaning to make any reflection on his mentals,
He begg'd to be buried in regimentals.

There is a certain uneasiness in this comedy which indicates an uncertainty of mind, Lamb's unsureness of himself and his role in the face of the political situation. It may have come from Lamb's circumstances, which led, as Jane Aaron has pointed out, to a suspicion of what she has aptly called 'the masculinist dogma of his times'. But she also points out that the playful element in his work 'becomes not simply a means of escape from harsh realities but a subtle organ of attack upon the pompous perpetrators of serious injustice'. It is the word 'subtle' that is so



L to R: Tom Craik, Wendy Craik, and Mary Wedd attend the luncheon to commemorate the 229th anniversary of Charles Lamb's birth.

important in her argument: for Lamb always stood firm in opposition to folly, and coarseness, and bad manners, and inconsiderate behaviour, to all those things which may not seem as important as the great events but which ultimately undermine a civilization and prevent it from seeing clearly. Small things can be as meaningful as important ones.

Lamb's precarious position was a forerunner of our own, and last year's brunch brought it sharply into focus. We were inside; they were out there with their banners. But it may be more complex than this: in celebrating Charles Lamb on his birthday, we surely were, and are, enrolling ourselves alongside those

for whom the arguments were, and are, subtle and complex: who, without surrendering to 'the impertinence of manhood', nevertheless, as he did, try to stand for goodness, kindness, and decency, and against the pompous perpetrators of serious injustice. Accordingly, I invite you to rise and drink the toast to THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB.

Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'

By MARY WEDD

A lecture given at the Wordsworth Winter School at Grasmere, February 2004

ON 27TH MARCH, 1802, Dorothy wrote in her Journal, 'A divine morning – at Breakfast Wm wrote part of an ode – Mr Olliff sent the Dung & Wm went to work in the garden . . .'.¹ It has long been one of my favourite entries, for its combination of sublimity and bathos! But it is important, not just for the dating of the first four stanzas of what became 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', but because Dorothy has no doubt that the new poem is to be an ode, which is characterized by being 'dignified or exalted in subject'.² That the Ode was a form deserving of special respect for Wordsworth is evidenced by his comment on 'Tintern Abbey' in 1800: 'I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition'.³ By 1802 he *had* ventured to approach the Ode-form proper, which demands rhyme, unlike the blank verse of 'Tintern Abbey', and for which there were accepted patterns. The poem did not have its long title in the 1807 volume but instead the epigraph from Virgil, '*Paulo majora canamus*'⁴ (Let us sing a somewhat loftier strain), which indicates its exalted status. On 17th June 1802, Dorothy recorded that 'William added a little to the Ode he is writing'.⁵ Opinions vary as to whether this means that Wordsworth added several stanzas on this day or merely expanded on what he had already written but, though Wordsworth's memory for dates was notoriously unreliable by the time he dictated the Fenwick Notes, in this case most readers tend to accept his approximate statement that 'two years at least passed between the writing of the first four stanzas and the remaining part' and to conclude that stanzas V to XI were written in February 1804 and the poem completed by March 6th.⁶

Unlike the 'Ode to Duty', which Wordsworth tells us is on the model of Gray's 'Ode to Adversity' which is copied from Horace's 'Ode to Fortune', the 'Immortality Ode' is on the Pindaric pattern,⁷ also used by Gray, which is characterized by the irregularity in the number of feet in the different lines and the arbitrary disposition of the rhymes, a form particularly suitable to Wordsworth's purposes here. As J.R. Watson says, 'The irregular stanzas of the Pindaric ode are very important in establishing the authentic combination of feeling and thought which is found in the "Immortality Ode", which approaches a new freedom and suggests a spontaneity and confidence which is confirmed by the poems of these years'.⁸

¹ Pamela Woof, ed., *The Grasmere Journals* (Clarendon Press, 1991).

² 'Ode', *Oxford English Dictionary*.

³ William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Clarendon Press, 1940-49) II, 517.

⁴ Virgil, *Eclogues IV*.

⁵ Woof 11.

⁶ For dating, see the Cornell Edition *Poems in Two Volumes and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, 271.

⁷ From *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Harvey, 647. The newer *Oxford Companion*, ed. Margaret Drabble, has a new slant on this, not, I think, relevant to Wordsworth or Gray.

⁸ J.R. Watson, *English Poetry of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (Longman, 1985) 146.

The first four stanzas mourn Wordsworth's loss of the intensity of childhood vision—'The things which I have seen I now can see no more'—and end 'Where is it now, the glory and the dream?' These stanzas sparked off Coleridge's 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson' which became the 'Dejection Ode', providing part of what Jared Curtis has called 'a poetic dialogue on despair'.⁹ But in 1804 Wordsworth tried to answer his own question and, if possible, to find some consolation. For a framework in which to do so he turned to Plato.

Duncan Wu, whose books on *Wordsworth's Reading* are my encyclopedia in such matters, says, 'Wordsworth's earliest reading of Plato is not easy to pin down' but he usefully reminds us of the note to 'I heard (alas, 'twas only in a dream)' composed a little later, 'perhaps in 1817'.¹⁰ Here Wordsworth 'directs the reader to "See the *Phaedo* of Plato, by which this sonnet was suggested"'. In the Fenwick Note to the Ode he says, 'a pre-existent state . . . among all persons acquainted with classic literature, is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy' and in those days, and for long after, every educated man *was* acquainted with classic literature. R.W. Clancey has traced the way in which public schools and grammar schools based their curriculum on the classics.¹¹ My own volume containing a translation of the *Phaedo* came to me from my father-in-law, who acquired it when he was a student in 1905. Both it and the popular *History of Philosophy*, published in 1936 which I, at university in my turn, bought for myself have a note referring to Wordsworth's Ode. Surely, for Wordsworth to have placed Plato first in his list of the world's greatest intellects in his *Reply to Mathetes*,¹² probably written in 1809, he must have been familiar for some time with his work, if only in Taylor's translation. In the sonnet 'I heard (alas 'twas only in a dream)' Wordsworth dreams he hears the song of the dying swan, 'the votary of Apollo':

And knows she not, singing as he inspires,
That bliss awaits her which the ungenial Hollow
Of the dull earth partakes not, nor desires?

In the *Phaedo* Plato says, 'we dwell in a hollow of the earth, and think that we are dwelling on its surface . . .' whereas really 'if any man could reach the surface, or take wings and fly upward, he would look up and see a world beyond, just as the fishes look forth from the sea and behold our world. And he would know that this was the real heaven, and the real light, and the real earth, if his nature were able to endure the sight'.

Wordsworth tells us in his Fenwick Note to the Ode that in childhood he had been unable to believe in the reality of his own death because of 'the indomitableness of the spirit within me' and that 'with a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or a tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality'. In other words, he had felt himself so much a part of the spiritual world of 'the real heaven and the real light, and the real earth' that he lost contact with objects in the 'ungenial hollow'. How natural, then, that Wordsworth 'took hold of the notion of pre-existence' as well as of a future life as a poetic framework for these experiences. In his Fenwick Note later in life he took care not to offend 'some good and pious persons' by seeming to wish 'to

⁹ Jared R. Curtis, *Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition: The Lyric Poems of 1802* (Cornell University Press, 1971).

¹⁰ Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 168.

¹¹ R.W. Clancey, *Wordsworth's Classical Undersong: Education, Rhetoric, and Poetic Truth* (Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹² *Reply to Mathetes, Prose Works*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Clarendon Press, 1974) II, 11.

inculcate such a belief', which he says 'is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith, as more than an element in our instincts of immortality', but the idea is fundamental to our understanding of the poem. In the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates conclude that 'we must have received our knowledge of all realities before we were born', lost it at birth, 'then afterwards, by using our sense on the objects of sense, recovered the knowledge which we had previously possessed . . .'. In which case, he says, 'are we not right in calling that recollection?' Among the Ideas we remember are those of 'an absolute beauty, and an absolute good, and an absolute greatness, and so on'. But before we recover that knowledge we first must lose it. 'We are not born with it'. Here the translator of my father-in-law's edition adds a note:

Compare Wordsworth's famous *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*. It must be noticed that in one respect Wordsworth exactly reverses Plato's theory. With Wordsworth 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy': and as we grow to manhood we gradually forget it. With Plato, we lose the knowledge which we possessed in a prior state of existence, at birth, and recover it, as we grow up.¹³

The reason for this contradiction is, of course, the 'two recollections of childhood' on which, as Wordsworth told Mrs. Clarkson, 'the poem rests entirely'.¹⁴ They are 'one, that of a splendour in the objects of sense which is passed away, and the other an indisposition to bend to the law of death as applying to our particular case'. The second of these can be encompassed in Plato's belief in a superior state both before earthly life and after death, but how account for the first? What if we do not, as Plato thought, immediately forget the ambiance of the pre-natal spiritual world but only gradually lose it as we become ensnared in that 'ungenial hollow'? Moreover, is the natural world as unprepossessing as that 'hollow' suggests? If, as Plato indicates, we recover our knowledge by 'using our senses on the objects of sense' then no, indeed. Wordsworth's childhood vision, whose loss he laments, was closely bound up with the natural world. He can still see its beauties and sympathize with the joy of the shepherd-boy and all the 'blessed creatures' who delight in the Spring but, although he says, 'The fullness of your bliss, I feel – I feel it all . . .', it is clear that he is trying to persuade himself. His real experience was expressed hauntingly by Coleridge, 'I see, not feel, how beautiful they are'. So he is indeed reversing Plato's theory in this respect. Instead of regaining the pre-natal vision with the aid of 'the objects of sense' he is losing it.

So, in 1804, Wordsworth tries to answer the questions he left hanging in 1802, 'Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?' and, by extension, how can one face living without it? At first he seems to be taking up Plato's assertion that all knowledge is recollection from our pre-existence, which we forget at birth:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar . . .

We notice that our soul is associated with light, the guiding light of a lodestar. But then Wordsworth parts company with Plato:

¹³ *The Trial and Death of Socrates, Being the Euthyphron, Apology, Crito and Phaedo of Plato*, trans. F.J. Church (Macmillan, 1903) 140.

¹⁴ William Wordsworth to Catherine Clarkson, January 1815, *Letters: The Middle Years, 1812-1820*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd ed., rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford University Press, 1970) 189.

Not in entire forgetfulness
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But he
 Beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth, who daily farthest from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.

John Beer writes, 'Here the central presence is that of the sun, the existence of the newborn child being primarily compared to the birth of a planet from it' and comments on 'The daring of Wordsworth's theology in identifying God with the home from which the soul comes'.¹⁵ It is true that one sees in this poem a foretaste of the deep soul-searching which was to follow the death of Wordsworth's brother John, now only a year away.

The imagery of light runs through the poem, as it does through Coleridge's 'Dejection', light seen as a garment thrown over the earth by the seer—'Apparelled in celestial light'—or light bestowed, by the sun—'The sunshine is a glorious birth'—by the moon who 'doth with delight / Look round her when the heavens are bare', by our Star, and, first and foremost by God. But the light fades. As so often with Wordsworth, his mentor Milton is echoed here. The Hymn to Light at the beginning of Book III of *Paradise Lost* starts as a paean of praise, 'Hail holy light', reminding us of the first act of Creation, 'Let there be light':

. . . and at the voice
 Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest
 The rising world of waters dark and deep,
 Won from the void and formless infinite.

'May I express the unblam'd? since God is light', says Milton. But the passage ends with that radiance being withdrawn:

but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn; . . .

¹⁵ John Beer, *Wordsworth in Time* (Faber and Faber, 1979) 111-112.

We remember how Wordsworth, citing what was Milton's epic subject, said of pre-existence, 'the fall of Man presents an analogy in its favour'.¹⁶ However, Wordsworth was not, like Milton, left in complete darkness but with the degraded 'light of common day'. What a telling phrase that is, reminding us of one of those cold, grey, winter mornings when it hardly seems worth getting up to do the boring things that everyday life demands.

That dreary deprivation of true light is not, however, the whole story. It is not always such a dismal morning:

Earth fills her lap with pleasure of her own;
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
 And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely Nurse doth all she can
 To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
 And that imperial palace whence he came.

One of the interesting techniques that Wordsworth uses in this poem is the interplay of what I think of as subjective and objective, though that is an approximation. Suddenly what has been seen through the poet's eyes—and ours in so far as we share his experiences—takes on a character and personality of its own, for example,

The moon doth with delight
 Look round her when the heavens are bare . . .

In stanza VI it is the Earth which is revealed as a person in her own right, like one of those invaluable Nannies who, in upper-class families, fulfilled the role which Mothers were too busy playing Bridge or entertaining to perform themselves. It was Nanny who gave and received the love due between parent and child and rescued many an infant from emotional deprivation. She did not need to be elegant or good-looking. She provided a home in the Nursery. So Wordsworth's adjective 'homely' has both its meanings, both as used of a 'plain' unpretending person and as an adjective from 'home'. She has 'something of a Mother's mind' but she is *not* Mother and only has a 'Foster-child'. But she does her best for him, 'Inmate' of the 'prison-house' though he may be. She offers him 'pleasures of her own', 'natural' ones that come from the earth, and she tries to make him forget memories that might make him discontented. The 'imperial palace' is God's Heaven from which his Soul came and from whose 'glories' the Nurse tries to wean him.

The next stanza, VII, has been much criticized and felt as an intrusion in the dignified Ode and it does pull us up with a jolt but again Wordsworth has changed his point of view from an internal to an external picture. In view of his mention of the 'transitions' as one of the ode-like features of 'Tintern Abbey', it is not to be supposed that he was not aware of what he was doing here. In Hartley Coleridge he saw an example before his eyes of a young child still in just that state whose passing he had lamented in the early stanzas. In his poem 'To H.C., Six Years Old', written at about this time,¹⁷ he writes,

¹⁶ In the Fenwick Note. DeS/D IV 464.

¹⁷ For dating of composition, see Cornell Edition as above, p. 100.

...Thou Faery Voyager! that dost float
 In such clear water, that thy Boat
 May rather seem
 To brood on air than on an earthly stream;
 Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,
 Where earth and heaven do make one imagery;
 O blessed Vision! happy Child!

It is fascinating how the child's age changes from six years old here to 'a four years' darling' in the Ode as published in 1807 to six in 1815. If my arithmetic is right, Hartley was six in 1802 and eight in 1804.

However, to go back to those 'transitions' from subjective to objective, parallel with the startling beauty of the Moon and the homely affection of the Nurse, we have in stanza VII the shock of seeing the visionary child from the outside, through the eyes of an amused, loving adult onlooker. The parents' behaviour is beautifully sketched. One can just see Sally-pally overdoing the demonstrations of maternal love. Does Wordsworth use the word 'sallies' advisedly? Coleridge at one time was also a doting parent, forever watching and reporting on his son's antics. Underlying this apparently indulgent picture, however, lies a bitter irony. Children learn by imitation and, in his delighted playing out of adult life, the boy, unknown to himself, is portraying on Samuel Daniel's 'humorous stage'¹⁸ (which does not mean 'funny' but displaying different 'humours' or temperaments) man's sorry progress through life. The echo from Jacques' speech¹⁹ of the Seven Ages of Man carries no very cheerful message. After all the ridiculous and pointless poses of our days we end 'In second childishness, and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything'.

And with new joy and pride
 The little Actor cons another part;
 Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
 With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
 That Life brings with her in her equipage;
 As if his whole vocation
 Were endless imitation.

Hartley was not destined for the humiliation of extreme old age, though he rather surprisingly reached his sixties before he slipped 'in a moment out of life'.

In stanza VIII of the Ode the irony of the child's unawareness of the implications of his delighted dramatic performance is combined with that of his ignorance of his blessed state, living on earth but still closely in touch with the heaven his soul so recently left, 'Suspended in a stream as clear as sky, / Where earth and heaven do make one imagery'. Yet, in his blindness, as every child does, he longs to grow up:

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
 Thy Soul's immensity;
 Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
 Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,

¹⁸ Samuel Daniel – line 1 of his sonnet to Fulke Greville in dedication of *Musophilus*, see DeS/D IV 466.

¹⁹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* II.vii.139.

That, deaf and silent, readst the eternal deep,
 Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, -
 Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
 On whom those truths do rest,
 Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
 In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
 Thou, over whom thy Immortality
 Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
 A Presence which is not to be put by;
 Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
 Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
 Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
 The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
 Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
 Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
 And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
 Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

It is a paradox that the child, who is an 'Eye among the blind' and can still see the spiritual world which adults cannot, is yet in another sense blind himself, both to his present situation and to his future state. He has not yet lost his heritage, and he still 'Beholds the light, and whence it flows', but he is 'deaf and silent'. Ironically, he does not know consciously that he has the spiritual vision, nor can he communicate it or hear warnings that it will wane. Yet he can read 'the eternal deep, / Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, -' In other words, he is in touch with the Divine. No wonder Wordsworth calls him 'Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!' The truths 'Which we are toiling all our lives to find' are described as *resting* on the child, no effort needed or demanded. Spiritual communion is not achieved by exertion.

This stanza came in for a slating from Coleridge in Chapter xxii of *Biographia Literaria*. I think I may have confessed here before that, when I read the passage at school, I wrote angrily in the margin of my Everyman Edition 'Rot!' with a big exclamation mark. At that time no one but me was likely to uncover my presumption but later when I read I. A. Richards' book *Coleridge and Imagination*²⁰ I was deeply relieved to find that greater minds than mine shared my opinion. He called the passage that had roused my wrath 'a trough of liberalism' and asks, 'What has happened that Coleridge has been so obtuse here?'

It is curious, but I have noticed that people of very brilliant intellect do occasionally seem to demonstrate an almost willful obtuseness. Perhaps it is because common sense, not to be confused with Coleridge's 'good sense', does not come very high on their list of priorities or perhaps they are more aware of their 'abstruser musings' than of the hidden emotions that motivate them. Anyway, I do not think it is necessary to waste time on Coleridge's blind spot, which has been refuted in detail in Richards' book, but merely to observe that we should be alive to the potency of metaphor and paradox. Coleridge asks, 'What does all this mean?' Well, to me even as a schoolgirl, though no doubt I missed a great deal, the answer was obvious.

'A four-years' darling of a pigmy size (or six, if you prefer it!) does *not* immediately make one think of Kant or even of Plato, but of course the word 'Philosopher' does not apply exclusively to learned academics and theorists. Its first meaning in my dictionary is 'Lover of wisdom'. Modify this

²⁰ I.A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968) 131ff.

a little and it indicates a *possessor* of wisdom. One is reminded of the sonnet 'It is a beauteous Evening', which ends by saying to the child,

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshippingst at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

Here, while we are 'In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave' or of that 'ungenial Hollow', Wordsworth says, by contrast, to the child,

Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by . . .

Again an echo of Milton seems to enhance the meaning, where the brooding dove in *Paradise Lost* Book I (line 21) represents the Holy Spirit and in the poem 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' (line 68) 'Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave'. A holy and calming presence, which Wordsworth calls 'thy Immortality' because it is a survival of pre-existence and a foretaste of life after death, is always with the young child. 'Brooding' has both the sense of nurturing and of pondering. As a Master watches over his Slave or the Creature nurtures his creatures, so the Spirit is always present.

I have been using the final text of the poem but originally at this point came the lines

To whom the grave
Is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight
Of day or the warm light,
A place of thought where we in waiting lie . . .

Again, Coleridge in that chapter of *Biographia* objected strongly to these sentiments. Beside his strictures, in the margin I'm afraid that cheeky schoolgirl wrote, 'This beats all!' with another huge exclamation mark. Wordsworth, however, was more respectful to his friend and removed the lines. Among other things, Coleridge wrote of 'the frightful notion of lying awake in his grave!' That spiritual Presence, with which the boy lives, does not find the grave an intimidating place for him, even though it is 'but a lonely bed without the sense or sight / Of day or the warm light', because it is the way back to 'that imperial palace whence he came'. Wordsworth does not seem to share Coleridge's shudder at 'so horrible a belief' at all. Dorothy's Journal for April 29th 1802 tells how, on the occasion when both she and William lay 'in the trench under the fence . . . listening to the waterfalls and the birds', ' . . . he thought that it would be as sweet thus to lie so in the grave, to hear the *peaceful* sounds of earth & just to know that ones dear friends were near'. When the time came, Wordsworth made certain that Hartley would have his dear friends near by ensuring that his grave would be close to his and Mary's: 'Let him lie by us. He would have wished it'.

After this description of the heavenly presence watching over the child who can read 'the eternal deep, / Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, -' the stanza reverts to the terrible irony:

Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
 And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
 Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

The very rhythm of the verse suggests the deadening despair. So far Wordsworth has not found any way towards acceptance. On the contrary. The last three lines of this stanza are devastating, with their emphasis on the irreparable crushing of the human spirit by the repetitive meaningless activities of everyday life. One feels the cumulative effect of the words 'freight', 'heavy', 'weight', 'custom'. Earthly existence has become an oppressive force, suffocating the soul, freezing the heart, and even reaching down into the very depth of human life itself and paralyzing it. Yet the child who at present is free, 'glorious in the might / Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height', is not resisting 'the inevitable yoke' that years bring but is actually, with 'earnest pains' trying to hurry the process on. What a bleak picture! and one that we all recognize from our moments of profound depression, but here it purports to describe a permanent state, once that 'visionary gleam' has passed away.

When I was in a dismal mood as a child, my grandmother used to say, 'Count your blessing', which irritated me very much, but it was good advice all the same and Wordsworth proceeds to follow it in stanza IX. When the dancing flames of the fire have gone out, there remains a warm glow in the still shining embers. Just as this happens in the natural world, so too human nature catches at glimpses in memory of 'What was so fugitive':

O joy! That in our embers
 Is something that doth live,
 That nature yet remembers
 What was so fugitive!
 The thought of our past years in me doth breed
 Perpetual benediction . . .

He is not now giving thanks primarily for the childhood experience itself, though of course it is fundamental, but for its legacy in adult life. Our childhood depends on our being provided for by grown-ups and it is necessary for us to grow up and take responsibility for ourselves and others. The child, Hartley, who was under Wordsworth's eye as he wrote, was in later life to describe most touchingly the state of someone who does not take on adulthood:

Long time a child, and still a child, when years
 Had painted manhood on my cheek, was I
 For yet I lived like one not born to die;
 A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears,
 No hope I needed, and I knew no fears.
 But sleep, though sweet, is only sleep, and waking,
 I waked to sleep no more, at once o'ertaking
 The vanguard of my age, with all arrears
 Of duty on my back. Nor child, nor man,
 Nor youth, nor sage, I find my head is grey,
 For I have lost the race I never ran,
 A rathe December blights my lagging May;
 And still I am a child, tho' I be old,
 Time is my debtor for my years untold.

It is necessary to face head-on the challenge of that 'earthly freight' and to find a way of coming to terms with the seemingly drab pointlessness of daily life and with suffering and death. In this we are aided by the knowledge that there is another dimension to our existence which was real to us in childhood and to which we can still relate. This knowledge makes us question materialist values and still gives us such flashes of the eternal light that we react like Hamlet's father's ghost who 'started like a guilty thing' at the coming of dawn. We may get bogged down in the hurly burly of everyday life, Plato's 'vast tracts of mud and slime', but we cannot doubt the existence of 'the real heaven, and the real light and the real earth' if once we have experienced them. Hence,

... those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:

We give thanks for

... those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing . . .

The imagery of light is followed through here. The 'fountain' is the early source and the 'master' is the governing influence, so that the dull semi-darkness of 'the ungenial Hollow' is illuminated by glimpses of a spiritual world, 'the real light' of the *Phaedo*. So 'those first affections, / Those shadowy recollections' have power to

Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!

'Listlessness' and 'mad endeavour' are the two poles of the manic depressive state which haunted both Coleridge and Wordsworth in that 'dialogue of despair'. But, in times of peaceful receptiveness, we can be aware of another dimension.

Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea

Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Cleanth Books wrote rather charmingly about these 'best philosophers' . . . 'playing with their little spades and sand-buckets along the beach on which the waves break'.²¹ He is making the point that 'although the sea is the sea of entity, and the mighty waters are rolling evermore, the children are not terrified – are at home – are filled with innocent joy. The children exemplify the attitude towards eternity which the other philosopher, the mature philosopher, wins to with difficulty, if he wins to it at all'. Indeed, Wordsworth is here most subtly combining what I called the subjective and objective, seeing the children both from outside and inside, and the adult, though far advanced into the journey of earthly life, away from the sea, can not only observe the children who are still close to it but can travel to within distant sight of it himself.

So Wordsworth goes back to his original experience in stanza III when he observed the joy he could no longer share. Then, 'To me alone there came a thought of grief'. But now he has changed and most delicately indicates this. He still cannot feel as once he did but does not, as in the beginning of stanza IV, try to persuade himself that he can. He has come to terms with things as they now are. To be grown-up involves taking into account other human beings, their lives, their sufferings, their deaths, as well as one's own, and pondering on them until perhaps that wisdom which is the true philosopher's goal will combine with the memory of the child's vision, to make sense of things.

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
 And let the young Lambs bound
 As to the tabor's sound!
 We in thought will join your throng,
 Ye that pipe and ye that play,
 Ye that through your hearts to-day
 Feel the gladness of the May!

The quiet contrast between 'thought' and 'your hearts' and 'feel' epitomizes the necessary reconciliation of the adult's intellectual understanding with the aftermath of the child's unthinking illumination.

What though the radiance which was once so bright
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,
 We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

²¹ Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (Methuen, 1971) 117.

It is difficult to see how 'thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering' can be 'soothing'. I have the same problem with the end of *The Ruined Cottage* and parts of *The Excursion*. But perhaps Jonathan Wordsworth gives us a clue when, writing of *The Ruined Cottage*, he says of Wordsworth, it 'places him, perhaps unexpectedly, among the very few great English tragic writers'.²² Aristotle states concerning tragedy that 'through pity and fear' is effected 'the proper purgation of these emotions'. By observing and identifying with characters who undergo supreme suffering the onlooker gains a kind of relief by catharsis. As we see illustrated in many of Wordsworth's poems, other elements enter in, the courage and dignity with which human beings face catastrophe and endure the unendurable, and perhaps the belief that after death, as Wordsworth rephrases Plato's thought, we go back to 'God, who is our home'.

So perhaps, after all, we can understand what is meant here. As in 'Tintern Abbey' the adult's continuing sense 'Of something far more deeply interfused' with Nature is combined with 'hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity'. Wordsworth told how as a child he could not conceive of death as applying to himself and this is generally the case. It takes the experience of increasing age to come to terms with it, both for oneself and others. It is 'years' that bring the 'philosophic mind'. 'Philosophic' does not imply, as often in common parlance now, 'supinely accepting' but, as Stephen Logan notes in his Everyman Edition, it means 'wisely meditative', in other words, in *thoughtful* search for truth. Unlike the child, who is a philosopher with a vision but not intellectual understanding, the adult, who has acquired wisdom through bitter experience, particularly in the loss of that vision, can think things through and appreciate the importance of human relationships, sympathies, compassion and the common alternation of joys and fears. It is to 'the human heart' that he now gives thanks.

So, in stanza XI, the poet accepts his new way of appreciating nature, without the 'radiance' and 'splendour' it once had but still passionately loved. One is reminded of the title to Book VIII of *The Prelude* 'Love of Nature leading to Love of Man'. The sun which at the beginning of the poem was 'a glorious birth' is now 'setting' but, as Coleridge said in 'Dejection', 'Ours is her Wedding Garment, ours her Shroud', and Wordsworth too acknowledges that it is the eye of the human watcher that gives the 'sober colouring' now, as it once gave radiance. Yes, it is necessary to grow up and admit that 'Another race hath been, and other palms are won'. Wordsworth's adult understanding of 'the human heart' goes hand in hand with his altered relationship with the natural world. 'The pansy at my feet' in stanza IV reinforced the question 'Whither is fled the visionary gleam?' Instead, in the last stanza 'the meanest flower that blows' brings 'thoughts' deeper than any ephemeral sensation, thoughts whereby suffering and loss can be faced head on and yet transcended:

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills and Groves,
 Forebode not any severing of our loves!
 Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
 I only have relinquished one delight
 To live beneath your more habitual sway.
 I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
 Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
 The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
 Is lovely yet;
 The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye

²² Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (Harper and Row, 1969) 153.

That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
 Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

How can any reader be immune to the strength and beauty of this poetry? Yet objections have been made to the Ode since the days of F.R. Leavis,²³ who apparently cannot bear that 'the simple Wordsworth' should write what he calls with overt hostility, 'an ode in the Grand Style'. He regarded it as a forecast of the revisions to *The Prelude* whereby 'in the pursuit of formal orthodoxy he freely falsified and blunted the record of experience'. That Wordsworth felt that his subject in this case deserved the exalted treatment he associated with this form is clear but that the technique can be described as 'rhythmic vulgarity' is surely the opposite of the truth. I agree with Professor Watson that the wonderful versatility of the Pindaric Ode allows Wordsworth the freedom to express both thought and feeling in the most effective way. I have not had time to illustrate in detail the virtuosity with which Wordsworth uses the licence allowed by the varying length of line and the number of lines in a stanza, as well as 'the arbitrary disposition of rhymes', to convey that 'impassioned music of the versification' which he associated with the dignity of the ode.

Perhaps one or two examples will serve to suggest what further study might reveal. Stanza I has nine lines. The first line has five stresses, the second four.

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
 The earth and every common sight . . .

Then comes a very short line of two feet only

To me did seem

which reinforces the fact that this was his individual, personal experience, with the undertone of doubt in the word 'seem' emphasized somehow by its rhyming with the first line.

Apparelled in celestial light

Has four stresses, the long words 'Apparelled' and 'celestial' contributing to a relaxed happy feeling, by contrast, and rhyming with 'sight' in the second line. The fifth line, 'The glory and the freshness of a dream', a pentameter like the first, conveys both the joy and the doubt, 'glory' and 'freshness' but perhaps only 'of a dream'. The continuity is reinforced by the rhyme with the first and third lines. So far the stanza has had a leisurely and harmonious rhythm with the connecting alternate rhymes, except for our being pulled up by the short line with its suggestion of doubt. But now the rhythm changes. A meditative pentameter—'It is not now as it hath been of yore'—leads in to the shock of two short lines, one of three and one of two stresses:

Turn wheresoe'er I may
 By night or day, . . .

²³ F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation* (Pelican, 1972) 172-3.

And the sequence ends with a devastating Alexandrine, a six stress line, here made up entirely of monosyllables:

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The rhyme scheme alters, too, the two short lines rhyming within their enclosing longer lines, which rhyme with each other. One feels the force of Pope's description of a six-foot line, 'That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along',²⁴ but, instead of his satirical sneer at 'A needless Alexandrine', here the dragging metre serves a most useful purpose to convey the mood of distress.

Now turn to stanza IX, which by contrast has not nine but thirty-nine lines! Don't despair, I am not going to examine them all! It is obviously too long for a full analysis but note how the first twenty-seven lines are divided into blocks of varying metres and rhyme-schemes, which, without their mechanics obtruding on the reader, are skillfully constructed so as to make the desired effect. Then suddenly we come upon two very short lines of two feet only divided by a pentameter, 'To perish never' and 'Nor Man nor Boy'. It is surely no accident that these two should be emphasized in this way. The greater part of the poem so far has been concerned at length to examine the way the Boy and the Man move away from the light, so that now in one two-foot line of four words the poet can convey to the reader the whole of his message in the earlier stanzas and now also, in a sense, challenge its validity. When Wordsworth lists the forces that are 'at enmity with joy' he only has to say 'Nor Man nor Boy' for us to understand all that that means. By contrast, the other two-foot line sets against those forces

... the eternal Silence: truths that wake
To perish never;

All is not lost. We are still in touch with the 'fountain light' which is our 'master light' and, unlike the child's fleeting vision, there is a greater power which is everlasting. This stanza too ends in an Alexandrine which this time wonderfully gives the sense of strength and timelessness:

And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

I have given here a very inadequate hint at the subtlety and complexity of Wordsworth's manipulation of the Pindaric Ode form but it does not give any feeling of being overwrought as Leavis suggested. On the contrary, it seems to ebb and flow like a speech rhythm while maintaining its dignity. By this means Wordsworth is able to beguile the reader into entering into the sense of deprivation and the necessity of growing up and learning to deal with it.

In this age when a kind of inverted snobbery seems to rule, whereby anyone talking on the media on almost any subject seems to find it obligatory to begin by saying, 'I'm not religious', it is perhaps necessary to indicate that, if Wordsworth is not trying to inculcate Platonism, neither is he being overtly Christian. But I do not think that he could climb onto to-day's bandwagon and say, 'I'm not religious'. If religious feeling and 'intimations of immortality' are not part of human nature it is curious that, throughout the ages, there are evidences from stone circles onwards that they always have been. Looking at the atrocities which have been and are done in the name of religions, it is

²⁴ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, Part II.

understandable that there should be a backlash against them, but as long as people have to die there will be attempts to envisage immortality and as long as people experience some kind of mystical presence they will persist in thinking that there is a force greater than themselves or the material world. The Immortality Ode is a poetic record of one man's attempt to wrestle with his experience of these things and there could not be a more worthy subject for the grandeur of an ode.

Let me end with Stephen Gill's admirable judgment of this Ode in his *Life* of Wordsworth.²⁵ He quotes the last 27 lines of the poem, then sums up:

All of Wordsworth's major poetry affirms gain even as it evokes most poignantly the shared human sense of loss. But none, not even *The Prelude*, does so more eloquently than this.

Sevenoaks, Kent

²⁵ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Clarendon, 1989) 229.

‘a truly friendly man’: Richard ‘Conversation’ Sharp & Samuel Taylor Coleridge

By EDMUND GARRATT

I

IT WAS THE GOOD FORTUNE OF Richard ‘Conversation’ Sharp (1759-1835) to have been the recipient of a letter written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge on Sunday 15 January 1804. Composed in the King’s Arms, Kendal, it turned out to be one of the finest letters in Coleridge’s published correspondence.

In the letter Coleridge considers the ‘merits’ of Tom Wedgwood and William Wordsworth. Of the latter he wrote:

Wordsworth is a Poet, a most original Poet – he no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespere – no more resembles Shakespere than Shakespere resembles Milton – he is himself: and I dare affirm that he will hereafter be admitted as the first & greatest philosophical Poet – the only man who has effected a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought & Feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the *modifying* Power in that highest sense of the word in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the *aggregating* power – in that sense in which it is a dim Analogue of Creation, not all that we can *believe* but all that we can *conceive* of creation.¹

Coleridge was confident that ‘few subjects are more pleasing to you [Sharp] than the Details of the merits of two men, whom, I am sure, you *esteem* equally with myself’.² He was undoubtedly correct.

II

Richard Sharp was a Whig politician, intellectual, and City merchant who endeavoured to support the literary community in London. As a wealthy man he could afford to do so.³ Outside parliament, which he entered in 1806, Sharp divided his time between 17 Mark Lane in London, where his hat manufacturing business was based, and his ‘cottage house’ in the grounds of Fredley Farm, Mickleham, near Dorking in Surrey. William Hazlitt was one of many guests entertained by Sharp, and described his generosity in glowing terms.⁴ So too did Henry Crabb

¹ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), II, 1034. Hereafter *CL*.

² *CL*, II, 1034.

³ Sharp made his fortune as a partner in the West India house of Boddington, Sharp & Phillips in Fish Street, London, and afterwards as the proprietor of the hat manufacturers, Richard Sharp & Co. in Mark Lane.

⁴ In *The Monthly Magazine* essay ‘On the Want of Money’ (1827) Hazlitt claimed: ‘I never knew but one man [Sharp] who would lend his money freely and fearlessly in spite of circumstances (if you were likely to pay him, he grew peevish, and would pick a quarrel with you). I can only account for this from a certain sanguine buoyancy and magnificence of spirit, not deterred by distant consequences, or damped by untoward appearances. [. . .] Give me back one single evening at Box hill, after a stroll in the deep-empurpled woods, before Buonaparte was yet beaten,

Robinson, who noticed that hanging in Sharp's home 'were five most interesting portraits, all of men he knew – Johnson, Burke, and Reynolds by Reynolds, Henderson by Gainsborough, and Mackintosh by Opie'. Robinson also suggested: 'I do not think he will ever have any higher fame than that of being "Conversation Sharpe". He certainly talks well'.⁵

Sharp deserved the respect of literary London, however, not solely for his munificence or powers of conversation, but for his contribution to the radical Whig tradition in the early 1790s. In 1790 Sharp published a pamphlet that demanded the repeal of the Test and Corporation acts, even at the cost of violence.⁶ Sharp was also one of many religious Dissenters and radicals who belonged to the Society for Constitutional Information, co-founded in April 1780 by John Horne Tooke and the medical doctor John Jebb.⁷ At the SCI Sharp met James Mackintosh, the author of *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* (1791), and indeed became his closest friend. They were also members of Charles Grey's parliamentary reform association The Friends of the People between 1792-95, although by 1796 they had both moderated their politics. In 1798 Sharp and Mackintosh founded (with four other friends) the King of Clubs.⁸

The King of Clubs became one of the grandest literary clubs of the age, and had a strong Whig and Scottish character. Initially gathering at Mackintosh's house in Serle Street, in 1802 it met monthly at the Crown and Anchor tavern in the Strand, and for many years afterwards it met at the Freemasons' Tavern in Great Queen Street. About a dozen gentlemen attended each dinner, claret was the popular drink, and the conversation consisted chiefly of 'literary reminiscences, anecdotes of authors, criticisms of books'.⁹ Amongst its members were Thomas Malthus, Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, Lord Holland, Sydney Smith, Samuel Romilly, John Wedgwood, Thomas Campbell and Etienne Louis Dumont.

The King of Clubs' register does not record that Coleridge was ever a guest.¹⁰ However, I hope to stress, with the help of three manuscripts housed in the British Library, that between 1801-04 Coleridge moved on the fringes of the King of Clubs circle, and became a good friend of Richard Sharp's as a result. After all, it was Sharp who organised Coleridge's voyage to Malta on the *Speedwell* in March 1804.

'with wine of attic taste', when wit, beauty, friendship presided at the board!' (William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1932), xvii, 185).

⁵ See *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1869), iii, 412.

⁶ See *A Letter to the Public Meeting of the Friends to the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, at the London Tavern, on February the 13th, 1790. From a Lay Dissenter* (London: J. Johnson, 1790).

⁷ The core aim was, as Major John Cartwright declared during Tooke's treason trial in 1794, 'to give Constitutional Information to the public, particularly, and expressly, for the purpose of promoting a parliamentary reform for the recovery of their lost rights.' See Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins: Reformers in Late Eighteenth Century England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 60.

⁸ It was founded in February 1798 at Mackintosh's home in Serle Street, London. The other four founder members were James Scarlett, John Allen, Robert 'Bobus' Smith, and Samuel Rogers.

⁹ See *The Pope of Holland House – John Whishaw*, edited by Lady Seymour (London, 1906) 338. Hereafter *The Pope of Holland House*.

¹⁰ See the King of Clubs' register housed in the British Library: Add MSS 37337. The final dinner was held on 7 June 1823.

III

Sharp was introduced to Coleridge in 1801 almost certainly through Mackintosh. Mackintosh looked to involve Sharp in his collaboration with Coleridge on the ill-fated project to collate Tom Wedgwood's history of philosophical opinions on time, space and motion.¹¹ Coleridge's rivalry with Mackintosh was clearly intense at this time,¹² and this tension probably coloured his initial opinion of Sharp. On 13 February 1801 Coleridge told Thomas Poole that he believed 'Sharpe to be a very shallow man'. He saw shallowness in Sharp's description of Samuel Rogers as 'a sweet *Enamel Poet*', and described Rogers to Poole as 'the drivelling Booby that *let* the Pleasures of Memory'.¹³

Sharp and Rogers visited Coleridge and Wordsworth in Keswick in June 1801, and it helped to improve Coleridge's attitude towards them both. Thus, 'our rural Retirement has been honored by the company of Mr Sharp, and the poet Rogers – the latter, tho' not a man of very vigorous intellect, won a good deal both on myself & Wordsworth – for what he said evidently came from his own feelings, & was the result of his own observation. I doubt not that they both return to London with far other opinion respecting Wordsworth, than the Scotch Gentleman [Mackintosh] has been solicitous to impress his Listeners with'.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Coleridge often felt bewildered in the company of the King of Clubs circle. He recorded in his notebook that the faces of 'M^r Sharp, Sir J. Mackintosh, R. and Sydney Smith, M^r Scarlet, &c &c' acted upon him 'as if they were Ghosts', but more often as if he was a 'Ghost'. When among them, he added, it was as if he was 'not *consubstantial*'.¹⁵

Coleridge identified in the members of the King of Clubs an intellectual character that fell short of his own. For example, although he admired Sharp and Mackintosh's eloquence and powers of memory, he thought that their imaginations were arid.¹⁶ Indeed, it is interesting to

¹¹ Mackintosh had been in discussion with Wedgwood concerning this project since 1800, and Coleridge joined it some time after. Josiah Wedgwood said to Poole: 'When Tom was here he enjoyed a high satisfaction in explaining to Mackintosh the result of his metaphysical speculations, and in finding M. concur with him in his opinions. . . . He has also convinced Sharpe, as far as he has opened the business to him. The subjects he has cleared are no less than Time, Space, and Motion; and Mackintosh and Sharpe think a metaphysical revolution likely to follow' (quoted in *CL*, II, 675n).

¹² On this subject see John Beer's article, 'Coleridge, Mackintosh, and the Wedgwoods: a Reassessment, including some Unpublished Records', *Romanticism*, 7.1 (2001), 16-40.

¹³ See *CL*, II, 675-76.

¹⁴ *CL*, II, 737.

¹⁵ *Collected Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1957-2002), III, 3324.

¹⁶ Interestingly, Francis Horner, the founder of the *Edinburgh Review*, echoed Coleridge's criticism of Sharp and Mackintosh in his account of the King of Clubs. Horner was disappointed that too often 'the memory alone was put to work', and that there were 'no efforts of original production, either by imagination or reasoning powers' (*The Pope of Holland House*, p. 338). However, Horner was also critical of Coleridge. For example, he wrote to Francis Jeffrey on 29 March 1804 with the news that: 'I saw Coleridge one morn lately – he has very extraordinary powers of conversation undoubtedly – as a man of letters – not in good taste as conversation – but with a certain fervour and exaggeration of expression, that is very imposing, and sometimes really eloquent. He is now gone on board the vessel which is to convey him to Malta – from which time he proceeds to Syracuse, where it is his intention to remain a considerable time. He has professed, with a little of the fervour I speak of, his desire to be farther acquainted with Brougham and me; which, considering the *Edinburgh Review*, is curious. I don't admire these sudden affections'. *The Horner Papers: Selections from the Letters and Miscellaneous Writings of Francis Horner*,

balance Coleridge's descriptions of Sharp and Mackintosh. On 29 December 1802 he informed Poole:

Sharp is a clever ready-cut-& dried-speech-retailer, and a friendly man who, tho' he has no heart, has a neat thing enough of a cardioeid s Automaton, that answers all the purposes of a heart to all the demands & interests of simple acquaintanceship. As your Greek is not French or Latin or English, I must lexiconize my 'Cardioeidous['] – which signifies something in the likeness of a Heart – / a puppet Heart –¹⁷

Compare Coleridge's account of Mackintosh recorded in *Table Talk*. Coleridge recalled that Mackintosh once said of Humphry Davy in the autumn of 1803: 'That's a very extraordinary young man; but he is gone wrong on some points'. (They had been discussing 'Locke and Newton, and so forth!' over breakfast). Coleridge's response was to opine:

But Davy was, at that time at least, a man of genius; and I doubt if Mackintosh ever heartily appreciated an eminently original man. He [Mackintosh] is uncommonly powerful in his own line; but it is not the line of a first-rate man. After all his fluency and brilliant erudition, you can rarely carry off anything worth preserving.¹⁸

IV

Two letters housed in the British Library reveal the eager attempts of Mackintosh and Sharp to entertain Coleridge in the New Year of 1802, and so bring Coleridge into their circle. Coleridge had arrived in London in mid November 1801,¹⁹ but disappeared on Boxing Day for three weeks to stay with Poole at Nether Stowey. The day after returning on 21 January 1802, Coleridge wrote in a letter to William Godwin (who was frustrated to have seen so little of Coleridge) that he had 'dined out' recently with Mackintosh and Sharp, but this, he said, was only out of 'Principle'.²⁰ Coleridge was, however, to have more contact with them over the coming weeks.

On 30 January [Letter 1] Mackintosh invited Coleridge to a dinner with Sharp and Robert 'Bobus' Smith, a fellow member of the King of Clubs.²¹ The letter also reveals that Coleridge had called on Mackintosh a few days earlier (although Mackintosh was not in), and that Mackintosh was eager to widen Coleridge's intercourse with his friends beyond that with Sharp and Bobus. Sharp was equally desirous to build a friendship with Coleridge. His letter of 11

M.P., 1795-1817, edited by Kenneth Bourne and William Banks Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 326-27.

¹⁷ *CL*, II, 907.

¹⁸ *Table Talk*, edited by Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), II, 41-42.

¹⁹ Coleridge initially stayed with Robert Southey at 25 Bridge Street, Westminster, before moving to Daniel Stuart's lodgings at 10 King Street, between Covent Garden and Fleet Street. Coleridge was paid by Stuart to write for the *Morning Post*.

²⁰ *CL*, II, 783. Godwin would not have been pleased to hear that Coleridge was meeting Mackintosh. Mackintosh, of course, humiliated him in public during his lecture series on the *Law of Nature and Nations* between 1799-1800.

²¹ At this time Mackintosh was in discussion with Bobus's brother, Sydney Smith, about the proposal to launch the *Edinburgh Review*. See O'Leary, *Sir James Mackintosh: The Whig Cicero* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 63.

February 1802 [Letter 2] explains to Coleridge his frustration at missing him on the previous day because of a sudden bout of illness.

In the following two years Sharp and Coleridge became good friends, despite Coleridge's frustration with Mackintosh's mercenary behaviour.²² In 1803, for example, Sharp advised Coleridge on organising a trip to the Canaries,²³ and related to him the disappointing news that Charles James Fox had not read his 'Letters to Fox' published in the *Morning Post* in the previous November.²⁴ Of the former instance, it should be noted that Sharp was a renowned traveller. His entry in the old *Dictionary of National Biography* states that he was a regular visitor to France, Italy, and Switzerland; in the autumn of 1816 he visited Lord Byron at his residence beside Lake Geneva. In fact, William Wordsworth thought that Sharp knew Italy better than any man he had ever met.²⁵

Sharp was most helpful to Coleridge in the winter of 1804 after Coleridge's return to London from the Lake District on 23 January.²⁶ On the same day Sharp wrote to Poole to apologise for failing to contact him earlier, and to express his dismay at Tom Wedgwood's desperate health [Letter 3].²⁷ Shortly afterwards Sharp received a letter from Coleridge (29 January), who had written to ascertain when Sharp would be 'sufficiently disengaged' to give him 'half an hour's conversation'.²⁸ Coleridge did not have long to wait. Two days later he breakfasted with Sharp in Mark Lane.²⁹

A driving concern for Coleridge at this time was to realise the suggestion of George Bellas Greenough 'to go to Malta & thence to Sicily'.³⁰ Coleridge looked to John Rickman (who was working with Poole on the Census) for help in organising the journey.³¹ However, on 12 March Coleridge wrote from Sharp's library to Robert Southey with the discouraging news that Rickman had failed to provide any 'intelligence respecting the King's Ship appointed to convoy the Mediterranean Vessels'.³² Coleridge therefore turned to Sharp, who 'very kindly sent out his Clerk' to make enquiries on Coleridge's behalf. The clerk returned with 'a short well-bellied man, John Findlay, Commander of The Well Known Fast Sailing Brig, Speedwell'.³³

²² Mackintosh's knighthood and his acceptance of the lucrative Recordship of Bombay from the Tory government in 1803 angered Coleridge. See *CL*, II, 1041.

²³ See *CL*, II, 913.

²⁴ *CL*, II, 954.

²⁵ See William Knight, *The Life of William Wordsworth*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1889), III, 250-51.

²⁶ Poole arranged for Coleridge to operate in his lodgings at 16 Abingdon Street, Westminster. This base was useful to Coleridge, as he had been given employment by Daniel Stuart to write for his new paper, the *Courier*. Coleridge slept at Waghorn's Coffeehouse nearby.

²⁷ In the letter Sharp refers to his friend 'Tuffen'. Regrettably there is a paucity of information about Tuffin, other than that he was a member of the SCI, and that Coleridge met him in March 1804 (see *CL*, II, 1077, 1098).

²⁸ *CL*, II, 1044.

²⁹ *CL*, II, 1050. Further, Coleridge's letters show that he dined at 'Sharpe's with Poole' on 17 February (*CL*, II, 1067), and with Sharp's business partner, Samuel Boddington, on 18 March (*CL*, II, 1098).

³⁰ *CL*, II, 1050. Coleridge hoped to secure an administrative post in a wartime naval base in the Mediterranean. Indeed, Mackintosh was supportive of this plan, and encouraged Coleridge to gain in Malta 'some little place or other that would at least liquidate' his travel costs (*CL*, II, 1087).

³¹ See *CL*, II, 1067.

³² *CL*, II, 1083.

³³ *CL*, II, 1083-84.

Sharp knew his salt, and informed Coleridge that the *Speedwell* was 'of the first class of Brigs in speed & condition'. Coleridge visited the vessel shortly afterwards, and recorded his experience in the same letter to Southey:

I went on board to see the accommodations – to be sure, very neat but so small as to be literally a Box – There are already two Passengers, a Lady & a Gentleman / separate Concerns / I am a Third – & there can only be one more / – the Passage money 35 guineas, and I find my own Wine & Spirits; the Capt'n every thing else, as Porter, Ale, Provisions, Tea &c – but I have to buy a Mattress, 3 Sheets, two blankets, a Pillow & Pillow Case – which the Capt'n is to buy for me, he says, he can get them much cheaper than I – & that the whole will not exceed £3 □ 10 □ 0 – & these will be of use to me on my return, and on my passage perhaps from Malta to Sicily –. Accordingly, I engaged him – & left him 20£ for a Deposit.³⁴

Whilst Coleridge was writing this letter, Sharp had re-entered the library. In their ensuing conversation, Sharp said that 'for his part he would much rather go on board the *Speedwell* than the finest King's Ship, the company of the younger naval officers being generally oppressive'. In turn, Coleridge considered the 'extreme Smallness of the Cabin, with 3 Bed holes in it' a 'serious nuisance; but the people will most often be on the Deck / or I shall be'.³⁵

Coleridge left London for Portsmouth in late March, and boarded the *Speedwell* on 6 April 1804.³⁶ He left with a greatly enhanced opinion of Sharp, compared with the 'shallow man' that he met in 1801. 'Sharp', Coleridge wrote to William Sotheby, is 'a truly friendly man', 'of his Understanding & powers of giving intellectual feasts all are agreed; and I should be a sad fellow if I did not think of his Heart something very like the opposite of what some of his "good friends" would fain have prepossessed me with'.³⁷ Coleridge's last extant letter to Sharp before leaving England shows that he had been touched by his kindness. 'If Gratitude consist in repaying Love by Love, merited Esteem by merited Esteem, & good services by earnest dispositions akin to them, I am, & shall ever be, your grateful Friend

S.T. Coleridge.³⁸

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³⁴ CL, II, 1084.

³⁵ CL, II, 1085.

³⁶ Around 24 March Sharp communicated to Coleridge: 'The *Speedwell* is gone to Gravesend and will be at Portsmouth if the present wind continues on Tuesday – The Captain says, you must go hence on Tuesday Morning or Evening, and therefore you *must secure immediately a place* at the Angel Inn behind St Clement's Church in the Strand – The Tuesday Morning Coach goes very early – the Mail at 7 in the Evening - &c.' (CL, II, 1099).

³⁷ CL, II, 1093.

³⁸ CL, II, 1108.

Letter 1:

James Mackintosh to Samuel Taylor Coleridge

British Library: Add MSS 35344, f.186

Address: 10 King Street, Covent Garden

Dated: 30 January, 1802

Monday 30 –

My Dear Sir

I was really very sorry to miss you the other day when you Called. If you will dine here on Saturday next at half past five you will meet my Friends Sharp & Bobus. –

One cannot get a party in London without such formal appointments but I should be very sorry if our intercourse were limited to them. I expect T. Wedgwood in town in a day or two to set about metaphysics –

Yours very truly

James Mackintosh.

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Letter 2:

Richard Sharp to Samuel Taylor Coleridge

British Library: Add MSS 35344, f.187

Address: 10 King Street, Covent Garden

Dated: 11 February, 1802

Mark Lane

Thursday 11th Feby.

My dear Sir

I dined in your neighbourhood yesterday that I might have the pleasure of being with you early in the evening but I was compelled to give up that gratification being seized with so violent a pain in my bowels as to be obliged to get home as soon as I could that I might get to bed – I am better again to day tho' much indisposed

Yours very respectfully & truly

R^d Sharp

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Letter 3:***Richard Sharp to Thomas Poole******British Library: Add MSS 35344, f.231******Address: 16 Abingdon Street, Westminster******Dated: 23 January, 1804***

17 Mark Lane Monday 23 Jany

My dear Sir

I have written to poor Wedgwood. Would to heaven that we could desire any relief for him! –

You will I trust excuse my not having called in Abingdon Street, for your Card did not reach my hands, owing I suppose to the carelessness of my servant, and I heard so long since that you were in town that I thought you had been gone some time past into the country.

I am engaged to a tiresome business dinner tomorrow, but if possible I will escape in time to Shake you by the hand.

Yours Respectfully
R^d Sharp

Tuffen who will be glad to see you, lives now in Park Lane – the corner of Upper Grosvenor Street

Darwin College, Cambridge

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration Luncheon

Once again the Society gathered at The Royal College of General Practitioners overlooking Hyde Park for our annual Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration luncheon. On this occasion the guest speaker was Professor John Barnard who provided us with a new 'take' on The Immortal Dinner. The luncheon took place on Valentine's Day and the fact was duly noted with suitable extracts from that essay on the menus.

Elia Publications

After the great interest in the media generated last summer by the publication of Sarah Burton's biography, *A Double Life*, we look forward to two more Elia publications this year. At the beginning of August, Bloomsbury will be bringing out an account of Mary Lamb's life, *The Devil Kissed Her* by Kathy Watson. And in the same month, Chatto & Windus are due to publish the latest in Peter Ackroyd's series of novels, *The Lambs of London*. With at least two further works on Lamb known to be in preparation, it seems that academic and public interest in Lamb is now firmly set on a rising trajectory.

IN MEMORIAM

We were very sad to hear the news of the death of Professor Richard Clancey, a long-standing member and good friend of the Society. The comments of one of our members, Mary Wedd, follow:

THE SOCIETY HAS LOST A DEAR FRIEND in Dick Clancey, who died on 8th March this year. Members who attend the Wordsworth Winter School will remember his lectures there, some of which appeared afterwards in the *Bulletin*. They will also carry with them the picture of Dick at Furness Abbey holding us enthralled with his extempore account of the pattern of life in a monastery, or at Hawkshead describing the way the Classics were traditionally taught in Grammar and Public Schools until comparatively recently. He spoke there from his own experience at his Jesuit School and he was an accomplished Classics scholar, his B.A. degree being in that subject, though he changed to English Literature for his M.A. and Ph.D. He used to tell his audience on these occasions that I too had experienced this classical education, causing me hastily to disclaim any such thing, as in my day very few girls learnt Greek. However, Matric. Latin was an obligatory prerequisite for reading English at Oxford, where we continued with it in the first year and I had learnt to love the literature, particularly Virgil. So, we enjoyed poring over Latin inscriptions together and attempting to decipher them, which Dick could be relied upon to do with ease.

Dick was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and, after teaching for a time a Dunbarton College of the Holy Cross in Washington, returned to his hometown as Professor of English Literature at John Carroll University. Latterly he took great delight in living in a flat with a beautiful view over the Lake. He was also a lover of music and gave enthusiastic support to the Cleveland Orchestra.

His training enabled him to trace in the work of Wordsworth and his contemporaries the influence of that classical upbringing without which they cannot be fully understood, but which has not perhaps been sufficiently emphasized in our Philistine age. It was Dick who sent me the book called *Who Killed Homer* about the 'Demise of Classical Education', written by Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath. In the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* for October 2001 Dick wrote about Lamb and Virgil, quoting in his title part of Wordsworth's translation of the famous line '*sunt lacrimae rerum et*

memtem mortalia tangenti, 'Tears for the frail estate of human kind'. The article illustrates from several of Lamb's essays the frequent allusions to Virgil, not merely to the *Aeneid* but to the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, which are used humorously and for more serious purposes, Lamb assuming of course that the reader will immediately pick up the references.

After various articles, including one on Wordsworth's *Cintra* pamphlet relating it to Demosthenes, at last came Dick's book *Wordsworth's Classical Undersong – Education, Rhetoric and Poetic Truth*, which was published in 2000 by Macmillan in the U.K. and St. Martin's Press in the U.S. In this he was able to use his exhaustive research into Wordsworth's education and the relevant archives of Hawkshead Grammar School and St. John's College, Cambridge, to illustrate the influence of the Classics on Wordsworth's work. As John Powell Ward said of the book in his review in the *Bulletin*, it had been 'eagerly awaited' and it did not disappoint. Being fortunate enough to have read the first draft, I was hoping for a successor, which could include some of the fascinating material which had to be omitted on grounds of length but alas! that we shall not now see.

Due to the vagaries of booking operations on our railways of recent years, a tradition grew up that I should organize the tickets and adjoining seats for our journeys between Euston and Oxenholme and that we should share a sandwich lunch on the train. Then another habit developed that, when we were not going on an afternoon outing, we would take a little walk suitable to our advanced years ending up at a favourite Grasmere café for a cream tea. If we missed, they would enquire where we had got to that day! But the highlight of our Cumbrian adventures was when Duncan Wu would take us and Constance Parrish for a Wordsworthian drive. We toured the River Duddon, stopping and sitting on a bank at each of the most memorable places to read the relevant sonnet, or we visited Wasdale, a rarely penetrated fastness. It so happened that for this the weather was beautiful but the occasion Dick most often reminded me of was when on one of our walks we were hurrying back to the village from Penny Rock in a sudden downpour and a car stopped and picked us up. 'Do you remember when Duncan rescued us?'

Dick was the most generous and warm-hearted of men. When he discovered that my preferred light reading consisted of detective stories, a series of parcels crossed the Atlantic containing American whodunits. A record was kept of my likes and dislikes and which titles I had already read. Then there was the famous occasion when he entertained half-a-dozen members of the Lamb Society to a luxurious meal at Rules. He took most pleasure in giving others pleasure and remembered our shared joys with the pleasure of glee. Moreover, he was open-minded, being, for example, prepared to be persuaded by Helen Irwin and me that he should eat his vegetables and that 'Liberal' is not necessarily a term of abuse!

For Dick was not just a fine scholar. He was modest, compassionate human being of complete integrity who combined a deep religious faith with an infectious love of life. He must have been a wonderful teacher, enthusing his students with his own delight in literature. For us, his friends, how shall we do without him?

In his essay on Lamb and Virgil, Dick emphasizes what successive scholars have been anxious to affirm that Virgil's famous line cannot be taken in isolation leaving a message of total despair. For once, I cannot feel quite satisfied with Wordsworth's words in his translation of a line which is probably untranslatable anyway but whose meaning comes home to us at times like this. Yes, there are tears in life, and death touches us deeply. As Dick tells us, "pity" is a crucial feature in the character of Aeneas' but Virgil's next line, which Wordsworth omits, tells the hero to 'Dismiss thy fears; this fame will bring thee some salvation'. Dick says, 'pathos is not the same as tragedy. By its nature it offers hope, a hope fed by the power to care'. If ever there was a person who had that power it was Dick Clancey, so in a sense he has written his own message to us. As Wordsworth expressed it, 'Not without hope we suffer and we mourn'.

Mary Wedd