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‘Mario Praz’s Introduction to the *Essays of Elia*’¹

Trans. by JOSEPH RIEHL

TO DESCRIBE FOR READERS THE NATURE OF CHARLES LAMB (of whose essays I give the first Italian version here),² it will not do to call him a humorist. Because *humour* or *umore*, in its sense of ‘a natural or accidental disposition of the temperament of the mind’, or whatever way in which Lexicographers care to define it, is a word as changeable and iridescent as the thing it signifies: it is most changeable when its definition is shrunk to a special idiosyncrasy of character: to that buoyancy or whimsicality which smiles in the midst of tears, as they say, or tries to resolve self-pity in laughter. If every word is an imperfect and approximate sign that stands for a thousand different things, the word *humour* is typical of its multiplicity of meaning. It can have the value of formal indication, but not of a substantial one. It can put into play an infinite possibility of shadings, of whims, but it cannot give shape to a definite finality where shading and whim would no longer have place. Every ‘humorist’ has his particular whim, unique as the fine arabesques of the skin on the back of the fingers: but whimsicality, like the formal, methodical disposition, is a characteristic common to all. It is the contrary of the person who sees no neutral zone between affirmative and negative, who always speaks seriously, who pays no attention to uncertainty, vacillations, doubts, but oracularly announces the ‘truth’, like an incontrovertible dogma which he has uncovered. It seems that this type of rational, formal mind (*testa quadrata*, literally ‘square head’) is very common among Scots, since the Scots are among those whom Lamb, by his own admission, was never able to understand; and among those who were never able to understand Lamb was precisely one Scot, Carlyle, a man of inflexible ideas if ever one existed. But, naturally, whereas Lamb describes the Scottish character as inaccessible, as a comic mystery, Carlyle describes Lamb as a person whose character he understands, and whose character he detests. What Lamb implies of himself in ‘Imperfect Sympathies’ could be said of every humorist:

There is an order of imperfect intellects (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. She presents no full front to them – a feature or side-face at the most

¹ Translator’s note: Most readers of Lamb are familiar with Mario Praz’s negative judgment of Charles Lamb. In 1934, on the occasion of the republication of Lucas’s edition of the letters, the centenary of Lamb’s death, Praz published an article in *English Studies*, later reprinted in his *The Hero in Eclipse* (1956) in which he presents Lamb as a comfortable bourgeois, but overall a ‘pathetic figure’ whose essays are the unaccountable flowering of a second-rate mind. However, a decade earlier, in 1924, Praz had translated the *Essays of Elia* into Italian. As an admirer of Lamb, I wished to explore this sudden reversal of literary opinion. In my history of Lamb criticism, *That Dangerous Figure* (1998), I speculated that it might have something to do with pre-war fears and the rise of fascism in Europe. Perhaps this translation of the Introduction to the 1924 edition will help to resolve the question, and by extension, the broader issue of Lamb’s rejection by the emerging New Critics of the pre-World War II era. (Except for those marked ‘Translator’s note’, all remaining footnotes are Praz’s own.)

² I am indebted to Michel Jolibois and Christina Vella for their valuable help in preparing this translation.

Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they pretend to. They beat up a little game peradventure – and leave it to knottier heads, more robust constitutions, to run it down. The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting: waxing, and again waning. Their conversation is accordingly. They will throw out a random word in or out of season, and be content to let it pass for what it is worth.

If the humorist had to construct his own metaphysics, it would not be very much different from that of the sceptic. But in, in truth, no one is more averse to metaphysics than the humorist. He is not concerned with formulating contradictions in order to resolve them. The greatest abstraction of thought of which he is capable is a sort of epicurean music; serenely savouring the fancy of the passing moment, bound to the sentiments of the instant, without feeling the need to be reconciled to a system. As soon as the humorist busies himself in putting right the conflicting ideas that pass through his head he ceases to be a humorist. Recently we have seen the case of Panzini. Although Panzini was a humorist, it could still be said that he believed in some things. In the depth of his spirit he was berthed in certain traditional ideas – Patriotism, Goodness, Purity. He did not trouble himself to disturb these ideas in the recesses of his spirit. He left them to their solemn and immutable lives, satisfying his whims by performing innocuous capers before their age-old altars. But the day that vain metaphysical ambitions became more urgent in him, goodbye innocence, goodbye humour! The face of the child becomes withered with wrinkles, his smiles bitter. And he could be sceptical and obscene.³

³ What I say about the absence of metaphysical worries on the part of the humorist, contradicts the definition of humour which Panzini gives in his *Modern Dictionary*, following the path of [Jean Paul] Richter (see Richter's definition in Luigi Pirandello's *On Humour* [1908], p. 144: 'Romantic humour is the serious attitude of one who compares the small finite world with the infinite idea: The result is a philosophical smile that is a compound of pain and sublimity. He is a universal comedian, full of tolerance or better, sympathy, for all those people who, participating of our nature', etc.) According to Panzini's definition, humour is the special disposition that high intelligence (in the more artistic) possesses to comprehend easily, penetrating as far as the hidden bottom of things, seeing the branch and the roots, the theatre and the backstage; here, human things appear so various and so diversely combined and nothing is at it appears. That which on the surface is comic, at the bottom can be tragic, and vice versa. If we compare this definition with Lamb's words (cited above), we will understand that the term 'humour' takes on as many definitions as there are humorists. In truth Lamb was much more aware of what he felt, and much more self-critical than Panzini. For Panzini's humorist would not merely see a glimmer of truth, but would see truth itself in its complexity, would penetrate 'to the hidden bottom of the things' would be, in a word, a philosopher, just the opposite of what is said of Lamb. Panzini continues: 'But one cannot say such things to the masses, because either they would see it as an offence to the truth or would not believe it'. Therefore, the humorist devises a special way of expressing the truth; a veiled, good-natured, simple and usually comic way, since the contrast between reality, the ideal truth, and human experience is such that the strongest feeling is one of laughter. So that one could also say, 'Humour is that form of art that makes those people who habitually do not laugh, laugh'. According to this type of definition the humorist would express himself in a humorous way in order to adapt the knowledge that he has of the truth to the tastes of the public (*ridendo dicere verum*), and in this way humour becomes a type of philosophical praxis, conditioned by external necessity. On the contrary, once we admit that the humorist is an artist it is implicit that only inner circumstances define the humorist. He is neither a pedagogue nor a philosopher since scientific or philosophical truth scorns any mode of expression that is indirect and circumspect. Neither can it be said that the humorist has the illusion that he possesses the truth, as Panzini would want us to believe. The humorist perceives only a contradiction. Though he might affirm one aspect, and would not reject the other as accidental and superficial, or, to be more precise, would reject both in name of a superior principle.

Lamb's humour is never defaced in this way. Perhaps because, more than a natural gift, it was a conquest for Lamb, a discovery. Perhaps because one of the traditional ideas was at least strong and alive enough to remain incorruptible against every possible sophism: religion.

If we consider the youth of Charles Lamb, and his first artistic manifestations, we might be amazed that he did not end as a madman like Cowper, or a suicide like Chatterton and Carey. Indications of similar 'romantic' possibilities are not lacking in his biography. We may summarize the facts briefly. He was born February 10, 1775, in London, son of a rustic who had come to the city in order to find his fortune and who became the assistant of Mr. Samuel Salt, member of the Inner Temple (the college of the lawyers of London). Charles grew up amid the hardships of a poor and numerous family, tainted with madness. He received a classical education at Christ's Hospital, a charity institution, and had the good fortune to have as a classmate Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These school years were perhaps among his happiest ones. 'Lamb was an amiable, gentle boy', wrote one of his old schoolmates, 'very sensible and keenly observing, indulged by his schoolfellows and by his master on account of his infirmity of speech [he was a stutterer]. . . .⁴ I never heard his name mentioned without the addition of Charles, although as there was no other boy of the name Lamb, the addition was unnecessary; but there was an implied kindness, and it was a proof that his gentle manners excited that kindness'.

When Charles left the school in 1789, his father already had grown senile, and the role of mistress of the house was assumed by his sister Mary rather than his mother. Sister and brother lived in intimate ties of intellectual sympathy and affection. (Their other brother John had already taken a position in bank, and he lived apart from the family.) Charles considered Mary, ten years older than he, as a second mother. At some time within the two years after leaving Christ's Hospital, Charles Lamb obtained a clerkship at the South Sea House (probably in the summer of 1791), and soon he was appointed clerk in the accounting office of the East India Company, where he laboured nearly all his life. In the winter of 1795-1796 Charles was stricken by a hereditary malady and spent some weeks in a lunatic asylum at Hoxton. Soon after he returned home, a tragedy struck which would decide his future. Mary had already given signs of mental imbalance, and one day in September of 1796, shortly before lunch, she took a knife from the table, to chase a girl who assisted her in sewing (Mary worked as a seamstress), and, in the end, stabbed her own mother. When Charles entered in the room, he found his mother already a corpse, his father wounded in the forehead, and the girl nearly dead from the shock. On Charles, little more than twenty, therefore fell a heavy burden of responsibility; he was to support his father and aunt through the little time that still remained of their lives, and to take on himself the task of looking after Mary, since her mind was not sufficiently impaired for her to be permanently shut up in a lunatic asylum. Every time that his sister's behaviour announced an imminent attack (and the attacks were not rare; Mary continued to be ill two or three months of the year, on average), Charles led her to the Hoxton Asylum on whose threshold, crying, he left her for several weeks. Charles and Mary lived together all their lives. Many friends visited their home; among them Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Hazlitt. To their friends they were 'the Lambs', one inseparable couple. 'Charles and Mary Lamb, dear to my heart, yea as it were, my heart',

⁴ Praz's note.

wrote Coleridge on the margin of a poem. Speaking about a party of whist with Cousin Bridget (that is, his sister) Charles says:

I wished it might have lasted for ever, though we gained nothing, and lost nothing, though it was a mere shade of play; I would be content to go on in that idle folly for ever. The pipkin should be ever boiling, that was to prepare the gentle lenitive to my foot, which Bridget was doomed to apply after the game was over: and, as I do not much relish appliances, it should ever bubble. Bridget and I should be ever playing.

And elsewhere: 'I wish that I could throw into a heap the remainder of our joint existences, that we might share them in equal division'.

The life of Charles Lamb is a marvellous example of abnegation and constant affection for his sister. His salary was meagre and, in the beginning, their existence was made difficult because of their reputation of mental disease. Neighbours avoided them, landlords looked suspiciously upon them, when they did not directly ask them to seek other lodgings. At times, anxiety seems to press upon the soul of Charles with an unendurable weight. 'We are in a manner marked', he wrote to Coleridge in 1800. Later, the economic restrictions lessened, and life became more easy and equal, weaving together tenuous joys (conversations with friends, books, pictures, the theatre, Sunday outings with his sister), pardonable vices (wine, tobacco), and monotony. Certainly a clerk's life was monotonous, but perhaps being constrained to a regular and mechanical job for the greater part of the day had a healthy influence on Lamb's temperament. He was able to smile at the futility of the thankless tasks of filling up ledgers with figures and conferring with pretentious imbeciles. If we consider how the man lived (to be unconscious for a good part of life, to spend the rest in sleep) we will understand the useful negative function which a stimulant can exercise in certain persons in the position of a *travet*.⁵ Those purgatorial hours in the office bestowed an aura of paradise upon the hours of freedom, and caused him to feel the deep value of this daily resurrection. So many times Charles Lamb would have felt what Machiavelli felt:

Come the evening, I return home and enter my study; and at its entrance I slough off my everyday clothes, full of mud and dust, and put on royal and courtly garments. Suitably re-attired, I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men. Received lovingly by them, I partake of the food which is mine alone, and for which I was born . . . every worry completely forgotten, I do not fear poverty, death does not dismay me.

In truth, after 1825, when Lamb left his clerkship, he wrote little or nothing, and in that much-coveted period of freedom, of perpetual vacation, the couple truly knew misery. One by one the 'old familiar faces' of his friends vanished; Emma Isola, the girl whom the Lamb's had adopted (a daughter of a Italian employed as Esquire Bedell at Cambridge University), left them to be married; and he was able to enjoy the company of his sister less and less, as she spent more time

⁵ Translator's note: An impoverished and insignificant clerk; from Vittorio Bersezio's comedy, *Le miserie di monsù Travèt*, 1862.

in the asylum. Charles Lamb died of an attack of erysipelas as a result of a fall, on December 27, 1834, a few months after the death of his beloved Coleridge. Mary survived her brother for approximately thirteen years, and, for this woman, who by now had become nearly unconscious, those were grave years, full of shadow and silence.

If we pay attention to the manner in which external events damaged the life of Charles Lamb, we cannot be surprised at the similarities that it suggests with the lives of many writers of early Romanticism. Never, perhaps, was the presence of mad or consumptive or suicidal writers so frequent as in that age; and not only in England, but also in France, and, especially, in the tumultuous Germanic *Sturm und Drang*, so rich in depression and exaltation. But these are only outer and generic signs. The work that documents Lamb's first literary activity, in the romantic style, is more significant. Lamb's first works were sonnets about melancholy recollection of times past, which the contemporary critic must classify as 'plaintive' poetry, and a tale in gloomy colours (*A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret*) which describes the ruin of a village girl by a foul rascal with the unusual name of Matravis.⁶ This drama in blank verse attests to the loving study that the author had made of Elizabethan models. Better than the sonnets of this period are some verses written in 1798, suffused by a sentimental atmosphere which seems a prelude to a certain Tennysonian attitudes. Here are these verses:

The Old Familiar Faces

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

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a Love once, fairest among women:
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man:
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

⁶ In the character of Rosamund, Lamb suggested the woman who was the first and only love of his youth, Anne Simmons (the Alice W--n of the *Essays*). Naturally, Anne's life did not possess the tragic colours of Rosamund. Far from it, Anne, the girl of Hertfordshire with the blue eyes and blond hair, had no desire for a connection with Lamb; she made a fortunate match with a goldsmith, and lived until to a venerable age. Beyond that juvenile idyll, love reappears only once in Lamb's life, when the 'divine ordinary face' (*ordinario* translates the English term plain; but *plain* does not translate easily with a single word) of the actress Fanny Kelly (see the essay 'Barbara S-----' in my translation) occupied his thoughts. Lamb proposed marriage to the actress in an artless and sentimental letter; then, when Kelly asked him not to insist, he endured the disappointment as a man of spirit. The friendship between the two protagonists of this short drama (the exchange of letters was completed in a day) continued as sincere and cordial as before.

Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood,
 Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,
 Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
 Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling?
 So might we talk of the old familiar faces—

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
 And some are taken from me; all are departed—
 All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

In considering the larger outlines of the development of Romanticism, Lamb, a sentimentalist in his first experiments, a humorist in his maturity, can be taken as a characteristic representative of that phase of Romanticism that we call post-heroic. The Romantic Movement marks a turning point in civilization, a revolution in world view. The first Romantics (such as the *Stürmer und Dranger*) felt this transformation intensely but confusedly, and did not know how to create *ex-novo* an adequate means of expression. They intrude their actual life into their work (or vice versa), so that we find rough fragments of crude life in this phase, and in their work suggestions of literary attitudes and poses. It would sometimes occur to them to try to complete in life a gesture begun in art, and so we see the suicides, the revellers, the pleasure seekers. The perfect conciliation between life and art, the antagonistic elements of the life made sublime in the work, marks the heroic period of Romanticism. But in a later moment, the equilibrium is broken off: the artist no longer possessed that serene seriousness to search for opposition between art and life that is appeased in a tragic conception of the world. The Romantics of this phase no longer see a single tragic face of things; they search for and depict idyllic or comic resolutions to those discordances with sentimentalism, with humour, with irony. The later Romantics (Pre-raphaelites, Symbolists) found an apparent solution by isolating art from life, attempting in their art to construct a shelter from reality.

We find the first suggestions of Lamb the humorist in letters that he wrote in the early years of his friendship with Robert Southey and Thomas Manning (around 1800). Southey occupies, much more indirectly than directly, an important place in the English literary history. He is not really important for his ten volumes of poetic works, recounting prolix, atmospheric stories, usually oriental tales. In the rough outline of such compositions can be seen a foreshadowing of those historical and mythological *periegesi*⁷ much later in vogue with Leconte de Lisle, Hugo of *Legende des siècles*, Morris, etc. If a writer's merit were of equal value with his willingness to work and the sum of his expensive labour, Southey's would be numbered among the best, but he was a slogger of a Zola type, and of the value of his works it might be said as Flaubert said of him: 'Cruchard works like 18,000 Negroes; that is his excuse'. But Southey is important because of the beneficial influence that his healthy and happy industry exercised on the soulful and tormented spirits of his friends.

⁷ Translator's note: A description of the globe; the title of a poem by Dionysus of Alexandria.

No papers or letters of Thomas Manning remain to show his strength as a thinker. He was a professor of mathematics when he was introduced to Lamb in 1799. Later he travelled in China, and on his return to England, he demonstrated an eccentric and embittered character, but in the years when he was friendly with Lamb he had a most remarkable sense of the ridiculous, and he delighted in good humour. In his letters to Manning, Lamb appears to us in the character which we are accustomed to imagine from his essays: a compound of seriousness and buffoonery, puns and wisdom. A letter of 1805 is typical; here, thanking a friend for a gift of some pork, he anticipates by approximately fifteen years, nearly with the same words, the famous 'Dissertation upon Roast Pig', one of the masterworks of humour. Before becoming the intimate of Southey and Manning, Lamb's friends had been much too similar to his own temperament to be a comfort and distraction from the sad events of those years. The mystic and irresolute Coleridge, and the sensitive, capricious Charles Lloyd, a poor paranoiac, could only deepen Lamb's melancholia, after the great tragedy in his family. Perhaps placed in the company of such healthy and superficial temperaments as those of Southey and Manning, Lamb discovered within his soul a sprite as playful and graceful as Ariel, and to follow the arabesques of this graceful butterfly distracted his attention from the shadows that occupied his deepest spirit. Perhaps the fantasies of this sprite were to Lamb what the songs of David were to the madness of Saul: the bitterness of memories that left a sweet regret. It taught him to be satisfied in the moment. He learned that lenient and gracefully ironic tone that a man shows sometimes when speaking about himself as of a different creature, moulded in his own hands, that benign mocking familiarity with which grownups treat children whom they like.

That Lamb discovered truth by means of art, was made possible by two conditions. The first of these is the ability to appear to the public without the worry of having to pose as an author. When he was moved not merely to publish a drama or a book of verses, but to reveal all that passed in his mind, as in a conversation among friends, without duty or obligation to respond faithfully to an imposed argument,⁸ Lamb truly became a great writer. 'The Essays', wrote Lamb to his editors, 'want no Preface; they are *all Preface*. A preface is nothing but a talk with the reader; and they do nothing else'. He could have applied Montaigne's confession to himself:

On this subject of letters, I want to say this word, that it is a work in which my friends believe that I am somewhat able: and I have taken this form more readily to publish my *eloquences*, than if I had to speak to them. I needed a particular type of conversation which attracted me, which supported me and lifted me, I knew only of dreams. . . I could be more attentive and more sure, having a strong and friendly manner, if I do not have to consider the various desires of an audience. (*Essays*, 'Considération sur Cicéron')

Lamb, from his first attempts, implies obscurely that he might have found his way in something like the theatre, so great was his love for plays on stage, for the performances of the actors. If he had not had a speech defect, who knows if he would not have become an actor also, as he confesses in 'Barbara S-----'. What had fascinated him so much in the art of the actor was the

⁸ Frequently the title of an essay gives no idea of its contents at all: For example, see 'Old China', where china supplies only the departure point. Also characteristic is the essay 'Barbara S-----', where Lamb is 'in no hurry to begin my tale'.

possibility to be, for one brief moment, an *other*, to submerge the man beneath the costume of the king or the Fool in the eyes of the audience, with the secret pleasure of feeling hidden and smiling in silence. That character of the fable felt a similar pleasure when, wrapped in a magic cape, he vanished before the astonished eyes of those around him.

It is the pleasure of the disguise, in a word, the mystification within which Lamb felt most alive: it is enough to remember that his tightrope-walking letters contained, along with real news, funny 'whoppers' of every kind. A trivial circumstance, like writing under pseudonym, permitted Lamb conversations and correspondences with friends immortalized in his art. He masked himself as Elia, and created a character partially himself, and partially invented. He amused himself in pulling the strings of this puppet Elia, in determining the destiny of this fantastic creature.

Another circumstance contributed to this curious phenomenon of an artist who discovers himself past 45 years: of necessity the events of his life had become memories. The work of time, that man cannot hasten, alone stretches the sails of sages, creates the background of dreams, crowns familiar faces with glory, generates legend and myth. To be a great artist Lamb needed to deal with himself just as he would a character of fantasy, and his own life as he would a fairy tale. In large part, something similar to what happened in his art happened every day in his life. The *Travet* Charles Lamb, at the threshold of his house, took off of the clerk's garment every evening. Futility and deception had forced him to skulk at his desk, and so he put on the domino of Elia. And Elia died the day that this mask could no longer be put on.

Coleridge found two expedients in order to stifle the anguish of his life: one of a corporal order, opium, and this brought him nearly to ruin; and one of intellectual order, metaphysics. Similarly, Lamb tried to forget his troubles in drink, 'the nest of friendly harpies around my house, that consume me', and in the mask of Elia. It is said that the first image that men had of Lamb (especially the rationalists [*testa quatrata*] of whom I spoke earlier) when they met in social situations was rather repugnant; they saw him as an imbecile and a clown. We may form an idea of what Lamb was sometimes like in company of friends by reading some lively pages drawn from the painter [Benjamin] Haydon's diary. Haydon had prepared a dinner, on the occasion of Wordsworth's visit to London (December 1817), and Lamb and Keats were of the party:

On December 28th the immortal dinner came off in my painting-room, with Jerusalem⁹ towering up behind us as a background. Wordsworth was in fine cue, and we had a glorious set-to – on Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Virgil. Lamb got exceedingly merry and exquisitely witty; and his fun in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn intonations of oratory was like the sarcasm and wit of the fool in the intervals of Lear's passion. He made a speech and voted me absent, and made them drink my health. 'Now', said Lamb, 'you old lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire¹⁰ dull?' We all defended Wordsworth, and affirmed there was a state of mind when Voltaire would be dull. 'Well', said

⁹ Sections of a colossal picture representing the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem upon which Haydon was then working. The faces of the personages following him portrayed the features of Haydon's friends.

¹⁰ A reference to a passage in Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, in which *Candide* is described as the 'dull product of a scoffer's pen'. It is curious that Lamb expressed the same opinion on *Candide* in an 1814 letter to Wordsworth: 'I have tried to get thro' it about a twelvemonth since and couldn't for the dullness'.

Lamb, 'here's Voltaire – the Messiah of the French nation, and a very proper one too'.

He then, in a strain of humour beyond description, abused me for putting Newton's head into my picture; 'a fellow', said he, 'who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle'. And then he and Keats agreed he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours. It was impossible to resist him, and we all drank 'Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics'. It was delightful to see the good humour of Wordsworth in giving in to all our frolics without affectation and laughing as heartily as the best of us.

By this time other friends joined, amongst them poor Ritchie who was going to penetrate by Fezzan to Timbuctoo. I introduced him to all as 'a gentleman going to Africa'. Lamb seemed to take no notice; but all of a sudden he roared out: 'Which is the gentleman we are going to lose?' We then drank the victim's health, in which Ritchie joined.

In the morning of this delightful day, a gentleman, a perfect stranger, had called on me. He said he knew my friends, had an enthusiasm for Wordsworth, and begged I would procure him the happiness of an introduction. He told me he was a comptroller of stamps, and often had correspondence with the poet.¹¹ I thought it a liberty; but still, as he seemed a gentleman, I told him he might come.

When we retired to tea we found the comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little time the comptroller looked down, looked up and said to Wordsworth: 'Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?' Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the comptroller. Lamb who was dozing by the fire turned round and said: 'Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?' 'No, sir; I asked Mr Wordsworth if he were not'. 'Oh', said Lamb, 'then you are a silly fellow'. 'Charles! my dear Charles!' said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

After an awful pause the comptroller said: 'Don't you think Newton a great genius?' I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself: 'Who is this?' Lamb got up and taking a candle, said: 'Sir, will you allow me to look at your phrenological development?' He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the comptroller he chaunted:

'Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his breeches on'.

The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory: 'I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr Wordsworth'. 'With me, sir?' said Wordsworth, 'not that I remember'. 'Don't you, sir? I am a comptroller of

¹¹ At the time, Wordsworth was part of the bureaucracy of government stamps.

stamps'. There was a dead silence, the comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out:

'Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle'.

'My dear Charles!' said Wordsworth.

'Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John',

chaunted Lamb, and then rising, exclaimed: 'Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs'. Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled and asked him to supper. He stayed though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed.

All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room and calling at intervals: 'Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more'.

In Haydon's pages Lamb seems to us a pleasant joker, and, it might seem to us, someone to be easily dismissed. So he seemed to those who considered him superficially, by his external actions, by his whimsy and his puns. We must very nearly yield to Carlyle, and call Lamb's behavior 'diluted insanity'. But to carefully consider the expression of his face would be enough to change one's mind. Lamb physical person was middling, small and disproportionate, with those dried up little 'almost immaterial' legs and that worn-out black suit of a *travet*, – but the face!

Above all there was a sweetness and a gentleness which went straight to the heart of every one who looked on it: and not the less so, perhaps, that it bore about it an air, a something, seeming to tell you that it was — not *put on* — for nothing would be more wrong than to tax Lamb with assuming anything, even a virtue that he did not possess — but preserved and persevered in spite of opposing and contradictory feelings within that struggled in vain for mastery. It was a thing to remind you of that painful smile which bodily disease and agony will sometimes put on, to conceal their sufferings from those they love.

All of Lamb's friends who have described his features remember this 'bland sweet smile with the touch of sadness in it'. And so it seems to a discerning reader of the *Essays of Elia*. We cannot define the art of Lamb, his 'humour', except in words spoken about his smile: 'bland sweet smile with the touch of sadness in it'.¹² Who can define a March sky? Its fragile, fissured

¹² The melancholy disposition in the act of joy is the definition of humour that [Pietro] Giordani gives in one of his letters to [Giacomo] Leopardi. (Translator's note: Praz draws heavily in the passage from Alfred Ainger, *Charles Lamb*, 1888, 93-95. The quotation is from Coventry Patmore.)

serenity, shuddering from the vague threats of a storm suspended in the air, its veiled clarity here and there, like the eyes that sparkle after tears, its gaiety that might seem carefree, if it were not for those long processions of almost wintry clouds, but clouds more light and innocuous, iridescent, and that inkling of renewal, of convalescence, of lively and fresh forces operating in the earth that restore all. If one wished to find a visible image of Lamb's 'humour', it is the March sky. Is it a sentimental art? Yes, in the good sense of the word 'sentimental'. Usually today one attaches to this word the meaning of a mawkish and tearful sensitivity, and it is used and abused as an insult, especially, as is natural, from the point of view of an ironist. Because inside the ironist – as he very much wants us not to notice – is always a stifled sentimentalist; and worst enemies are, obviously, most kindred in character.

The first of the essays that Lamb wrote under the pseudonym of Elia, in *The London Magazine* of August, 1820, already hints at the character which figures in all of the collection, drawn from autobiographical memories, as the title indicates: 'Recollections of the South-Sea House'. Elia was an Italian clerk whom Lamb had known thirty years before in the South-Sea House. Lamb said that he used the pseudonym of Elia out of concern for his brother John, an employee of that company. But probably there is a more humorous reason for the choice of that *nom de plume*. As Lucas has pointed out in his biography of Lamb, 'Elia' was chosen because it is an anagram of *a lie*, an idea that is confirmed when Leigh Hunt, on the subject of Lamb's essays in the *Examiner* of 1821, says that he calls the works 'A lie; *alias* Elia'. The twenty-five essays published between August 1820 and December 1822 in *The London Magazine* were gathered in a volume, together with later essays published in that and other periodicals.

In speaking about Lamb, I have refrained from speaking of his literary background, so as to lay the preliminary work for the subject of his development on personal psychological factors. From that point of view we can see that Lamb is above all a Romantic; but if we consider similar types of artistic expression we can trace his genealogy through the English periodical of the eighteenth century back to the first roots of that curious literary work which is the Essay – to Montaigne and Plutarch. Postponing this genealogy somewhat, though it appears little justifiable philosophically, serves on the other hand to put in clear light, by way of contrast, the great originality of Lamb, who surely can be considered to have given to the Essay a romantic direction, as, essentially, the father of modern essayists.

The essay, born with the *Moralia* of Plutarch and *Epistulae* of Seneca, as a type of pedantic chattering on all kinds of subjects, from religion to literary criticism, filled with fine instructions, stuffed with examples and citations, enlivened itself in the hands of the Montaigne who, while not losing sight of the ancient model, added a savour of intimacy and familiarity. He replaced the anonymous pedantic tone of his classical ancestors with the balanced and ornamented conversation of the perfect gentleman. Montaigne gave to the essay the fixed form of a discussion of personal opinions, however unorthodox or governed by personal idiosyncrasies, frequently indeed arising from momentary whims, which permitted it therefore to produce even further developments. Next, abandoning the rigid frown of the dogmatist, the *formal essayist*, is Francis Bacon or Thomas Browne (who, in *Religio Medici*, may be considered a massive essayist), who candidly offers to readers his unfinished ideas, his intuitions, unexpected suggestions in their first freshness, excusing the apparent arbitrariness of that embryo of thought with the human and warm tone of friendly conversation which frequently passes into true and personal confession. It is therefore natural that in a busy age less preoccupied with the dogmas and the problems of casuistry – the romantic age exactly – that to record the shadings of its own

sensibility the essay would become a most agile and effective instrument of autobiography. Such possibilities were first suggested in England, in the chapter 'Of Myself' by Abraham Cowley, the 'Recollections of Childhood' of Steele, and some parts of the work of Goldsmith. The autobiographic direction is already implicit in Montaigne and Browne: but the interest of these authors is especially recorded in disjointed thoughts, opinions about the theory and practice of life, because as the natural landscape did not exist then more than in a minimal measure, therefore the psychological landscape did not exist, or it appears in rare, involuntary, fleeting lightning bolts, like the natural landscape seen in the painting of the age. But Romanticism *novos orbes poeticos invenit*: discovers autobiography, not in the sense of an exemplary 'life', but of a passionate human document.

Beside this type of essay, which we can call the common stock of the essay – which alone was prolific of new developments up through the more perfect shapes of the art of R. L. Stevenson and Max Beerbohm – a parasitic shape was also developed, which manifested so-called 'humour' in its more popular expression. I speak of that form which, related to the rough poetic spirit of some Latin poetry and above all certain medieval poetry, found finished expression in the 1500s with the *Capitole*¹³ of Berni, Varchi, Messer Bino, Dolce and others, such as encomiums to common objects and praises of human types thought of as noxious or dull, or not worthy of serious attention; or defences of spiritual positions – when they are conscious of them – which one is ashamed to acknowledge as one's own. This form was grafted on to the essay, conceived exactly as hodgepodge of spontaneous opinions, like a *jeu à cotè*, like the amusements of one who, not having opinions suggested from an interior sentiment, takes on the task of supporting reprehensible or fantastic ideas for his amusement. This sort of chattering burlesque aims commonly to produce astonishment by the artifice of its style, the vagaries of its ideas and the exquisiteness of its erudition. It is a pastime for man of letters, purely adventitious, which also accounts for the perfection of *Dissertation upon Roast Pig*. In the bernesco style,¹⁴ the comic effect is sought with resources of a very trivial order: that is the parody of the solemn style in order to say paltry or low things, obscene double meanings, and so on. The device of adorning the commonplace with erudite delicacy, which is another type of bernesco style, is found elsewhere repeatedly. For example, Sterne had fully attained Lamb's unsurpassable skill.

The other part of the essay, the fine instruction and moralizing, proper to the first (Alexandrine) origins of the essay, returned in an age where satire of the customs and the idolizing of forms of society constituted the dominant motifs in literature: for example, in the essays of Addison, Steele, and Goldsmith who proposed 'to publicly announce the defects and the ignorance of the territories of Great Britain'. These writings, in the case of those eighteenth-century journalists, inspired in great part by the form if not the spirit of the *Characters* of La Bruyere, which in their turn, bring back to us to Theophrastus, were illustrated with the depiction of interesting and instructive types (the *Club* of the *Spectator*: Will Honeycomb, Sir Roger de Coverley and the other characters), with the introduction of more or less amusing anecdotes or of imaginary letters.

A comparison between one of the *Spectator* essays and one of the *Elia* essays clearly demonstrates what was said above about the clearly romantic approach of Lamb's essays. The

¹³ Translator's note: Burlesque poetical compositions in terza rima.

¹⁴ Translator's note: That is, in the style of Francesco Berni, poet of the Sixteenth Century. Other writers mentioned above are the poet and historian, Benedetto Varchi, the gay poet Messer Giovanni della Casa, di Bino, and art critic and poet, Ludovico Dolce.

contrast between the dignified tone of good-natured haughtiness, of impeccable self-possession even in moments of exhilaration, which characterize the former, and the passionate abandon, the unbridled jokes of our author, reveals the full measure of the deep psychological change which happened in the meantime.

It is interesting to notice how several of the aspects of the Essay meet in Charles Lamb. Certainly, much of the eighteenth century spirit is still in the *humour* of this author. His character can sometimes appear to us perfectly acclimatized to the company of the witty journalistic spirits who in the era of Johnson frequented fashionable cafes and theatres, enraptured by the show offered them by the life of the street, and by the conversation of the clubs of eccentrics. Types more than individuals. Persons who drew their expressions from the atmosphere in which their voice was little more than a single note, people that we imagine thoughtful or sneering in the shadows of an engraving of Hogarth, as they reveal themselves in the street, crowds of ragged beggars, dwarves, dreadful old women and enticing gypsies, boys from pastry shops with fantastic cake pyramids, while on the horizon, between hedges of dark houses set afire or collapsing, a skeletal gallows outlines itself against the gloomy January sky. On a background of a London street, not a little crowded, like a Hogarth engraving, but where the tragical, pitiless, mad crowd of fellows (this man near you) has produced a colourful masquerade, we are able to discern at times the figure of Charles Lamb, who spent part of his time in a superficial humour on the external aspects of human life, joking in newspaper paragraphs on habits and fashions, exercising his wit on the rose-colored stockings of the latest style and on other trifles. To this kind of superficial humour many of the *Essays of Elia* can be compared: those that in some way harnessed the spirit of the burlesque *Capitoli* of Berni (like the 'Dissertation upon Roast Pig', with which may be compared for example, 'In Praise of Eels', 'Of Gluttons', etc. of Berni,¹⁵ 'The Complaint of the Decay of the Beggars in the Metropolis', the 'Popular Fallacies', one might even say paradoxes, which were the more short-lived part of the book, or those that meandered into witty descriptions of character types (e.g. 'The Two Races of Men', 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist', 'Imperfect Sympathies', 'Poor Relations', whose first part directly recalls Theophrastus.) On the other hand, there are essays that collect impressions of literary or theatrical criticism, or that were ordered by experience or cultural remembrances ('On Some Old Actors', 'The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', 'Scattered Thoughts on Books and Reading', 'The Sanity of True Genius', etc.) But in Lamb's time the habits of life had been changing in speed as well as in new psychic directions. The street, the club, the coffee-house were no longer the customary scenes of actions and opinions: the individual retreated into himself and, in his need of intimacy he turned to the home and the family: the visual field became less varied, more concentrated and intense. So likewise in the *Essays of Elia*, which still echoed of eighteenth-century customs, autobiographic circumstances add a new flavour. Indeed, they are often correspondent with moments expressive of most happiness. Although these circumstances emerge here and there in all the essays, they dominate in one group ('Recollections of Christ's Hospital', 'Blakesmore in H-----shire', 'Dream Children', 'Old

¹⁵ Lamb certainly knew about the poetry of Berni. According to a correspondent of *Notes and Queries*, 21 June 1884, *Gli Elogi del Porco: Capitoli Berneschi* by Tigrinto Bistonio, (Modena, 1761) was a part of his library. L. may have acquired this work after the composition of his essay; but – it would be absurd to digress on an issue of sources, since the Italian work is a shapeless doggerel. It is certain that the spirit L. displayed in his essay, conscious or not, recalls the burlesque poetry of Berni.

China', etc.) where Lamb appears to us in his full originality and maturity; a group which perfectly expresses that lyricism which had only been manifested with timid, incomplete hints in Lamb's juvenile poetry (as in 'Old Familiar Faces'). In his Elia essays he himself speaks to us about his life with his cousin (that is with his sister), of his friends from school, the birthplace of his young sweetheart, his walks in the vacation days, views of his beloved London, his favourite authors, of the theatre which he loved, and of many other things he entertains himself with – and us. He confides his tastes, his aversions, the fantasies that pass through his mind, with the apparent caprice of a lively conversation; and in this conversation the most insignificant objects acquire the semblance of eternal types, and the caprice of the moment is fixed in an everlasting pose, a charming arabesque, things fragile and aerial and evanescent as the lace of arid froth left behind by a wave that the next wave obliterates.

Certain days of Elia's childhood return to us like eternal seasons. Whoever has read 'Blakesmore in H---shire' will forever envision the child rambling through the rooms of the great villa, through the faded, falling tapestries and through the seventeenth-century garden, between the squares of greenery and the pale ungilded lead vases, will see him seated, reading in the corner of the window before the green lawn, his eyes motionless and serious in the suspended summer afternoon, like a dream at the point of breaking, but never interrupted, by the buzz of that one solitary wasp that buzzes and buzzes always. Another time we surprise Elia in the act of speaking with his cousin about the time they were poor, when it was a pleasure to spend every little shilling on a book or print, a pleasant mist of sorrow over those small dissipated savings; whereas in their wealthy period ('rich', said Bridget) they could spend whatever they wished on prints and books, but the pleasure of those expenses was diminished. Another time Elia tells us of the great emptiness that he felt after he retired, and of his regret for those long-ago Sunday vacations that were, in the end, wistfully sad, like the week of summer vacation resembling more the expectant pursuit of pleasure than the pleasure itself – but the wait was everything. Every day of the week and every month of the year were related, all were coloured by the vacation, depending on how far or near they were to it. But now he was always on vacation and was never on vacation, and the walks and the holidays that at the time did not seem a great thing, later dwelt in memory forever, and were no more. And Elia recounts this in a gently flowing style, a continued stream of memories; with his long sentences he seems to want to say everything and a great deal is to be said, because the images of the past are introduced in a crowd, each with the brightness and the urgency of one who demands its right to live in the perfect shape of art.¹⁶ Other times he is concise, the words chasing fast and flaming, the largo or the andante precipitating the allegretto, and on the glittering background of the phrase plays the sparkling fire

¹⁶ This contained fullness, this meaty abundance is that of one who has lived long in the same place, and has had occasion to renew infinite times, with infinite shadings, the primitive impressions of those things. Narrow is the space of earth in which the life of Lamb moved. If we except a trip to the Lake Country, in 1802, and a stay of some weeks to Paris in 1822, Lamb always lived in London and in its outskirts. London was a grand daily show, whose marvels, he wrote once to Wordsworth, coaxed him to take an evening walk through the crowded streets: 'I often shed tears in the motley Strand from the fullness of joy at so much Life . . . great portions of my heart'. He calls to mind the affection of Montaigne for Paris: 'I love it tenderly, even its warts and its spots' ('*Essay sur la Vanité*'). In his love for city life, Lamb is much closer to Johnson and, in turn, to the Eighteenth Century, than to the Romantics. Johnson preferred Fleet Street, with its busy buzz of people, to the quiet of Greenwich Park, and the odour of the torches of the theatres to the fragrance of May evenings. 'Fleet Street seems to me more delightful than Tempe'; 'Sir, no man, that has a grain of intelligence, wishes to leave London. No, sir, when a man is tired with London, he is tired with life; because London is all that life can offer'. So thought the great Doctor Johnson.

of artifice. His style has the caprice of the character of the author. At times solemn and grandiloquent, heavy with the gems and massive gold of seventeenth-century taste, or nobly and gently sententious like Browne; at times succinct and without pretensions, nearly stripped of its heavy brocade, wearing the black and deferential livery of the East India Company. His style was uniquely rich in citations, because Lamb was also a scholar and a critic of first order.

I should not present an image of him, however superficial, without pointing out, at least briefly, his importance in the history of English criticism. Before the campaign in favour of the Elizabethan dramatists conducted by Lamb the contemporaries of Shakespeare were hardly known even to scholars. The ignorance, not only of the works, but of the very names of Marlowe, Webster, Tourneur, Massinger, Ford, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, etc. was such that a critic of *John Woodvil*, Lamb's drama which emulated the language and the images of the Elizabethans, (a drama that was considered a failure) expressed himself in these terms: 'We still have, among us, men of the age of Thespi . . . The tragedy of Mr. Lamb may indeed be fairly considered as supplying the first of those lost links which connect the improvements of Eschylus with the commencement of the art'.¹⁷ Of the sort of verse used in certain passages, verse which closely follows Beaumont and Fletcher, the critic could not find anything better to say than that there was never any kind of verse on the face of the earth which was not replaced by a better one. In brief, the illusion, which Romanticism destroyed, that the eighteenth century marked the *ne plus ultra* of perfection in art lasted even to that time and had only begun to be dispelled in the minds of a few. Generally Lamb's contemporaries performed the tragedies of Shakespeare – the only Elizabethan dramatist who was still staged – in versions that distorted them and rearranged them according to the taste of the age. It is enough to say that in the version of *King Lear* adapted to the stage – a version mangled by [Nahum] Tate, which had been called 'a prudent mixture of Shakespeare and Tate'! – that the character of the Fool was omitted, that Cordelia is made to survive, that she is married to Edgar, and finally that Lear, Kent and Gloster proclaim their intention to retire to private life, in order to keep watch over the happiness of the young couple. Against such confusion and dullness Lamb was the first energetically to protest. He could have learned about the rising school of dramatic criticism in Germany, following the impulse of Lessing, from Coleridge, but one does not find a trace of the German method in his writings. Before Coleridge gave his lectures on Shakespeare to the London Philosophical Society, Lamb published, in 1808, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare*, an anthology of Elizabethan dramatists, equipped with critical and aesthetic, not philological, notes. Only rarely was Lamb unable to penetrate into the spirit of the plays he examined. One of these rare cases is his unfavourable judgement on Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, based on certain exaggerations of language in that drama. He did not notice that in the character of Tamerlane Marlowe personifies that same thirst for the infinite and the unreachable, that spirit of the Renaissance of which his plays (pre-eminently *Doctor Faustus*) are some of the most perfect expressions. Lamb's other great contribution to dramatic criticism is his *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), which his sister collaborated in, written in an easy style, accessible to children, for whom the book was above all designed. Croce had good reason to say of their introduction to that study 'a pair of poets most clear, most open, most comprehensible to

¹⁷ Translator's note: The quotation is from [Brown, T.] *John Woodvil*. *Edinburgh Review* 2 1803, 90-96, reproduced in Donald Reiman, ed. *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*. New York: Garland., 1972, pt. A, 426.

persons of sparse and elementary education'. Readers may find proof of Lamb's rare insight and good sense in matters of aesthetic judgment, by reading 'The Sanity of True Genius' in my translation.

Lamb was less acute in judging his contemporaries. It is true that he was the first to exactly estimate Burns, Blake and Wordsworth. But on the other hand he declared that he did not understand Shelley and thought Goethe's *Faust* (which, however, he read in translation) inferior to Marlowe's. His judgment of Byron, which others may think unjust, seems instead quite penetrating to me:

I have a thorough aversion to his character and a very moderate admiration for his genius – he is great in so little a way – To be a Poet is to be The Man, the whole Man and not a petty portion of occasional low passion worked up into the permanent form of Humanity.

In other words, we see how little the artistic pretensions of indecorous and practiced Byronic emotionality persuaded Lamb. But usually when a new book was published, Lamb preferred to re-read an old one, his beloved Burton, or Browne, or Fuller, Bunyan, or any of those other juicy and opulent prose writers of the seventeenth century.¹⁸

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¹⁸ One final translator's note: Rocco Carabba, Praz's publisher ran quite an influential house based in the Italian town of Lanciano. His other writers included d'Annunzio and Pirandello. The Praz translation of Lamb was part of a series, inaugurated in 1909 by Crabba's son, Gino, which was to include rare or forgotten works as well as new, controversial ones. The series dealt mostly in translations and neglected works of Italian literature. Praz first published *The Romantic Agony* as *La morte la carne e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (1930) with Carabba.

Charles Lamb in Dutch Translation

By OSKAR WELLENS

EVER SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, Dutch literati have displayed an increased interest in the works of their English counterparts. It is small wonder, then, that British authors, who had risen to prominence, were to exert considerable influence on Dutch literature and were to be made accessible in Dutch translations. Celebrities like Byron,¹ Scott,² Dickens,³ George Eliot,⁴ etc., became rapidly available in Dutch after reaching notoriety in their own country. Even less acclaimed English writers found, through translation, an avid readership in the Low Countries. This essay seeks to chart, in detail, all the Dutch renditions so far offered of Charles Lamb's works. In addition, it aims to provide background information on these translations.⁵

The Dutch reader could for the first time relish a Dutch translation of Lamb's *oeuvre* in *Iris* (1830-1887), a periodical published by G. Vervloet in *The Hague*, which anthologized material originally printed in foreign journals. In its March 1831 issue (459-71), *Iris* inserted a translation of 'Barbara S***', a rendition of 'Barbara S', collected in *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833). In a footnote to this contribution, Lamb is perceived as

one of the most original writers of present-day England. . . . With a sensitiveness that reminds us of some of Sterne's scenes, this author combines a tendency to aberration, which perhaps betrays egotism, but in whom worldly wisdom and profoundness of contemplation are concealed under a mask of natural simplicity.⁶

In his subsequent issues the anonymous editor of *Iris* printed four more translations of the *Elia* essays of 1823 and 1833, viz. 'De vrijgelatene' (1832, 40-52) ['The Superannuated Man'], 'Een arme bloedverwant' (1832, 108-21) ['Poor Relations'], 'Het oud porselein' (1834, 79-86) ['Old China'], and 'De oude pakketboot van Margate' (1834, 208-26) ['The Old Margate Hoy']. The man behind these translations remained anonymous, but there is reason to suppose that they were penned by Everardus Johannes Potgieter (1808-1875), a literary icon, who from the very beginning of his career as a writer and critic was intrigued by successful works published abroad,

¹ See Tjeerd Popma, *Byron en het Byronisme in de Nederlandsche Letterkunde* (Amsterdam, 1928), Ulfert Schults, Jr., *Het Byronianisme in Nederland* (Utrecht, 1929), and Theo D'haen, 'The Dutch Byron: Byron in Dutch', in *Centennial Hauntings: Pope, Byron and Eliot in the Year 88*, ed. C.C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA), 1990, 233-51, and 'De Nederlandse "Byron"', *Literatuur* (1992), 88-96.

² See Polly den Tender, 'Scottomanie in Nederland. De Nederlandse vertalingen van Walter Scott's romans tussen 1824 en 1834', *De negentiende eeuw* (1984), 3-12.

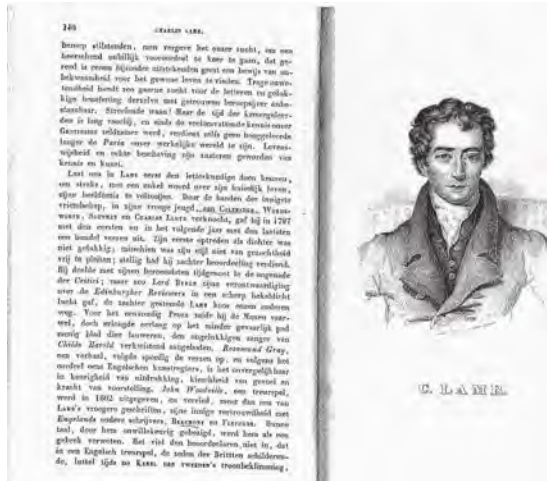
³ See my 'The Earliest Dutch Translations of Dickens (1837-1870)', *The Dickensian* 93 (1997), 126-32, and 'The Contemporary Dutch Critical Reception of Dickens', *The Dickensian* 99 (2003), 11-21.

⁴ See my 'The Contemporary Dutch Reception of George Eliot', *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* (September, 2001), 25-31.

⁵ *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, vol. 4 (1800-1900), 3rd ed., ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge, 1999), is both incomplete and inaccurate on the Dutch translations of Lamb's works.

⁶ This and the subsequent translations from the Dutch are my own; the citation describing Lamb is from p. 459.

especially in Britain, searching the reviews of its prestigious periodicals to keep himself well abreast of the emergence of new English talent. That Potgieter was one of the earliest Dutchmen to have spotted Lamb's genius appears from two of his works published in 1836. The first of these, entitled 'Charles Lamb', was submitted to *Het Leeskabinet* (1834-1903)⁷ [*The Reading Cabinet*], a liberal miscellaneous journal that featured numerous translations of foreign works. Potgieter's piece was undoubtedly the first substantial Dutch portrait of the English essayist and therefore has claims to our attention.



Engraving accompanying Potgieter's 'Charles Lamb'

Potgieter opens his article by stating that, although after the publication of the *Essays of Elia* Lamb became a celebrity in London literary circles, he is still largely unknown in the Netherlands. It is therefore useful, Potgieter goes on, to offer a brief account of Lamb's life and works, which demonstrates, overall, a surprising familiarity with its subject, no doubt culled from the many

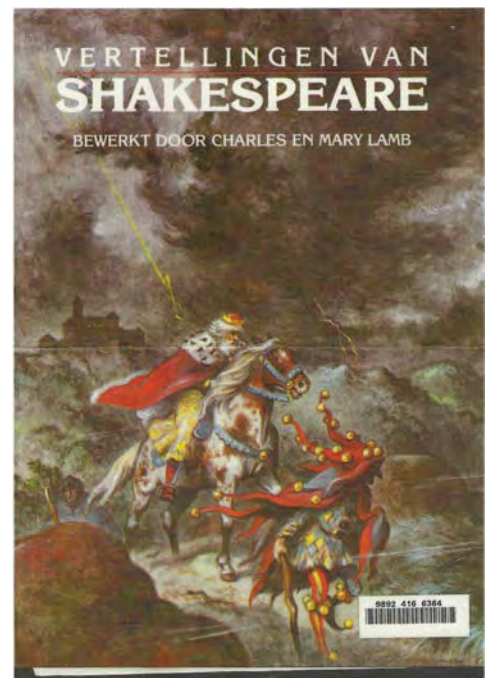
flattering obituaries that circulated after Lamb's death in 1834. Potgieter focuses, among other things, on Lamb's education at Christ's Hospital, his lifelong intimacy with Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey—in one of the earliest Dutch references to the Lakists—and his humble clerkship in the East India House, despite his literary ambitions and his infatuation with the older English poets. Potgieter then provides a bare outline of Lamb's chief works, including the *Essays of Elia*. Though eminently 'melancholic', these are, Potgieter writes, characterized by 'Wisdom and ingenuity, real fun, witty playfulness and striking tenderness . . . a just and delicate feeling for everything that concerns man forms their merit. We do not know any writer who has drawn such wonderful portraits of townspeople; refined observation combines in every sketch with truth of presentation'. Potgieter also calls attention to Lamb's special relationship with his sister and his amiable personality, finishing his account with a fine vignette of Lamb strolling with his dog Sparks in the London suburbs. Interestingly, 'Charles Lamb' featured a fine lithographic portrait of the essayist, engraved by an anonymous artist. Clearly, then, Potgieter's piece must surely have contributed significantly to the spread of Lamb's status as a congenial English writer in the Netherlands. Revealingly, at the time *De Leeskabinet* boasted a top circulation of 40,000 copies.

To substantiate his claims on Lamb, Potgieter chose to furnish a rendition of 'Lof der Schoorsteenvegers' ['In Praise of Chimney-Sweepers'], which he submitted to *De Leeskabinet* as an appendage to his 'Charles Lamb' (144-52). Then, too, Potgieter brought out in the same year *Proeven van een humorist* [*Essays of a Humorist*], containing 33 translated pieces selected from the *Elia* collections. Its publisher, Hendrik Frijlinck (1800-1886), *De Leeskabinet*'s founder and editor, who had a flair for discovering genuine literary talent, also from abroad, was himself to translate numerous works as well as to issue several translations of contemporary English

⁷ 1836, 137-44.

fiction, including Dickens'.⁸ Potgieter left *Proeven van een humorist* unprefaced, but in a brief note he refers the reader for more information on Lamb to his biographical sketch earlier embodied in *De Leeskabinet*. This collection printed the same engraving as that illustrating Potgieter's article for *De Leeskabinet* as well as a fine original lithograph made by the renowned portraitist Hilmar Johannes Backer (1804-1845) for the essay 'Heb mij lief, en mijn hond ook' ['That you must love me, and love my dog']. As far as I know, only the venerable review *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1761-1875) bothered to assess Potgieter's performance.⁹ The anonymous contributor, after attempting to define the qualities of a humorous writer, labels *Proeven van humorist* 'a rather bodily book, rich in original concepts, shrewd observations, deep feeling, rare knowledge of human nature and graceful wording, a changing painting here in the grandest style and then childish naïve'. Singling out a few essays from the collection, he styles them 'masterpieces', which point to an 'experienced writer' as well as to a 'profound thinker', concluding that 'We recommend the book to all readers . . . Read it, also because it has been excellently and fluently translated by a competent as well as tasteful hand', adding that 'our own puffed literature has still great need of such works displaying spirit and taste'. In this respect, nineteenth-century Dutch literature was still preponderantly governed by established neoclassical values. However, more than a century later, D.G. van der Vat painstakingly probed into Potgieter's venture and was forced to pass a less flattering verdict.¹⁰ Marshalling an abundance of examples of Potgieter's faulty as well as careless renditions, he concludes that *Proeven* offers an 'exceedingly defective translation of Lamb's *Essays*', which he attributes to the translator's 'extraordinarily imperfect knowledge of the English language'. The outcome is that 'Lamb's masterly and very personal style founders completely'. Van der Vat also questions Potgieter's chronology of the *Essays*, which he finds 'entirely arbitrary' and 'in no way justifiable'. Although Potgieter was no doubt attracted to English humorous writers, he 'failed to grasp', Van der Vat posits, 'the finer nuances of Lamb's sensitive prose . . . and his wittiness'. True, judging from a modern point of view, Potgieter's achievement may be brushed aside as a failure, but he has the credit of being the first Dutch writer to have brought Lamb to the notice of a wider Dutch audience.

It was thirty years later—in 1866—that the Dutch reader could again access a translated Lamb, when Albertus Ter Gunne of Deventer brought out *Vertellingen uit Shakespeare* [*Tales from Shakespeare* (1807)]. Ter Gunne (1808-1888), who, according to an obituarist, 'occupied an independent position among his



Cover (Holland, 1993) of *Vertellingen van Shakespeare*

⁸ See 'The Earliest Dutch Translations of Dickens', *loc.cit.*, 127.

⁹ 1836, 631-33.

¹⁰ 'Potgieter en Charles Lamb', *Tijdschrift voor Taal en Letteren*, 27 (1939), 219-31.

colleagues',¹¹ was an extremely enterprising bookseller, printer, and publisher, issuing numerous belletristic translated works, including Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot. He omitted mention of the translator of *Vertellingen uit Shakspeare*, but we may safely assume that he himself penned the rendition, for he was known as a prolific translator of several English works. 'The translator' prefaced the volume with a four-page commentary, which elaborately justified his work as an introduction to Shakespeare for Dutch youngsters. The Dutchmen's increased interest in the English language, he argues, will no doubt sharpen their appetite for exploring the English literary heritage, of which Shakespeare is the paragon. However, young people, 'translator' continues, will not easily access the original plays, since assessing their merits requires both 'thinking power and imagination'. Furthermore, Shakespeare, as he emerges from his works, 'does not offer a reading without moral reservations', especially for young girls whose 'virgin sentiments' may be 'hurt', a view we will hear again, if more forcibly, in a Preface to a later Dutch translation of the Lambs' *Tales*. Lastly, Lamb has, according to 'Translator', in many ways used Shakespeare's words in his *Tales*, a policy which he in *Vertellingen uit Shakspeare* has likewise followed. Briefly, Van der Gunne's first translation of some of the Lambs' *Tales* serves to lead the Dutch youth to Shakespeare, steering, however, clear of 'offensive' or 'immoral passages', and once it has reached adulthood, it will hopefully go to the originals. As a coda to *Vertellingen uit Shakspeare*, the reader is offered a well documented survey of Shakespeare's life, largely relying, it turns out, on Lamb's own writings on Shakespeare. For this edition Ter Gunne enlisted the then famous duo O.D. Emrik and Chs. Binger of Haarlem to furnish some lithographic illustrations.

Almost half a century passed before we hear of another Dutch translation of Lamb's *oeuvre*. In 1904 the Amsterdam-based publisher S. Van Looy brought out *Luimig proza* [*Witty Prose*], a collection of humorous pieces selected from works by Lamb, Thackeray, Hunt, and Villiers de l'Isle Adam. The editor and translator was Frank van der Goes (1859-1939), one of the founders of *De Nieuwe Gids* (1885 -) [*The New Guide*], a journal that acted as the mouthpiece of the 'Tachtigers' ['The Movement of the Eighties'], who ushered in modern Dutch poetry. Later Van der Goes became the first Dutch theoretical Marxist. That he was attracted to Lamb is perhaps no matter for surprise, for Van der Goes himself was all his life a notable essayist. In *Luimig proza* he presented rendtions of fifteen *Elia* essays, prefacing them by some introductory remarks, which set out to justify his selection and mode of translation. He declares that he has 'not permitted any greater liberty in the rendtions than the omission of some compound sentences, completely and partially, and of some fragments which at this time are hardly intelligible or without importance'. Van der Goes embarked on this translation, when he was serving a prison sentence for libel. In this 'Introduction' he recommends *Luimig proza* as 'excellently suited to enhance the joy of quietude and seclusion', adding humorously that he was advised by 'an institute to sit, but not to sit still'. *Luimig proza* did not cause a stir among contemporary Dutch critics, except Willem Kloos (1859-1938), the acknowledged leader of the *Tachtigers* and an authoritative arbiter of literary taste. In *De Nieuwe Gids* of 1904 (260-288) he devoted a lengthy commentary on Van der Goes's volume. In this piece Kloos first sketches a psychological

¹¹ *Nieuwsblad voor den boekhandel*, vol. 55 (1888), 103. See also A.C. Kruseman, *Bouwsstoffen voor den geschiedenis van den Nederlandschen boekhandel gedurende de halve eeuw 1830-1880* (Amsterdam, 1887), vol. II, pp. 691-2.

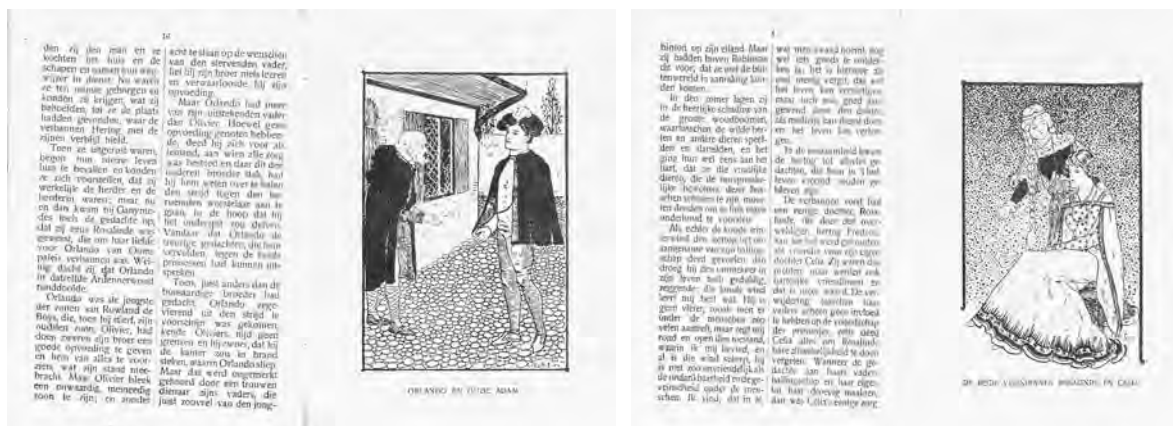
portrait of the translator as well as violently attacks the trivial formalities of 'the clergymen's literature', so characteristic of Dutch literature in the nineteenth century, and then turns the flashlight of attention on Lamb. Some of his lucubrations on the English essayist are well worth quoting. Deploring that Lamb is as yet 'little known' in the Low Countries, Kloos sets out to qualify Lamb as

a man full of spirit and sensibility and a surprisingly fine power of observation, who, moreover, possessed a writing talent, so light-natural, fresh-original, elegant-solid, that even nowadays, 70 years after his death, one reads his work as if it was written today, a super-delicate sketcher and day-dreamer; who does not cultivate banality, even when he discusses the most common events in life[.]

adding that the Dutch prosaists of the past would have learned a great deal from him. Lamb, Kloos goes to say, 'is a writer one must love, because he does not at all adopt an attitude towards you, but he always shows himself as the same pure and simple, fine and perceptive human being, who he inwardly really was'. Or again: Lamb was 'fair-childlike, and wrote what he wrote, but possessed at the same time the intelligent sensibility and the ripe insight, which must be the characteristics of every adult and educated person'. Finally, Kloos judges Van der Goes' rendition 'good', except for some minor inaccuracies in the wording, and labels *Luimig Prose* 'a nice book' that will hopefully pull Lamb (and Leigh Hunt) out of forgetfulness. Kloos's elaborate article, published in a prestigious journal like *De Nieuwe Gids*, must certainly have helped to promote Lamb's prestige as a major writer among Dutch educated readers

In 1901 the Leeuwarden publishers J. Hepkena and R. van der Velde launched a series named 'Boeken voor jongens en meisjes' ['Books for Boys and Girls'], which was to print more than 244 volumes of children's literature, chiefly Dutch renditions from popular foreign works such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Ivanhoe*, *Alice in Wonderland*, etc. These booklets were later added freely to the weekly *Leeuwarden Nieuwsblad* [*Leeuwarden Newspaper*], which was also published by Hepkema and Van der Velde. 'Boeken voor jongens en meisjes' incorporated in 1912 as Number 40 *Twee verhalen van Shakespeare, voor het eerst in het Nederlandsch voor kinderen vertaald / naar de Engelse bewerking van Charles Lamb en Mary Ann Lamb* [*Two Stories of Shakespeare for the first time translated into Dutch / after the English Adaptation by Charles Lamb and Mary Ann Lamb*].

The *Two Stories* were the Lambs' adaptations of *As you Like It* and *The Tempest* as they were



Illustrations to the Hepkena and R. van der Velde edition (1912)

first printed in *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). The translator was not named. This popular edition boasted some rather delightful, if crude, illustrations made by a certain Edith Ewen.

In these early decades of the past century also appeared—undated—*Eenige vertellingen van Shakespeare door Charles and Mary Lamb* [*Some Tales from Shakespeare by Charles and Mary Lamb*], from the presses of Gabriel Devreese of Antwerp, an industrious printer and publisher of schooltexts and books for children. The translation was entrusted to A. van Riel-Göransson and A. van Riel (1880-1935), the latter a minor writer and versifier. This Flemish work offered renditions of the Lambs' *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. It was apparently conceived as a schooltext, for in its 'Preface' the Van Riels urged the 'Dear Children' to address themselves to 'their teachers' for clarification when the text 'would seem unclear'. The translators also penned brief memoirs of both Shakespeare and the Lambs. Of *Tales from Shakespeare* they write: 'These tales, destined to prepare children to the reading of Shakespeare, were also avidly read by adults, for they form an excellent introduction to Shakespeare and explain many things which appear obscure in the works'. *Eenige vertellingen van Shakespeare* included drawings by Leo Primavesi, whom I have been unable to identify.

In 1953 the major Dutch publishing firm L.J. Veen, since 1887 specialized in publishing famous Dutch and Flemish works as well as translations of the classics in world-literature, set up a literary series named 'Amstelboeken', which was to offer belletristic works in paperback format. As Number 166 'Amstelboeken' presented *Charles en Mary Lamb. Verhalen naar Shakespeare's Toneelstukken*, containing twenty of *Tales from Shakespeare* in a translation of Hermien Manger and Betty Teesing-Koster, both professional translators from the English and German. 'H.M.', that is Hermien Manger, provided a Postscript to *Verhalen*, which outlines the genesis of *Tales from Shakespeare*. She also mentions, in passing, that the original was exclusively addressed to boys, adding that nowadays 'adults occasionally like to be children' and that these translations may therefore serve as 'a memory support for examinees' or as an 'introductory foretaste for potential theatre-goers'.

The following year the publishing section of 'Het Davidsfonds', an organization founded at Leuven in 1875 to promote, on a strictly Catholic basis, the cultural emancipation of the Flemish people, issued *Charles Lamb. Vertellingen naar Shakespeare* [*Charles Lamb. Stories after Shakespeare*], a work printed in a run of more than 15,000 copies, an extraordinarily huge number considering the limitations of the Flemish reading market. However, this amount is perhaps not surprising, for 'Het Davidsfonds' enjoyed an unparalleled popularity at the time,



Illustration to Devreese's edition

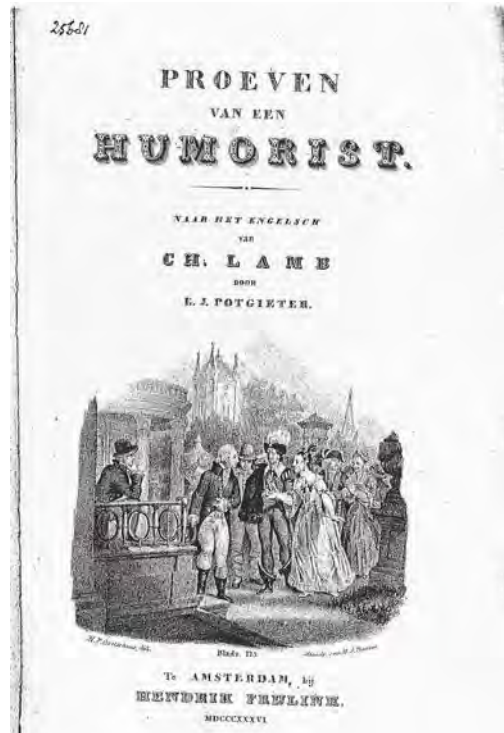
each of its members receiving free copies of four of the many works brought out yearly by this union. The twenty *Vertellingen* were translated by a A. Govaers, who remains unidentifiable. The artist Jef Boudens (1926-1990), who allegedly revolutionized Flemish calligraphy after the Second World War, conceived the decorative binding of this work. *Vertellingen* appeared as an altogether undistinguished publication both in its outlook and contents, except for its 'Preface', which broached some observations that sound, to put it mildly, odd to modern ears. To start with, the anonymous writer, though acknowledging that the Lambs' original catered for the younger readers, asserts that 'There is a distance between 1807 and 1954; there is notably a difference between the contemporary English young readers and their today's Flemish counterparts', and 'because of that distance and difference, we are [therefore] harsher than Charles Lamb and feel obliged to publish the present work with the moral qualification III-IV, that is, appropriate for educated adults only'. This singular verdict is more elaborately justified in the following paragraphs. From them we learn that it requires 'a trained conception and literary training to follow Shakespeare-Lamb in the capriciousness of their over-rich phantasy' and 'their poetical liberties'. Then, too, Shakespeare witnessed a time when 'levity and libertinism prevailed in some noble circles', which regrettably found their way into his plays. Therefore, the 'Catholic reader is to be warned and is to read Shakespeare without losing sight of the circumstances in which this work came into existence . . . and he is to read Lamb in the same spirit'. Nonetheless, despite these moral objections, thoroughly grounded in orthodox Catholicism so prevalent in Flanders at the time, *Vertellingen naar Shakespeare* is praised as 'a masterpiece', because of their 'insight into man' and their 'vital seriousness'.

As is well-known, from the 1960s onwards book production expanded enormously as well as imposed higher standards both in its outlook and lay-out. Then, too, the general readership commenced to make claims on procuring eminently readable texts cleared of outdated phraseology and diction. This trend is amply borne out by *Sprookjes en vertekingen naar Shakespeare* [*Fairy-tales and Tales after Shakespeare*], published in 1969 by Agon Elevier. In effect, this work was an international project produced simultaneously in Austria, the initiator, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Finland, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the USA. The Dutch text was supplied by the professional translator H.I. Onnes-de Groot, but the translation of the poems embedded in *Sprookjes en vertellingen* was borrowed from Dr. L.A.J. Burgerdijk's standard edition of *De toneelspelen van William Shakespeare* [*The Plays of William Shakespeare*], revised by C. Buddingh in 1963. By far the most appealing feature of this publication were the gouaches that lavishly illustrated the tales. They were executed with consummate delicacy by the popular Polish illustrator Janusz Grabianski (1924-1971). Further, this edition offered the first Dutch translation of the Lambs' original Preface to *Tales from Shakespeare*.

Finally, the publishing company Holland of Haarlem, active since 1921 as a specialist in issuing illustrated children's books, published in 1993 *Vertellingen van Shakespeare. In de oorspronkelijke bewerking van Charles and Mary Lamb* [*Tales of Shakespeare. In the Original Adaptation by Charles and Mary Lamb*]. A team of translators was enlisted, including Catalien Neelissen, Willem van Paassen, and H.I. Onnes-De Groot. Again this volume boasted numerous fine illustrations made by the Czech artist Karel Toman (1931-).

To round off this account, two marginal Dutch translations of Lamb's works merit attention. As a special Christmas issue, destined for its close customers, Enschedé and Sons of Haarlem brought out in 1957 a dual language edition of *New Years Eve-Oudejaarsavond*. The Dutch was

from the pen of E.J. Potgieter as it was first printed in *Proeven van een humorist* (1836); the Preface was penned by J.C. Bloem (1887-1966), an accomplished Dutch poet, who was awarded



Title page to *Proeven van een humorist* (1836)

several literary prizes. In this prefatory essay Bloem opines that Lamb is chiefly remembered as ‘the gentle Elia’, unless one, like Carlyle and Somerset Maugham, dislikes him. Further, Bloem describes *Essays of Elia* as ‘superior causeries’ or as ‘journalism of the very best kind’, also highlighting that essentially Lamb volunteered his essays as contributions to journals, not intended to be published in book-form. Bloem then provides a summary outline of Lamb’s life and career, thereby focusing special attention on the essayist’s devotion to Mary. Oddly, Bloem does not care to justify his choice of Potgieter’s by-then antiquated translation with its awkward heaviness. *New Years Eve-Oudejaarsavond* was printed in the beautiful letter-type ‘Romulus’ and in the elegant Molé capitals. It was bound in Danish marbled paper coloured by hand. The portrait of Lamb was engraved by Sem L. Hartz (1912 -1968), a Dutch type designer who succeeded the famous Jan van Krimpen (1892-1958) at the House Enschedé and who also collaborated with the Sheffield typefoundry Stephenson Blake. Undoubtedly this bibliophile edition of ‘New Years Eve’, facing the Dutch translation, revealed Enschedé’s superior

craftsmanship and must therefore be seen as a fine homage to Lamb’s genius.

Lastly, ‘Ruimte-X’, a wayward artistic forum of Tilburg, launched in 2002 a multi-disciplinary ‘Project on Pigs’, for which ‘Telexpress’, a private issuer of bibliophile editions, printed *Charles Lamb. Een verhandeling over gebraden varkensvlees* [‘A Dissertation upon Roast Pig’]. Hand-printed on an old high-pressure press, this delicately illustrated impression was issued in 150 numbered copies. The eminently readable Dutch text came from the pen of Hans Heesen (1959), publicist, scenarist, writer of children’s books, and above all an anglophile. The original linocuts were provided by Nina Kurth (1966), the typography was in the hands of Christine Lohmann, and the design as well as the cover’s screenpainting were executed by Walter Kerkhofs. The historian and freelance journalist Ingrid Luycks wrote an ‘Introductory Note’ which, beside shedding light on the genesis and production of *Een verhandeling over gebraden varkensvlees*, described Lamb’s *Essays* as displaying ‘an unbridled imaginative power, humour, and an appetite for the particular, the bizarre and the deviant’. Not ‘the great issues interest him’, Luycks



Illustration to ‘Ruimte-X’ edition (2002)

continued, 'but rather personal incidents which he imparts to his reader in a familiar, occasionally formally constructed way'. Needless to say, this handsomely produced booklet, the work of a team of dedicated artists, has been much sought after by bibliophiles.

In retrospect, then, this survey has, I believe, demonstrated that Lamb's chief works became fairly rapidly available in translation in the Netherlands. At an early stage Potgieter must certainly be credited with having introduced the English essayist to a Dutch audience. In fact, there is reason to conjecture that Potgieter was one of the first translators of Lamb. Perhaps this is no matter for surprise, for, as noted above, he took a keen interest in contemporary English literature, attracting the interested Dutch reader's attention to work by Hazlitt, Shelley, Dickens, etc. True, a few later doubtless more faithful renditions of some individual *Elia* essays were published, but Potgieter's *Proeven van een humorist* was to remain the only complete Dutch translation of the *Elia* essays to date. Curiously, while *Tales from Shakespeare* found early translations into German, French, Spanish, and even Swedish, it was only in the late 1860s that the Dutch reader could get acquainted with a rendition of this popular work. It was only in the past century, increasingly in its latter part, that several Dutch versions of *Tales from Shakespeare* found their way to the public, each of these reflecting the changing linguistic and stylistic evolution of the Dutch language. Except for the Flemish edition of 1954, which was expressly directed at the adult reader, all these 'modern' Dutch translations, some profusely illustrated, catered for the curiosity of the young, as the Lambs had originally intended. It is pleasant to discover that after almost two centuries Dutch publishers have continued to deem a translated *Tales from Shakespeare* a profitable venture intent upon initiating young people into the world of Shakespeare. As to the two delightful bibliophile issues, they merit a special place in the cabinet of Lamb *curiosa*.

Free University of Brussels

Society Notes and News from Members

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Keats House is hosting a forthcoming lecture series entitled 'Parallel Lines', as outlined below:

Tuesday 21st March, 7pm

CHARLES & MARY LAMB

Inseparable brother and sister and lights of the Romantic circle, Charles and Mary Lamb's literary reputation rested partly on the famous *Tales from Shakespeare*. And yet there was an unhappier side: Charles was an alcoholic and Mary, in an attack of insanity, stabbed their mother to death. In the heart of early nineteenth century London, eccentrics and literary giants rubbed shoulders, but madhouses also concealed terrible abuse.

Dr. Sarah Burton is a lecturer and author of *Double Life: A Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb*.

Tuesday 28th March, 7pm

NICCI FRENCH

Nicci French is the pseudonym for the writing partnership of journalists Nicci Gerrard and Sean French. Both successful writers and journalists, Nicci and Sean were married in 1990. In 1995 they began work on their first joint novel and adopted the pseudonym of Nicci French. The novel, *The Memory Game*, was published to great acclaim in 1997. *The Safe House*, *Killing Me Softly*, *Beneath the Skin*, *The Red Room*, *Land of the Living* and *Secret Smile* have since been added. They will chat about the process of writing fiction together and how they create a consistent voice in their fiction. An unmissable event for anyone who enjoys crime fiction and thrillers!

Tuesday 4th April, 7pm

WILLIAM AND DOROTHY WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth is famous as one of the great early Romantic poets, writing well-loved poems such as *Daffodils* as well as longer works such as *The Prelude*. However, his sister and constant companion Dorothy charted not only their daily lives but also Wordsworth's working methods in her journals, giving us a valuable insight into the process of his writing.

Stephen Hebron is Director of Publications at the Wordsworth Trust, which runs Dove Cottage, the house where William and Dorothy Wordsworth lived in Grasmere. He has published numerous books on Wordsworth and other Romantic writers.

Concessions are £8, £6 for all lectures.

Doors open for evening events at 6.30pm. Events begin at 7pm **unless stated otherwise**. Price includes a glass of wine or fruit juice.

How to book: credit card bookings can be made by telephone – call 020 7435 2062. To book by post, please send a cheque for the appropriate amount, stating which talks you would like tickets for, to Keats House at the address below. **It is advisable to ring first to check availability before booking by post.** Please make cheques payable to The Corporation of London.

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FROM D.E. WICKHAM

Fanny Kelly and Her Dickensian Equivalents

Any reference to Charles Lamb's friend Frances Maria (Fanny) Kelly (1790-1882) is likely to refer to her divine plain face and to the fact that, although an actress, she was generally regarded, unlike most actresses of the time, as a lady and the bearer of a fine reputation—though there is always the matter of Miss Gerbini, alias Greville, her 'adopted' daughter, mentioned in her will, to explain away. In the 1840s, moreover, Fanny Kelly opened her own private theatre at the back of her house in Dean Street, Soho, a bohemian district in Central London, a site since rebuilt but still oddly separate from its neighbours.

Charles Dickens's essay on 'Private Theatres' (*Sketches by Boz*, chapter 13, 1834 onwards) summarizes what might have been expected in those circumstances:

The principal patrons of private theatres are dirty boys, low copying-clerks in attorneys' offices, capacious-headed youths from city countinghouses . . . , shop-boys who now and then mistake their mashers' money for their own; and a choice miscellany of idle vagabonds. The proprietor of a private theatre may be an ex-scene-painter, a low coffee-house-keeper, a disappointed eighth-note actor, a retired smuggler, or [an] uncertificated bankrupt. The theatre itself may be in Catherine-street, Strand, the purlieus of the city, the neighbourhood of Gray's-inn-lane, or the vicinity of Sadlers' Wells; or it may, perhaps, form the chief nuisance of some shabby street, on the Surrey [southern] side of Waterloo-bridge.

The lady performers pay nothing for their characters and it is needless to add, are usually selected from one class of society; the audiences are necessarily of much the same character as the performers, who receive in return for their contributions to the management, tickets to the amount of the money they pay.

All the minor theatres in London, especially the lowest, constitute the centre of a little stage-struck neighbourhood. Each of them has an audience exclusively its own

and so on and so on and so on.