The Charles Lamb Bulletin

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Contents: Mary Wedd Issue

EDITOR'S COMMENTS:

This year marks the ninetieth birthday of Mary Wedd, who edited this journal jointly with Basil Savage from number 19 (July 1977) to number 26 (April 1979), and then on her own until number 64 (October 1988). After resigning the editorial chair, she became the first Associate Editor of the *Bulletin* and remains an advisory editor to this day. The present editor is proud to offer Mary this special issue of the *Bulletin* as a tribute from the Society. All articles were commissioned from the contributors, who were happy to lend their weight to such an important celebration in the life of the Society. That every contribution to this issue was completed and submitted, expeditiously, is itself a marvelous tribute to Mary's rare grace as an individual as well as to her exceptional service and the distinguished levels of scholarship and criticism she has so generously provided to both the *Bulletin* and the Lamb Society.

All the very best, Mary!

Mary Wedd

By LAURIE AND PATRICIA WEDD

MARY WEDD WAS BORN MARY CARR IN NOVEMBER 1916, the daughter of a clergyman. Initially taught by her mother, she then attended St Elphin's School, Cheltenham Ladies' College, and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, becoming one of a select number of female graduates of her generation.

Her earliest published work was a short story under her then name of Mary Harris which appeared in a book entitled *The Pleasure Ground – A Miscellany of English Writing*, edited by Malcolm Elwin and published by Macdonald in 1947. This was followed by a number of stories published in literary magazines of the time.

She taught at Summerhill with A. S. Neill, and at a number of other alternative schools such as Kilquhanity House and Long Dene, which last brought her to Kent where she has lived ever since. In the 1960s she returned to primary school teaching, using her experiences to write *Born for Joy*, an influential book for teachers published by Macdonalds in 1969. She went on to lecture at teacher training college, and then for many years taught English Literature at London University's Goldsmiths College.

During the 1960s and 1970s very many articles appeared, mostly on educational subjects, in such periodicals as *The Use of English*; in the early '70s she wrote pieces for *The Times Educational Supplement*, and *The Sunday Times*. She contributed book reviews for *The Lady Margaret Hall Brown Book*, and was for some time a regular reviewer for *The Review of English Studies*.

In 1977 she became editor of *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, initially in collaboration with its founding editor Basil Savage. Her first article in the *Bulletin* appeared in October 1979; in 1984 she was invited to speak at Christ's Hospital, and the text of her talk appeared in the *Bulletin* the following year. She continued as editor until 1988. She contributed articles on Lamb and on Leigh Hunt to *The Handbook of British Romanticism* (Macmillan, 1992).

She has been a regular speaker at the Wordsworth Summer and Winter schools in the Lake District, has given many talks on Coleridge at Kilve, and continues as an active member of various literary associations including The Lamb Society.

Tonbridge, Kent

Mary Wedd (2006)

Mary Wedd (2006)

Lamb, Coleridge and Blake[1]

By JOHN BEER

MARY WEDD HAS ALWAYS SHOWN A PRAISEWORTHY RESISTANCE to literary fashions that try to dismiss from further consideration writers who have long held the field—which is one reason why she has proved such a doughty champion of Charles Lamb. The idea that this Romantic writer not only knew of Blake's existence but had some knowledge of his work still comes as something of a surprise to readers; yet at this time London was a small enough community for this to be possible. Coleridge, for example, allowed himself to be captivated, describing Blake as 'a man of Genius—and I apprehend, a Swedenborgian—certainly, a mystic emphatically…. I am in the very mire of common-place common-sense compared with Mr Blake, apo- or rather ana-calyptic Poet and Painter!'[2] This was in 1818, when Tulk had just lent him a copy of the *Songs*; a week later he provided him with a full range of comments, graded from those that gave him pleasure 'in the highest degree' to those 'in the lowest'.—though the placing of a poem in the latter category he explained to be a sign of perplexity rather than of outright censure. He thought, nevertheless, that 'A little Girl Lost' would be better omitted 'not for the want of innocence in the poem, but from the too probable want of it in many readers'. Interestingly, the poems in the *Songs of Innocence* gained his approbation more consistently than those in *Experience*.[3] A few years later, as the two men met at parties arranged by Elizabeth and Charles Aders at their house in Euston Square,[4] a contemporary recorded his impression that 'Blake and Coleridge, when in company, seemed like congenial beings of another sphere, breathing for a while on our earth'.[5] Charles Lamb, meanwhile, described Blake as a 'mad Wordsworth'— a judgment, as often with Lamb, more perceptive than it might at first sight seem.[6] A longer response came in an enthusiastic letter to Bernard Barton in 1824:

> Blake is a real name, I assure you, and a most extraordinary man, if he be still living. He is the Robert Blake, whose wild designs accompany a splendid folio edition of the Night Thoughts…. He paints in water colours, marvellous strange pictures, visions of his brain which he asserts that he has seen. They have great merit. He has seen the old welch bards on Snowdon—he has seen the Beautifullest, the Strongest, & the Ugliest Man, left alone from the Massacre of the Britons by the Romans, & has painted them from memory (I have seen his paintings) and asserts them to be as good as the figures of Raphael & Angelo, but not better, as they had precisely the same retro-visions & prophetic visions with himself. ….His Pictures, one in particular the Canterbury Pilgrims (far above Stothard's) have great merit, but hard, dry, yet with grace. He has written a Catalogue of them, with a most spirited criticism on Chaucer, but mystical and full of Vision. His poems have been sold hitherto only in Manuscript. I never read

[1] This piece is based on a passage in the author's *William Blake: A Literary Life* (Palgrave 2005).
[2] Letter to Cary, 6 February 1818: Coleridge, *Collected Letters,* ed. Griggs *(*Oxford 1956-71) IV: 834.
[3] Ibid., 836-8.
[4] See G.E. Bentley, Jr, *The Stranger from Paradise* (New Haven, 2001) p. 410 and n.
[5] 'Anon' (C.A.Tulk?) 'The Inventions of William Blake, Painter and Poet', *London University Magazine* (March 1830).
[6] Henry Crabb Robinson, letter of 10 August 1848: *Blake Records Supplement,* ed. G.E. Bentley Jr., (Oxford 1988) p. 68.

> them, but a friend at my desire procured the Sweep Song. There is one to a Tiger, which I have heard recited, beginning
>
> Tiger Tiger burning bright
> Thro' the deserts of the night—
>
> which is glorious. But alas! I have not the Book, for the man is flown, whither I know not, to Hades or a Mad House—but I must look on him as one of the most extraordinary persons of the age.[7]

The power Blake manifested could result in a proneness to states of enthusiasm and fear: later he was to tell how the great events of his time (particularly the American and French revolutions) took the form for him of visions so powerful that he felt he could hardly 'subsist on the Earth'.[8] It could also prompt other people to wonder like Lamb, whether he might not end up in a madhouse. From both his own and his sister's experience, Lamb knew what would be involved in such a fate, so that the remark was not a flippant one. But if he had considered the subject seriously he would probably not have shared Southey's opinion that one could only feel sorrow and compassion for such a man [9] but would have been more likely to share the insight expressed by Wordsworth:

> '. . .there is something in the madness of this man that interests me more than the Sanity of Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott'.[10]

Peterhouse, Cambridge

[7] MS letter in Huntington Library quoted *Blake Records,* ed. G.E. Bentley Jr., (Oxford 1969) pp. 284-5, where it is also noted that Lamb's main source of information was Crabb Robinson, who took him and Mary to see Blake's pictures in 1810 (p.226) and sometimes recited 'The Tyger' in company (p. 286n).
[8] *Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed, D.V.Erdman and Harold Bloom, (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1982) p. 708.
[9] Letter of 1830, Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise,* p. 341.
[10] *Blake Records,* p. 536, quoting Henry Crabb Robinson's 1852 *Reminiscences.*

Lamb and Some Religious People: To Mary Wedd

By J. R. WATSON

I FIRST CAME TO KNOW MARY WEDD in the 1980s, at the 'Literature and Religion' conferences at Durham. These conferences have grown considerably in numbers and renown since that time, but in the early days they were fairly small, so that people got to know each other quite quickly. I remember sitting with Mary and Bill Ruddick, who loved conferences, talking in a way that I have since come to think of as Elian, with friendliness and humour, and complete benignity. They came to tea at my house once, and we had cucumber sandwiches. The talk turned to the art of letter-writing, and I remember Jon Stallworthy, who was also present, saying that Keats was the finest writer of letters in English. Mary and Bill and I exchanged a look: 'Lamb', we said quietly, in a kind of joyous unanimity.

Mary's presence at those conferences was not just for the pleasure of literary talk. She had a great curiosity about the relationship between literature and religion. As a life-long teacher of English literature and as the daughter of a clergyman, it was natural that this should be so. The conferences gave expression to a connection which she felt very deeply, between two of the great concerns and delights of her life; and that connection was not just an intellectual one. It was a part of her whole personality. It has always been evident, as one listens to Mary talking, or, more formally, giving a paper, that literature is more than a topic of study. It is something to be loved and respected and admired, as well as criticised. And she is no narrow specialist. How many of today's university teachers, who work to their 'special period', would have finished an essay on Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence' with a quotation from the Old English 'The Battle of Maldon'?[1] When Mary gives lectures, her voice takes on a quality that anyone who listens for it can pick up, a tone and timbre that come from a love of the subject. That does not mean to say that it becomes sentimental or over-fond: there is still the necessary rigour. But that rigour comes from respect, which is a natural and mature consequence of love.

This respectful and loving discussion is found in Lamb's work also. What a *conférencier* he would have been! Anecdotes, opinions, what Byron called 'the quick succession of fun and gravity', sympathy, would have all been present in his discourse. So would his delight in conversation, and his sense of mischief. 'Your long and much talkers' would have hated him, as they did 'the late Elia', who 'would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it.'[2] Not quite irrelevant, indeed: as Mary showed in a brilliantly perceptive article in *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* in 1999, the danger of being taken lightly, at his own ironic valuation, led to some crass misjudgements in the twentieth century. Her defence of Lamb is, of course, absolutely right: the high seriousness is there for those who would find it.[3]

The subject of this essay could be, in its ways, highly serious. But I do not intend to make it so. I shall not discuss Lamb and his religious belief (which is private and hard to fathom anyway)

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[1] *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n. s. 115, July 2001, p. 104.
[2] 'A Character of the Late Elia', *London Magazine*, 1823.
[3] Mary Wedd, '*The Essays of Elia* Revisited', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n. s. 108, October 1999, pp.161-9.

under the umbrella of literature and religion. That would be too much for the occasion, and altogether inappropriate. To adapt the passage from Horace quoted in 'Grace before Meat'; and cited by Richard W. Clancey in the same 1999 number of the *CLB*, 'non tunc illis [est] locus', this is not the place for such things. Instead, we might think of some of Lamb's portraits of religious people, as types of religious belief and practice. Writing character sketches was one of Lamb's great strengths, as can be seen from the 'Character of an Undertaker', and 'On the Melancholy of Tailors' in *The Reflector* of 1810-11, or the picture of the man on the coach who asks questions of everyone and dispenses information liberally and who turns out to be a schoolmaster ('The Old and the New Schoolmaster'). His portraits of religious persons are not set pieces of this kind, but their fleeting observations are hugely enjoyable and highly significant.

Lamb lived in the comet's tail of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. It is this that gives additional point to the visit of Miss Wesley and her friend Miss Benger (Lamb calls her Miss Benjey) to the Lambs in April 1800, which Seamus Perry drew attention to at the birthday lunch three years ago. They seem to have been in quest of Coleridge, two of 'a tribe of authoresses that come after you here daily'. Sarah Wesley (1760-1828) was the daughter of Charles and the niece of John (whom Lamb thought 'an elevated character'[4]); Elizabeth Ogilvy Benger (1778-1827) was later to be the author of a poem on the slave trade. They pressed Charles and Mary to go to listen to a series of opinionated and dictatorial observations, which Lamb described to Coleridge with rueful humour. The Lambs were made to promise to go again, Charles telling Coleridge that 'I have been preparing for the occasion. I crowd cotton in my ears'.[5]

Although there is no sign of proselytising in these encounters, the two ladies were friends of Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Hannah More, and the seriousness of the conversation suggests that they were earnest as well as intellectual (Byron would have understood Lamb's antipathy). They share some of the qualities that one can detect in the two Methodist ministers in 'Grace before Meat', when one asks the other, before drinking tea, 'whether he chose to *say anything*'. The resulting confusion is soon cleared up, but it leaves an effect that is slightly comic and distinctly off-putting. Almost as comic, though less rebarbative, was the Unitarian minister reading Lardner in the street (in 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading'). Lamb, with delightful modesty and admirable common sense, decided that this was 'a strain of abstraction beyond my reach', but pretended to admire 'how he sidled along, keeping clear of secular contacts'. Lamb is surely having another joke here: Nathaniel Lardner (1684-1768), Independent turned Presbyterian, with Arian leanings, wrote *The Credibility of the Gospel History* in twelve volumes, published between 1727 and 1755. That would have kept the good minister sidling along for a very long time. And the description of them as 'a strain of abstraction beyond my reach' would have Lamb humorously declining to be bored by shelves of theology.

In his declining years Lardner was befriended by the young Joseph Priestley, who was influenced by Lardner in his transition from Independent to Unitarian. Lamb found Priestley an entertaining controversialist, the opposite of Lardner. Priestley had, in Lamb's view, confuted no less than three 'Scotch Drs', Thomas Reid, James Oswald and James Beattie; 'how the rogue strings 'em up, three together!' reported Lamb with glee.[6] He wrote to Coleridge about

[4] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr., (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975), I. 88-9.
[5] Ibid., 199-200.
[6] Ibid., I. 84

'Priestley, whom I sin in almost adoring', quoting a passage from Priestley about keeping good religious company.[7] What that company would have been for Lamb, who complained to Coleridge in the same letter about being solitary in his religion, is indicated by his aversion to earnest theologians and his love of his friends. He would have heaven populated by his friends; and on earth there was nothing that he valued so much as friendship. It was therefore no accident that he admired the Society of Friends. His essay on 'A Quakers' Meeting' begins by suggesting that it was capable of satisfying his needs, human and spiritual:

> Reader, would'st thou know what true peace and quiet mean; would'st thou find a refuge from the noises and clamours of the multitude; would'st thou enjoy at once solitude and society; would'st thou possess the depth of thy spirit in stillness, without being shut out from the consolatory faces of they species; would'st thou be alone, and yet accompanied; solitary, yet not desolate; singular, yet not without some to keep thee in countenance; a unit in aggregate; a simple in composite: – come with me into a Quaker's Meeting.

This union of individual spirituality with the comfort of fellowship was deeply attractive to Lamb. As so often, he works by character sketches: the Quakers are not ministers or theologians, but 'faces … upon which the dove sate visibly brooding'. The speakers include older women: 'now and then a trembling female, generally *ancient*, voice is heard'; or people marvellously possessed with the spirit, like the man of giant stature who appeared to become weak as he delivered his remorseful message – that 'he had been a WIT in his youth'.

Lamb praises the Quakers for their honesty: 'Hypocrites they certainly are not, in their preaching'. He reserves the same praise for someone at the opposite end of the religious spectrum, Guy Fawkes (spelt 'Faux'), a fanatic; but he was no hypocrite':

> The contempt of death is the beginning of virtue. The hero of the Gunpowder Plot was, if you will, a fool, a madman, an assassin; call him what names you please: still he was neither knave nor coward… He did not call it a murder, but a sacrifice, which he was about to achieve: he was armed with the Holy Spirit and with fire; he was the Church's chosen servant, and her blessed martyr.

Between Guy Fawkes and the peaceable Quakers there was a great gulf fixed, but they shared a bravery and a rejection of any conduct that could be thought hypocritical. Lamb, like Samuel Johnson, had no time for cant. His reaction to the Unitarian who protested against the Church of England after being married in it and according to its Trinitarian principles was to deplore what he saw as double-dealing (in 'Unitarian Protests'). His admiration was reserved for honesty. He praised Thomas Holcroft (in 'The Tombs in the Abbey') as 'one of the most candid, most upright, and single-meaning men I ever knew':

> I believe he never said one thing, and meant another, in his life; and, as near as I can guess, he never acted otherwise than with the most scrupulous attention to conscience.

[7] Ibid., I. 88

In addition to honesty, Lamb had a deep admiration for unassuming goodness: for Captain Jackson, eking out the scanty food and giving the cheese rind to himself; for those who have to put up with poor relations; for those who were too simple to see that they could be exploited and put upon, such as George Dyer. In them Lamb saw characters whom he could admire. He had an instinctive affinity for them, perhaps because of his own pattern of a life of caring for Mary, and the natural sympathy which that evoked for the unselfish and the ingenuous. In the same way, he recoiled from conceit and pride of any kind, and spiritual pride especially: perhaps because he had s strong sense of his own imperfections.

At the same time, he could enjoy the attractive element of religion. In 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital' he remembered 'our hymns and anthems', much as children have done since his day until the end of hymn-singing in the school assembly. He recalled Christmas and 'the carol sung by night at that time of the year':

> Which, when a young boy, I have so often lain awake to hear from seven (the hour of going to bed) till ten, when it was sung by the older boys and monitors, and have listened to it, in their rude chanting, till I have been transported in fancy to the fields of Bethlehem, and the song which was sung at that season by angels' voices to the shepherds.

Such memories were part of the human appeal of Christianity, the way in which it was illuminated not by the church or by theologians, but by stories that were beautiful and people who were good. As Lamb himself put it, 'such religion as I have, has always acted upon me more by way of sentiment than argumentative process'.[8]

His response to religious matters was governed not by dogmatics or theology but by his human feeling and by his response to human problems. He was – not surprisingly – upset when in 1823 Southey described the *Essays of Elia* as 'a book which wants only a sounder religious feeling, to be as delightful as it is original'. Lamb's reply (the **'**Letter to Southey' in the *London Magazine*, October 1823, later 'The Tombs in the Abbey') conducts its argument almost entirely on *ad hominem* grounds, reminding Southey of his own attacks on some religions, and citing the goodness of Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt ('one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing'), as well as associates such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Allan Cunningham, Henry Cary, George Dyer, Crabb Robinson and others. The episode in which Lamb found himself turned out of Westminster Abbey after the service was another of those moments that was significant in Lamb's religious history: it demonstrated the vulnerability of a human being when faced with officialdom, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes. Small wonder, when faced with this, that Lamb should say proudly, 'I am a Dissenter'.

The argument is conducted on the basis of anecdote and personality. The sequel is even more revealing. Southey wrote to Lamb a sensible letter, disclaiming any intention of causing offence. Lamb's forgiveness was instant and whole-hearted, signing himself 'Your penitent C. Lamb'.[9] He would have known the noble imperative of the conclusion of Samuel Johnson's Christmas Eve *Rambler* of 1751, number 185:

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[8] 'The Tombs in the Abbey', (the 'Letter to Southey', 1823).

[9] E.V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1907), pp. 512-13.

> Of him that hopes to be forgiven, it is indispensably required that he forgive. It is therefore superfluous to urge any other motive. On this great duty eternity is suspended, and to him that refuses to practise it, the throne of mercy is inaccessible, and the Saviour of the world has been born in vain.[10]

Johnson, like Lamb, begins with the human, and develops it into a religious principle. And although both writers read religious works, and understood something about doctrine and about what today would be called systematic theology, their first appeal was to the experience of everyday life. In the case of Lamb, it led him to the praise of Hogarth, with his 'drama of real life' and his 'comic performances' which 'we do not merely laugh at' but 'are led into long trains of reflection by them'. Lamb's essays have the same effect upon us. They contain observations of human character that are illuminating, not least on the topic of religious behaviour. But just as in Hogarth, as Lamb observed, there was 'that sprinkling of the better nature, which, like holy water, chases away and disperses the contagion of the bad', so in his own work there is something of that gift which is to be prized above all others, without which we are all as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Lamb, as Mary Wedd has always known and consistently observed, was a great writer and a noble moralist. He was both of these things because he knew, in his dealings with the people whom he met, and his writing about them, that there were such virtues as faith and hope, but that the greatest of them all is charity.

University of Durham

[10] *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1787), VII. 264.

Lamb's Last Letter Comes Home

By D. E. WICKHAM

I AM PLEASED AND PROUD TO RECORD that Lucas 1017, 'I am very uneasy about a Book which I either have lost or left at your house … while the tripe was frying', entered the Wickham Collection towards the end of May 2006.

The letter was last generally heard of as Lot 597 in the A. Edward Newton sale at Parke-Bernat, New York, in 1941. It is said to have been with 'the auctioneer's family' ever since, until sold in a New England auction to a New England bookseller, probably during 2005. One of my English dealers (not a phrase to be used out of context!) saw it at a book fair there and bought it 'on spec' for me, confident that I would want it, either at once or very soon afterwards.

The letter fits entirely with the 1941 catalogue description except that a photograph of a portrait of the author enclosed with the binding is in fact clearly marked as of George Dyer, apparently from the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England.

Lucas's transcription of the wording seems to be correct, but he follows his own rules about commas, inverted commas, capital letters, and underlining. The only useful additions from the original are Mrs. Dyer's address, Cliffords Inn, Fleet Street, and the postmark Edmonton M[ornin]g, De[cember] 22, 1834. Returning from putting this letter into the post, one understands, Charles Lamb tripped and fell in the street (Church Street?) and grazed his face. Erysipelas set in and he died on 27 December 1834. The letter's position as Lamb's last seems confirmed by the postmark.

I am astounded that this letter has apparently remained in the U. S. A. for a further six decades or more since Newton without entering another of the great literary or library collections. Even if any Elian feels a twinge of jealously at my acquisition (Cries of 'No! No!') I hope that everyone take pleasure in the fact that Lamb's last letter has 'come home'.

Belvedere, Kent

‘The Sunless Land’: *Intimations of Immortality* from Recollections of Virgil and Ossian

By RICHARD GRAVIL

> Thrice with my arms I strove her neck to clasp,
> Thrice had my hands succeeded in the grasp,
> From which the Image slipped away, as light
> As the swift winds, or sleep when taking flight.
> —Wordsworth’s *Aeneid* (1823)

> Well sang the Bard who called the grave, in strains
> Thoughtful and sad, the ‘narrow house’.
> —Wordsworth, *Yarrow Revisited* XII (1831)[1]

1. ‘We shall see them face to face’

AN EPITAPHIC ART OFTEN IMPLIES that ‘we shall see them face to face’. But Wordsworth’s confident expressions of such a faith are almost wholly classical. For the poet who once described earth as the ‘the place where, in the end, | We find our happiness or not at all’, what follows mortal life is uncertain. Numerous of his critics intuited, even in *The Excursion*, a lack of the confidence one should expect of a Christian writer, and the bolder of them denied that he was a Christian at all. Henry Crabb Robinson cites Richard Cargill to the effect that if Christianity means ‘faith in redemption by Christ’ *The Excursion* is ‘no better than atheism’.[2] Nothing in his poetry, at any date, despite Coleridge’s plans for *The Recluse*, suggests ‘a scheme of redemption’ or a system of qualification for the afterlife. After *Intimations*, which (I shall argue later) avoids giving any particular characteristics to its ostensible subject, immortality, the death of John seems to have led him slowly towards the quasi-Christian stance of the *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810). Eventually, Wordsworth’s loss of Thomas and Catherine seems to have brought him into communion with the church, and to such reconciliation with its creed as he ever attained, but the outcome is never radiant, and is sometimes surprisingly shadowed by a mordant humour such as that permitted to his *alter ego* (the Solitary) in *The Excursion*.

For some decades, in his early poetry, Wordsworth’s poetic representations of death fluctuated between a Roman sense of Elysian fields, an Enlightenment sense of returning to the elements of nature, and—which is much the same thing—an Ossianic sense of death as joining the numerous ‘souls of lonely places’.[3] From *The Vale of Esthwaite*, through *An Evening Walk* to *A slumber did my spirit seal*, and *Lucy Gray* and the Christmas ‘spot of time’, one meets with passages in Wordsworth that recall Werther’s considerably more excessive allegiance to Ossian:

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[1] Poem 12 of *Yarrow Revisited* is a wry piece on ‘The Earl of Breadalbane’s Ruined Mansion’, 1831. Burns and Ossian have been identified as progenitors of this phrase, but Ossian has priority. The phrase occurs in the first book of *Fingal*; Fingal, Malvina and ‘the heroic age’ are invoked in poem 15 of the sequence.

[2] *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers* (ed. Edith Morley, 1938), 1: 65.

[3] The appeal of Ossian, according to Ted Underwood’s impressive ‘Romantic Historicism and the Afterlife’, *PMLA* 117.2 (2002) 237–51, was that its vision of death concurred with Enlightenment notions of elemental survival.

> What a world that exalted soul leads me into! To wander across the heath in the pale moonlight, with the gale howling and the spirits of his forefathers in the vaporous mists! To head amidst the roar of a forest torrent the faint moans of the spirits in their mountainside caves.[4]

This Ossianic version of the afterlife lingered in Wordsworth's poetry long after he relinquished any formal allegiance to Enlightenment thought—in which death was thought of as returning at a molecular level to the mineral and vegetable world. 'The only difference I know of between life and death' Diderot wrote to Sophie Volland, 'is that at present you live *en masse*, and that twenty years hence you will live minutely, dissolved and dispersed in molecules'. Since molecules are capable of sensibility, this implies little diminution in her capacity to enjoy, and none at all in her capacity to be. 'What lives has always lived and will always live'.[5] It is not entirely clear, even in Wordsworth's most extended considerations of the afterlife in the *Fenwick Notes* and the 'Essays upon Epitaphs', that he dissents from this view.

If, eventually, Virgil and Ovid, with their vividly realized Elysian presences, rather than 'Ossian' with his vaporous ones, reigned in Wordsworth's poetics of death, they did so in part because of his own experience of the death of John Wordsworth in 1805 and of his children Thomas and Catherine in 1812. Even after the death of John, Wordsworth was able to write in the first of his 'Essays upon Epitaphs', in 1809, that 'a grave is a tranquillizing object: resignation springs up from it as naturally as the wild flowers', but 1812 changed all that. Bereavement helped to bring Wordsworth into communion with the church, and partly reconciled him to its creed, but resignation proved not at all natural. Nothing in the numbed poems he wrote about his double loss expresses hope and even in 1825, the fear 'That friends, by death disjoined, may meet no more' was very real to him.[6]

One Victorian bench-mark of what it means to 'look through death' is Robert Browning's *Prospice*. This rapturous vision of the moment of reunion with Elizabeth imagines the knight of faith approaching death. Browning's knightly speaker knows that if he faces the 'arch-fear' manfully, with unbandaged eyes,

> the fiend-voices that rave,
> Shall dwindle, shall blend,
> Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
> Then a light, then thy breast,
> O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again….

In Wordsworth, the poems inspired by personal loss achieve no such radiance. His first public treatment of the loss of Catherine is ventriloquized in the most harrowing lines of *The Excursion*, in an extended passage (3: 639–705) which accounts for the fact that of all four characters in that poem—Pastor, Pedlar, Poet and Solitary—the one Wordsworth identified with most passionately is the last. For the Solitary, like Wordsworth (and unlike the somewhat featureless 'Poet' in the poem) has lost a daughter. 'Caught in the gripe of death' she was

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[4] J. W. von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, tr. Michael Hulse (Penguin Classics, 1989), 95.
[5] Denis Diderot, Letter to Sophie Volland, 15 October 1759 (my translation).
[6] From 'O dearer far than light and life are dear', addressed to Mary Wordsworth in 1824.

> Conveyed
> From us to inaccessible worlds, to regions
> Where height, or depth, admits not the approach
> Of living man, though longing to pursue. (3: 641-4)

Despite the ambivalence over 'height, or depth' the classical archetypes for this longing, in the tales of Virgil and Ovid that possessed Wordsworth in schooldays, are apparent enough. The Elysian exercises of Hawkshead, inspired by the loss of both parents, now return to haunt him as a father.

The *Fenwick Notes* speak simply, and 'for private notice', of how the poem *Maternal Grief*, composed in 1811–13 but not published until 1842, was 'in part an overflow from the Solitary's description of his own and his wife's feelings upon the decease of their children'. Wordsworth points out with touching naiveté—speaking as if the Solitary were a real neighbour with whom they sympathized—that Wordsworth and Mary, too, 'lost two of our children within half a year of each other'. *Maternal Grief* expresses Mary's state of feelings between the death of Catherine and that of Thomas, feelings that informed also the treatment of resignation in *The White Doe*. 'Shall I admit', the Mother asks, 'that nothing can restore / What one short sigh so easily removed?' All that remains of Catherine is:

> A shadow, never, never to be displaced
> By the returning Substance, seen or touched,
> Seen by my eyes or clasped in my embrace.
> (*PW* 2: 51 and *app. crit.*)

'Clasped'. In Browning's *Prospice* and in Wordsworth's *Maternal Grief* and *Laodamia* the word expresses what alone will suffice.

In 1812 Wordsworth's six-line epitaph for Thomas is similarly terminal. It begs, in the not altogether persuasive vein of the *Ode to Duty* (which speaks of submitting to 'a new control'), that he and Mary may be taught 'calmly to resign / What we possessed, and now is *wholly* thine'. And in 1814 he wrote a wrenchingly beautiful sonnet to Catherine, *Surprized by joy*. Having achieved sufficient forgetfulness of her death to experience a moment of unaccustomed joy, the poet turns to share that joy with his daughter—'with whom but thee / Deep buried in the silent tomb!' and grieves anew:

> Through what power,
> Even | for the least | division | of an hour,
> —the line seems to articulate in its bald diction a pained deliberateness –
> Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
> To my most grievous loss!

Renouncing such 'beguilement', the sonnet closes with the grim recollection that nothing, 'neither present time nor years unborn' will 'to my sight that heavenly face restore'.[7] Heaven, it

[7] Very strangely, this beautiful poem is hidden away in 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' rather than given pride of place among the 'Elegiac Pieces'.

seems, is not where Catherine is, but what she was.

In *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1821–22) Wordsworth writes of Catherine once more. This time he writes of seeing her in a dream ('exactly as here represented') and he records how

> The bright corporeal presence – form and face –
> Remaining still distinct grew thin and rare,
> Like sunny mist; – at length the golden hair,
> Shape, limbs, and heavenly features, keeping pace
> Each with the other in a lingering race
> Of dissolution, melted into air.

The vision is contemplated with the sceptical intelligence appropriate to illusion. Although she was 'no spirit' but 'one I loved exceedingly' the apparition 'spake [only] Fear to my soul' and left him in sadness, rather than joy, as that 'dissolution' already implies. More surprisingly, perhaps, is the trace in the sonnet of Wordsworth's still Ossianic sense of death. Catherine's is figured as a *corporeal* presence, yet one that is as capable of dissolution as the parting Cathmor at the close of *Temora*—'Gradual vanish his limbs of smoak, and mix with the mountain-wind'.[8] Many years before, in the Christmas spot of time in the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth had borrowed from *Fingal* and *Temora* to record a (retrospectively) premonitory encounter with the spirit of his dying father. As the boy Wordsworth looks forward impatiently to the arrival of the horses to take him home for Christmas, waiting at the intersection of two roads, he is surrounded by intermittent mists through which he peers, in hope of seeing the horses that will take him home. In Ossianic retrospect, however, the scene recomposes itself in terms of guilt and admonition. Knowing that he had, however unwittingly, wished away some of his dying father's last mortal moments, he imagines those mists advance towards him in 'indísputable shapes'—the shapes, one supposes, of disappointed fathers—'along the line of each of those two roads' (1805 *Prelude*, 11: 355–81).

2. Intimations of Elysium

If anything could rouse Wordsworth after the deaths of Thomas and Catherine, it was intimations of Elysium from recollections of Virgil and Ovid. The closest he ever gets to affirming the notion of recognizable personal survival is in his numerous anxiety-laden versions of the failure of Virgilian and Ovidian heroes and heroines to 'clasp' their deceased spouses, versions which begin in childhood and climax in the remarkable 'Laodamia'. The seriousness of Wordsworth's endeavour in this poem of 1814, inspired by the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, is conveyed by his comment that he desired to treat the subject in 'a loftier tone than … has been given to it by any of the Ancients' and that he bestowed upon it considerable pains.[9]

In it Wordsworth returns to the story told by Ovid and by Virgil of how by Jove's consent, Laodamía[10] is granted three hours with 'her slaughtered Lord'. As her lord appears, accompanied by Hermes, the early *Vale of Esthwaite* motifs derived from Orpheus and Aeneas achieve their

[8] *Poems of Ossian*, ed. Howard Gaskill, with an introduction by Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 291.
[9] The *Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 16.
[10] In Wordsworth's Englished Latin, husband and wife are both pronounced as a trochee followed by an amphibrach,or Léo-damáya and Próte-siléus.

final expression in Wordsworth's poetry:

> Forth sprang the impassioned Queen her Lord to clasp;
> Again that consummation she essayed;
> But unsubstantial Form eludes her grasp
> As often as that eager grasp was made.
> The phantom parts—but parts to re-unite,
> And reassume his place before her sight

The grieving Wordsworth sides, quite transparently, with the resistance mounted by Laodamía to the pious instructions of her immaterial husband that she reconcile herself to his dissolution.[11] Protesiláus's Olympian advice to his widow is to 'control rebellious passion' because 'the Gods approve | The depth and not the tumult of the soul' (rather as the Wanderer counsels the Poet in *The Ruined Cottage*). When Laodamía pleads that if Hercules retrieved Alcestis from death, and Medea's spells restored Aeson, surely the gods might also indulge their love, the plea is met with the stern injunction 'Peace'. For a moment she is pacified, but only because

> In his deportment, shape, and mien, appeared
> Elysian beauty, melancholy grace,
> Brought from a pensive though a happy place.

He comes, he says, from a place without fears or strife, where 'The past [is] unsighed for and the future sure'. He speaks

> Of all that is most beauteous, imaged there
> In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,
> An ampler ether, a diviner air,
> And fields invested with purpureal gleams;
> Climes which the sun, who sheds the brightest day
> Earth knows, is all unworthy to survey.

But as Protesiláus departs, the lesson of resignation unlearned, Laodamia shrieks and dies. For thus exhibiting the weakness also shown by Orpheus and Persephone in their respective trials, she is sentenced by 'the just Gods whom no weak pity moved' to dwell for an appointed time apart from the 'happy Ghosts that gather flowers | Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers' (*PW* 4: 267–72).

'No poet', says Douglas Bush, 'has absorbed with finer understanding, or rendered with more wistful beauty, the spirit of Virgil's picture of Elysium'.[12] Equally, it seems to me, only the Virgilian inspiration allows him to write this positively of 'heaven'. Elsewhere, Wordsworth's

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[11] For Wordsworth's identification with Laodamia, see the extended reading of this poem in Judith W. Page, *Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 'Why does Wordsworth feel so strongly for this character? Laodamia's tragic resistance to the consolations of religion and the afterlife attracts Wordsworth more than the un-Wordsworthian heroism of Protesiláus because he himself has known the power of the passions associated with his experiences in France and those of his mourning for his brother and children. Moreover, where Protesiláus is "abstract" his wife speaks "the genuine language of passion"', i.e. in figures (Page 83).

[12] Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1963), 63.

sense of an afterlife seems to evolve from a somewhat heterodox Judaeo-Christian position in childhood, through adolescent Ossianism, towards a quasi-pantheist content with sharing in the life of things, of which one of his greatest expressions is *A slumber did my spirit seal*. When Wordsworth is at his most impressive on the subject, as in the Lucy and Matthew suites of 1798–99, he betrays little assurance of *individual* survival.[13]

The obsession with contacting 'the other side' began early, in the Hawkshead period, and its major expression is Wordsworth's implied desire (in *The Vale of Esthwaite*) to visit the Cumbrian underworld to speak with his father—like some latter day Aeneas—in 'dark Helvellyn's inmost womb'.[14] Along with numerous attempts at epitaphs, two shorter poems are also of some interest. One is the sentimental imitation of Catullus, entitled 'The death of a Starling' of which the second stanza—published by Coleridge in the *Morning Post* in 1798—reads:

> Yet art thou happier far than she
> Who felt a mother's love for thee.
> For while her days are days of weeping
> Thou, in peace, in silence sleeping
> *In some still world, unknown, remote*
> The mighty Parent's care hast found,
> Without whose tender guardian thought
> No sparrow falleth to the ground.

'Still', 'unknown, remote'; the tones already anticipate the 'sunless land' of *Extempore Effusion* and the 'eternal silence' of *Intimations*.

The specific question of Elysian illumination—as in the 'purpureal gleams' of *Laodamia*—is raised first in the highly accomplished Hawkshead poem, 'Sonnet written by Mr— Immediately after the death of his wife' (1787). Here death is associated with the image in which Wordsworth will later summarise the betrayal of the French revolution, the death of the sun, and the sonnet betrays an uncertain balancing of earthly sunlight, religion's moonlight and a (sunless) 'bright morn':

> The sun is dead—ye heard the curfew toll,
> Come, Nature let us mourn our kindred doom;
> My sun like thine is dead—and o'er my soul
> Despair's dark midnight spreads her raven gloom,
> Yes, she is gone—he called her to illume
> The realms where Heaven's immortal rivers roll.

From this Eurydicean moment, the widower recoils in the sestet to call upon 'Religion's moonlight ray | To cheer me through my long and lonely night | Till Heaven's bright morn leads on the Eternal day'. Scholarship, often most assiduous in answering irrelevant questions, informs

[13] The present essay pursues themes that are the subject of my chapters on the Lucy poems, and on the Discharged Soldier, Michael and the Leech-Gatherer as Elysian presences, in *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787–1842* (Palgrave, 2003).

[14] For recent and complementary explorations of this youthful territory see the first three chapters of *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation* and the first two of Duncan Wu's *Wordsworth: an Inner Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

us that the parish registers have not yielded the name of the widower. One would be more interested to discover where it is supposed that 'Heaven's immortal rivers roll', why its realms should need to be 'illumed', and what sort of perplexity and obscurity concerning our notions of death leads the schoolboy to the contradiction between the dark heaven of line 6, which needs the widower's wife to 'illume' it, and the 'bright morn' promised in the conventional closing line.

Just as much perplexity and obscurity, perhaps, led to the astonishing stanza of *Intimations* (prior to Coleridge's public protest in *Biographia*) in which the six-year-old 'mighty prophet! Seer blest!' who knows the truth we toil 'all of our lives to find' also knows that the grave 'is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight | Of day or the warm light, | A place of thought where we in waiting lie' (*PW* 4: 282). William and Dorothy, as we all know, found this heterodox thought congenial enough. In April 1802 Dorothy records lying in a trench in 'John's grove' while Wordsworth speculated on lying thus in the grave listening to 'the *peaceful* sounds of the earth' knowing 'that our dear friends were near'. The heroine of *We are Seven* in 1798, the speaker of *To a Sexton* in 1800, the man of 1802, and the poet of *Intimations* in 1804 are all agreed: our graves are green, our hearing unimpaired, and we wait in peace. What we wait for, presumably, is expressed in a well-known song to do with articulation of bones. After which, in *Intimations*, comes 'the eternal Silence'. But we might equally be awaiting molecular or misty re-emergence into the life of the fells.

Heaven, as far as Wordsworth can envisage the state, is 'still', 'unknown, remote', 'sunless' and 'silent'. On the whole, Elysium is distinctly more inviting. Its climes, we are told, are sunless because their light transcends the sun's. So, logically, must heaven's be, if God is light. But poetry does not function through mathematical equations and it is counter-intuitive to read 'sunless' as meaning 'sun-surpassing'. Neither 'sunless' in the *Extempore Effusion*—'How soon has brother followed brother | into the sunless land'—nor the 'the eternal silence' of *Intimations* makes Heaven much more inviting than the 'still world, unknown, remote' to which starlings are consigned in that early imitation of Catullus. Nor is the afterlife made a lot more inviting, or more personal, in any of the cluster of poems that precedes the *Intimations Ode* in Wordsworth's arrangement of his collected works—the *Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces*.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth makes two possibly contrary affirmations. One is that 'our home | Is with infinitude' (*1805* 6: 539). The other is that this 'very world' is the place 'where, in the end, | We find our happiness or not at all'. There is of course no reason to assume that the 'invisible world', the world referred to in the Simplon Pass lines as revealed 'when the light of sense | Goes out', means 'the beyond'. It makes more sense if the entire passage is read as a declaration that in acts of imagination an imagined world, grounded in the mind, usurps on the material world that is imaged by our senses. But one can hesitate over the meaning of 'home' and 'infinitude' in the continuation:

> Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
> Is with infinitude, and only there—
> With hope it is, hope that can never die,
> Effort and expectation and desire,
> And something ever more about to be.

If one chooses to see this as some kind of reference to immortality, rather than to a Romantic

programme of endless becoming, one can cite, in corroboration, Wordsworth's argument for immortality in the first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs*, which were designed to support Coleridge's labours in *The Friend*, and which were—perhaps—adumbrated in *Intimations*. One of the major arguments in the first essay is based upon the veneration for death found in the pre-Christian Simonides (*PrW* 2: 52). It echoes another poem for John, *The Daisy*, which records the comfort the Wordsworths found in the discovery and respectful formal burial of John's drowned body after six weeks 'beneath the moving sea'. Much of the first essay rehearses the implied argument of *Intimations* that the sense of immortality is strong in childhood, co-eval with the birth of reason: the child grasps, intuitively, Wordsworth says, that if a running stream has a source, it must also have destination, which destination can only be 'a receptacle without bounds or dimensions;—nothing less than infinity' (*PrW* 2: 51). Here, it would seem, the 'receptacle' is God, our point of origin, and our eternal home, but whether God is more than a Spinozistic 'source' and 'receptacle' remains obscure.[15]

Wordsworth clearly did believe in *some kind* of immortality for *some part of us*. Yet the *Fenwick Note* on *Intimations*, dictated in 1843, actually avoids comment on Wordsworth's mature beliefs. Instead he affirms that when he was '*impelled* to write this poem on "the Immortality of the Soul"' he decided to make what use he could of the doctrine of pre-existence. There is something shifty about claiming that he by no means 'meant to inculcate such a belief' while pointing out, nevertheless, that 'in revelation there is nothing to contradict it'. He confides to Miss Fenwick that he found it difficult *in childhood* 'to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being' because of 'the indomitableness of the spirit within me' and that, brooding on the stories of Enoch and Elijah, he used *almost* to persuade himself 'that whatever might become of others I s^{d} be translated in something of the same way to heaven'.[16] Both manoeuvres—the pre-existence hare and the ascension rabbit—successfully deflect attention from deeper questions, such as whether he still believes what he believed then, or whether he believes now in the resurrection of the body, and if so, in what sense. It is the same in each of Wordsworth's utterances on the matter: the belief takes the form of an inability to apply the notion of death to one's own being, and it is strongest in childhood. In Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs* Wordsworth is quoted as saying that 'I could not believe that *I* should lie down quietly in the grave' and speaks of his infantine sense of 'absolute spirituality, my "all-soulness", if I may so speak'.[17] In the *Essays on Epitaphs* (1810) he says that 'If we look back upon the days of childhood, we shall find the time is not in remembrance when, with respect to our own Being, the mind was without this assurance'. A letter to Mrs Clarkson in 1815 refers to 'an *indisposition* [in youth] to bend to the law of death, as applying to our particular case'. None of these passages contains an overt commendation of this position as a viable one for maturity. One might, on this evidence, and in the light of the body of great poetry devoted to coming to terms with mortality, conclude that Wordsworth focuses on his childhood beliefs so as to avoid offending Miss Fenwick with his maturer scepticism, having put away childish things.

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[15] I am reminded of Tom McFarland's use of that term in his discussion of Spinoza in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*.

[16] *The Fenwick Notes*, 61. Coleridge makes a comparable point more philosophically in a notebook entry of c. 1826 [Notebook 39 f. 36^{v}]: 'What is [the assurance of immortality] but the impossibility of believing the contrary? … The moment that the Soul affirms, I am, it asserts, I cannot cease to be'. Cited in J. Robert Barth, SJ, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 187.

[17] Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs* (London: Edward Moxon, 1851), 2: 476.

But one would be wrong so to conclude. The first *Essay on Epitaphs* describes as 'forlorn, and cut off from communication with the best part of his nature' a man who should ascribe a child's faith in immortality to either 'blank ignorance' or 'unreflecting acquiescence' in what s/he has been taught. Moreover, the same essay makes the (to me) astonishing remark that 'it is to me inconceivable, that the sympathies of love towards each other, which grow with our growth, could ever attain any new strength, or even preserve the old, after we had received from the outward senses the impression of death' if that impression were not counteracted by what he earlier referred to as 'an intimation or assurance within us, that *some part of our nature* is *imperishable*'.[18] Again, if that were not enough, 'with me the conviction is absolute, that, if the impression and sense of death were not thus counterbalanced, such a hollowness would pervade the whole system of things, such a want of correspondence and consistency … that there could be no repose, no joy' (52). It may seem, in a secular age, astonishing that someone as pantheistically inclined as Wordsworth thought that a belief in personal survival was either viable, or necessary to the growth of love or to the moral life—so astonishing, in fact, that one forgets to ask the obvious questions: what is meant by '*some part of our nature*' (other than what Diderot meant) and by '*imperishable*' (likewise). Just what Wordsworth did believe on these two points is impossible to say.[19]

3. Elegies and Epitaphs

As Wordsworth conceded at the start of his second *Essay upon Epitaphs*, in a churchyard brimful of 'faithful Wives, tender Husbands, dutiful Children, and good Men of all classes' one may wonder 'Where are all the *bad* People buried?' It is the duty of epitaphs, he goes on, to create a 'picture … of lasting ease | Elysian quiet, without toil or strife' in which all one is conscious of is 'silent Nature's breathing life'. I am, of course, paraphrasing the argument of the *Essay* in phrases from 'Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle', written in 1805 after the death of John. The 'Essay' does not cite this poem overtly, yet the poem informs the *Essay*. Contemplating Peele Castle for four 'summer weeks', the poem begins, the form of the Castle was every day 'sleeping on a glassy sea'. It 'trembled' a little but 'it never passed away'. In *fancy* even 'the mighty deep' seemed 'the gentlest of all gentle Things'. To peruse a series of epitaphs, he says in the *Essay*, creates 'sensations akin to those which have risen in my mind while I have been standing by the side of a smooth sea, on a Summer's day'; one is pleased by the absence of detraction, though conscious of the anxieties and vices and rancour which must have agitated the hearts of 'those who lie under so smooth a surface'. One may retain the consoling image of 'an unruffled sea' while one's fancy penetrates into the depths, with

[18] *PrW* 2: 50, 51, my emphases. He is, at that point paraphrasing John Weever's *Ancient Funeral Monuments within the United Monarchie of Great Britaine. Ireland and the Ilands Adjacent* (1631) which work (according to Owen and Smyser) is in turn quoting, without acknowledgement, from William Camden's *Remaines Concerning Britaine*... (1605). What Camden calls 'the presage or fore-feeling of immortality, implanted in all men naturally', Coleridge, in *Aids to Reflection*, will call a 'pre-assurance'. Coleridge seems not to have written of such 'pre-assurance'—as opposed to a more routine belief in reward and punishment after death—before the *Ode* or the *Essay*.

[19] Anthony Harding has addressed such questions, with reference to Coleridge's thinking in the mid-1820s, in 'Coleridge, the Afterlife, and the Meaning of "Hades"', *Studies in Philology*, 96.2 (Spring 99) 204–23. He quotes a notebook entry of surprising indefiniteness—'the Soul may & probably must survive the Body; but in what state and condition is another question… Shall its Life meet with Life? or shall it be Life in Death and in a World of Death?'—and comments: 'the issue for Coleridge' was not whether there was an afterlife, but 'whether anything peculiar to the individual human being, to the person we know in this life, survived' (210).

accompanying thoughts of shipwreck, and even of 'monsters of the deep' (*PrW* 2: 63–4).

Epitaphs soften and idealize, but as Wordsworth had claimed more generally in the first essay, the character of the deceased *ought* to be seen 'as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it'. The mist 'takes away' whatever is discordant, but the image nonetheless 'is truth, and of the highest order' because only then does one see what before 'had been only imperfectly or unconsciously seen'. So the truth offered by the idealising epigraph 'is truth hallowed by love—the joint offspring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living!' The test of this truth is for one 'whose eyes have been sharpened [into the faults of a good man] by personal hostility' to observe the transformation that takes place on 'tidings of his death': the 'character' idealised in such a moment by filtering of inessentials approximates to what the deceased may be assumed to be, in reality, 'as a Spirit in heaven'. This lower case reference to heaven is, even in the essays, about as close as Wordsworth comes to considering the Christian meaning of death.

Although the opening of the second *Essay upon Epitaphs* of February 1810, five years after the death of Captain John Wordsworth, draws deeply upon personal associations, Wordsworth claims to be inspired mainly by working on his nine translations of the Epitaphs of Chiabrera. These compose the first of 17 items in the *Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces*, which category of poems precedes, in all collected editions after 1815, the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of early Childhood*. His interests in the *Essays* seem to be theoretical and technical, and the second and long third essays take the form of practical criticism on a variety of epitaphs from the age of Chaucer to the corruptions of the age of Pope. The most powerful sentiments are those which gloss the uncanny recurrence on his poetry of that credal phrase 'the living and the dead' his career-long point of contact with Christian terminology. A parish church-yard, with its reminder of the 'general home' towards which we are travelling, is he says 'a visible centre of a community of *the living and the dead*' (56); its best epitaphs are 'the joint offspring of the worth of *the dead* and the affections of *the living*' (58); a grave (which is itself 'a tranquillising object', from which 'resignation … springs up … as naturally as wild flowers'), is much enhanced by an epitaph in which the deceased, through what Wordsworth calls a 'tender fiction', appears to address the living, so as to unite 'the two worlds of *the living and the dead*' (60); and the desire even of the migrant poor to be buried among their forefathers exemplifies 'the wholesome influence of that communion between *the living and the dead* which combining the place of burial and that of worship tends to promote'. Indeed it is the *dead*, throughout the essays, rather than their saviour or their priest, who have the most to say to the living, and the place of worship is manifestly secondary to the place of burial—the former being significant mainly for bringing the living to commune with their dead.

The Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a Picture of Peel Castle in a Storm (1805) have all the enigmatic quality of Wordsworth's mourning poetry at its best. They communicate the stoicism the poet has not yet arrived at in *The Ruined Cottage* (in which he is overborne by Margaret's tale), which he tries to realize in the Lucy poems, and which he dramatises, with benefit of distance, in *Michael*. As Morris Dickstein says, 'What comes out in the Lucy poems … is that Wordsworth is the man of feeling who desperately longs for the condition of not-feeling, the insensibility that might free him from the distinctly human trials which are his subject'.[20] But for

[20] Morris Dickstein, '"The Very Culture of the Feelings": Wordsworth and Solitude', in Johnston, Kenneth R. and Gene W. Ruoff, eds. *The Age of William Wordsworth: Critical Essays on the Romantic Tradition*. (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 315–43, 323.

one anonymous reference to 'Him whom I deplore'—Captain John Wordsworth—one could take *Peele Castle* to be primarily about a somewhat abstract theme, the passage from an illusioned to an unillusioned state of existence. The primary motif of the early part of the poem is borrowed from *Intimations*, the loss of 'the gleam | The light that never was on sea or land'—a light projected from the youthful mind. The year in which Wordsworth was Peele Castle's 'neighbour' was 1794, when he still saw the plated shield of human life from 'the golden side', as he puts it in *The Prelude*, and would have fought to attest the quality of metal that he saw. One is therefore at liberty to associate this gleam with utopian illusions. *Had he* painted Peele Castle at that time he *would have* 'planted it' he says

> Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;
> On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss.
>
> Thou shouldst have seemed a treasure-house divine
> Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven;
>
> …
>
> A Picture had it been of lasting ease,
> Elysian quiet, without toil or strife

Now, 'humanised' by 'a deep distress', the loss of 'him whom I deplore',

> Not for a moment could I now behold
> A smiling sea, and be what I have been;
> The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old;
> This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

Sir George's painted castle 'cased in the unfeeling armour of old time' exemplifies what one needs if one is to brave: 'The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves'. So adamant is the poet's apparent stoicism that one may admire the imaginative force of 'trampling', without thinking of the particular circumstances—the loss of the *Abergavenny* and its trampled commander—that inform it. The condition of being housed in 'a dream at distance from the Kind', is now formally and experientially renounced. Blindness will not suffice:

> But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
> And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
> Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.—
> Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

But what hope exactly?

The maritime imagery returns a year later in a more distant elegy for Charles James Fox, or *Lines composed at Grasmere … having just read … that the dissolution of Mr Fox was hourly expected* (1806). The grim pun on (parliamentary) dissolution is compensated for in the grandeur of the six stanzas commemorating the Whig leader, one of 'the great and good':

> A Power is passing from the earth
> To breathless Nature's dark abyss.

What do such passings mean?

> That man, who is from God sent forth,
> Doth yet again to God return?—
> Such ebb and flow must ever be,
> Then wherefore should we mourn?

Written two years after *Intimations* (though helpfully preceding the Ode when it appeared in *Poems in two Volumes*) the lines underline the ode's sense of the soul's journey from and back to 'God who is our home', but they also provoke a necessary question: is 'breathless Nature's dark abyss' another expression for 'God who is our home'?

There is no 'mourning' as such in the deeply personal elegy *Written after the Death of Charles Lamb* (1830), though there is the intensest possible feeling as the poem builds from its opening address 'To a good man of most dear memory' to its exclamation, 'O, he was good, if e'er a good man lived!' The words Christian and Heaven make an appearance in this 1830 poem. It also bows to God as the author of wedlock and siblinghood, 'Without whose blissful influence Paradise | Had been no Paradise; and earth were now | A waste where creatures bearing human form, | Direst of savage beasts, would roam in fear, | Joyless and comfortless'. Just as Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey* moves through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil 'for Thou are with me'—thou being Dorothy, not the Holy Ghost—so in Lamb's case, though in phrases sufficiently separated to camouflage a related sacrilege: 'Unto thee … Was given … a Sister'. Such poems underwrite Arnold's 'Ah, love, let us be true | To one another! for the world … | Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, | Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain'. The desire that this brother and sister should know no separation leads to what may be Wordsworth's most positive reference to an afterlife in the conventional sense. He comforts Mary in the last line of the poem, with the thought of that 'blest world where parting is unknown', a blessing that may—or may not— imply that such a 'world' exists.

Five years later, Wordsworth read in a newspaper of the death of 'the Ettrick Shepherd' James Hogg, a man for whom he felt no particular regard, except perhaps in his association with the 'Border-Minstrel', Sir Walter Scott. He went up to his room and emerged half an hour later, we are told, having written an eleven stanza elegy for Hogg, Scott, Coleridge, Lamb, himself, George Crabbe and Felicia Hemans. It is a poem, Bill Ruddick argued, in which there occurs 'a spontaneous, almost instantaneous filtering and selecting process' of the kind recommended in the Essays upon Epitaphs.[21] No filtering was required in the case of Lamb, but in the case of Coleridge an enormous repression of years of estrangement, and accumulated resentments, produced these astonishing lines:

> Nor has the rolling year twice measured,
> From sign to sign its stedfast course,

[21] William Ruddick, 'Subdued Passion and Controlled Emotion: Wordsworth's Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg', *CLB* n. s. 87 (July 1994) 98–110, 99.

> Since every mortal power of Coleridge
> Was frozen at its marvellous source;
>
> The rapt one of the godlike forehead,
> The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth:

'Stedfast'? As contrasted with Coleridge's 'moral delinquency' (Ruddick 104) the epithet licenses a question whether some scepticism might be present in the lines. No rancour is present, but there is perhaps a gentle questioning of transcendental idealism. Is there an implication that Coleridge's powers were indeed 'mortal', and marvellous because they were wholly human, 'godlike' though his forehead may have been? The heaven-regarding creature now 'sleeps in earth' and wears, like any Shropshire lad, the turning globe.

Coleridge, Lamb and Hemans attract Wordsworth's most clearly *felt* epithets. Honesty forbids Wordsworth to speak more than neutrally of the fact that death 'has closed the Shepherd-poet's eyes', or that Crabbe, too has 'gone before'. Crabbe does get six lines of the poem (or seven including 'ripe fruit, seasonably gathered'), as many as do Scott, Hogg, and Coleridge. But they run, with stoical gloom:

> Our haughty life is crowned with darkness,
> Like London, with its own black wreath,
> On which with thee, O Crabbe! forth-looking,
> I gazed from Hampstead's breezy heath.
>
> As if but yesterday departed,
> Thou too art gone before…

Crabbe, the naturalist, is knowingly evoked as one concerned with London's 'black wreath', rather as Ruskin watched the storm-cloud of the nineteenth century darken over Coniston, but he hardly looms as a companionable being. Wordsworth's detachment comes out in the *Fenwick Notes*, where he scorns Crabbe's need for the spur of public acclaim, and carelessness about his art—an acerbity which attracts from Dora the delightful riposte: 'Daddy dear, I don't like this—think how many reasons there were to *depress* his Muse; to say nothing of his duties of a Priest'; perhaps, she offers sweetly, public praise merely to 'put it into his heart to try again' (*PW*, 4: 460–61). Nonetheless, that crown of darkness crystallising into a 'black wreath' is one of the poem's most telling images. It recalls antithetically the 'coronal' of *Intimations*, and the brightness of the sleeping city in *Westminster Bridge*. It draws its dark, arrested energy from the imagery of flux and annihilation that follows the first quartet of deaths in the poem:

> Like clouds that rake the mountain-summits,
> Or waves that own no curbing hand,
> How fast has brother followed brother,
> From sunshine to the sunless land!

(For Wordsworthians mourning Dick Clancy, Robert Barth, Robert Woof and Jonathan Wordsworth, these lines have recently acquired a terrible force.) Such clouds might, of course,

reflect the radiance of the setting sun in *Intimations*, but they seem to me to derive in the first instance from Ossian, and hark back to the peopled mists of *An Evening Walk*.

4. The high water-mark of intellect in this age

So Emerson called the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.[22] Francis Jeffrey, of course, thought the (then untitled) ode the most 'illegible and unintelligible' of the Poems of 1807, and in terms of intelligibility he has a point. Anna Seward thought it a 'manifest imitation' of Coleridge's *Dejection*, and an excursion into 'the dark profound of mysticism'.[23] Thomas Noon Talfourd's 1820 essay 'On the Genius and Writings of Wordsworth' declared it the 'the noblest piece of lyric poetry in the world'.[24] Gerard Manley Hopkins was inspired by the ode to class Wordsworth among those 'very few men', Plato pre-eminently, whom common repute adjudges to 'have *seen something*': it may even come to be the opinion of the world at large 'that in Wordsworth when he wrote that ode human nature got another of those shocks, and the tremble from it is spreading. This opinion I do strongly share; I am, ever since I knew the ode, in that tremble'.[25]

For Coleridge, Emerson, Poe, Peabody, Melville, Whitman, Thoreau and Hopkins it was the inescapable text: its phrases echo in their writings, taking on the colouring of the echoing substance—spiritual, transcendental, macabre, sceptical. Coleridge began the canonization in a celebrated passage of *The Friend*. The climactic eleventh essay of the series 'On the Grounds of Morals and Religion' takes as its starting point the ninth stanza of the ode, with its mysterious thanks and praise for

> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day.

Coleridge's soaring commentary on those 'shadowy recollections' leads to the suggestion that 'enlightening enquiry' will lead man at last 'to comprehend gradually and progressively the relation of each to the other, of each to all, and of all to each' (*Friend* 1: 511). His essay finds in the notion of a 'world of spirit' nothing less than 'the substantiating principle of all true wisdom, the satisfactory solution of all the contradictions of human nature, of the whole riddle of the world' (524). Poe's rather clearer but more Pantheist solution to 'the riddle of the world', in *Eureka*!, is that deity spends eternity, like a cosmic Emerson, in 'perpetual variation of Concentrated Self and almost infinite Self-Diffusion', and that what are called his creatures 'are really but infinite individualisations of himself' and are, by faint indeterminate glimpses, conscious 'of an identity with God'.[26]

Thomas Noone Talfourd's reasons for celebrating the ode make a comparable point rather

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[22] *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alfred R Ferguson, et. al. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971 ff), Volume 5, English Traits, 168. His exact words are: 'The high-watermark which the intellect has reached in this age'.

[23] Robert Woof, *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage* (London and NY: Routledge, 2001) 251.

[24] Woof, 870, 852.

[25] *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott, 2nd ed. (London: OUP, 1955) 148. Letter XXXVII, pp. 145–159, 23 October 1886.

[26] For a brief assessment of Poe's use of Coleridge's use of Wordsworth see Richard Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues: Anglo-American Continuities, 1776–1862* (New York and Basingstoke: St Martin's and Macmillan, 2000), 128–32.

less philosophically. On the one hand, he argued in 1820, the ode celebrates all those innate qualities of childhood that 'it is the first object of Calvinism to extinguish'.[27] It therefore appeals to the modernising intelligence desirous of being rid of all that baggage. On the other, it expresses the desire—perhaps the single most pervasive of desires in the coming Victorian age—that around the peaks of modernity there should still cluster some clouds of spirituality. 'What a gift did we then inherit!' says Talfourd,

> To have the best and most imperishable of intellectual treasures—the mighty world of reminiscences of the days of infancy—set before us in a new and holier light; to find objects of the deepest veneration where we had only been accustomed to love; to feel in all the touching mysteries of our past being the symbols and assurances of our immortal destiny! The poet has here spanned our mortal life as with a glorious rainbow, terminating on one side in infancy, and on the other in the realms of blessedness beyond the grave, and shedding even upon the middle of that course sweet tints of unearthly colouring. (Woof 870)

Talfourd then quotes stanzas V and IX, those parts of the ode that Coleridge implies in *Biographia* could only be found intelligible by a small class of readers, those who have 'been accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their inmost nature, to venture at times into the twilight realms of consciousness, and to feel a deep interest in modes of inmost being, to which they know that the attributes of time and space are inapplicable and alien, but which cannot be conveyed, save in symbols of time and space'.[28] The latter of these two stanzas, says Talfourd, constitute 'such a piece of inspired philosophy—we do not believe exists elsewhere *in language*' (Woof 870, my emphasis).

That 'inspired philosophy' relates to the 'something that doth live' (IX) in the embers of remembered childhood—some gleam beneath the 'freight', 'weight' and 'frost' of custom that survives our descent from 'being's height' (VIII) and it occupies in the main one giant sentence. 'The thought of *our* past years in *me* doth breed | Perpetual benediction' not for the hope delight and liberty of childhood but for a less predictable assortment of experiences. These include 'those obstinate questionings | Of sense and outward things, | Fallings from us, vanishings' of which Wordsworth speaks in the *Fenwick Notes*—the sense he had in childhood that apparently external things were 'inherent in my own immaterial nature'—and occasional 'Blank misgivings of a Creature | Moving about in worlds not realized', experiencing a vertiginous attraction to the 'abyss of idealism' to which the *Fenwick Note* also refers. Other gifts for which he raises thanks are more positively toned, namely 'those first affections, | Those shadowy recollections, | Which, be they what they may, | Are yet the fountain light of all our day, | Are yet a master light of all our seeing; | Uphold us, cherish and have power to make | Our noisy years seem moments in the being | Of the eternal Silence'.

Francis Jeffrey could have been forgiven, it seems to me, for wondering what 'those first affections' and 'those shadowy recollections' refer to, especially when the poet glosses them as 'be they what they may'. Neither phrase has been used so far, so we have apparently referential terms with no obvious referent. Do they belong only to the infant in stanza V, still trailing his

[27] *New Monthly Magazine*, November 1820 (Woof, 852).
[28] *BL* (Bollingen ed.) 2: 147, 154. To be more exact, Coleridge says this of the ode in general, on p. 147, but quotes these stanzas only on pp. 153–4.

clouds of glory, or equally to the six-years child in stanza VIII engrossed in imitative games? And how do either affections or recollections (which appear to point in contrary directions—the human and natural world in one case, and the celestial home in the other) both constitute 'truths', let alone 'truths that wake | To perish never'?

Of all Wordsworth's poems this one seems to depend most upon ideas outside itself, and one's interpretation of its various cruces will differ considerably depending on whether one looks elsewhere in Wordsworth's work, or to Vaughan's very helpful and much briefer analogue, *The Retreat*, or to philosophers of Coleridge's persuasion—to Plato's *Phaedo*, for instance, or the *Enneads* of Plotinus. There are many ways of looking 'through death' (stanza 10). The poignancy of 'To me the meanest flower that blows can give | Thoughts that do often lie to deep for tears' has no specific philosophical content. The poem may not persuade one that 'heaven lies about us in our infancy' other than in the *Prelude* sense of the infant's world being beautified by the mother, which sense is not explored in *Intimations*. While the premise that we come 'from God who is our home' is entirely compatible with Wordsworth's core pantheism, the notion that Nature is a prison-house and that our only light is otherworldly constitutes such a break with almost everything in the *oeuvre* prior to 1804, that it leads to an impasse. What does one do with the assurance in line 73 of the poem, that the Westward-bound youth 'still is Nature's Priest'? That 'still' has no antecedent with this poem, so it affects a (ruinously inconsistent) bridge to the pantheistical close of *Tintern Abbey* where the poet is still 'a worshipper of Nature'. And interpretation of the mysterious lines 'High instincts before which our mortal Nature | Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised', though not impossible, relies to an exceptional degree on guesswork—or an implied invitation to construct your own argument from desire.

Coleridge, of course, accepted that invitation. Needing to believe in immortality, and familiar with Kant's argument for innate ideas and 'postulates' of the moral life, he found the sense of the poem 'perfectly plain' (*BL* 2: 147). *The Friend* had already paraphrased *Intimations* 9 quite succinctly as showing the 'elevation of the spirit *above the semblances of custom and the senses to a world of spirit*, this life in the idea, even in the supreme and godlike, which alone merits the name of life and without which our organic life is in a state of somnambulism' (*Friend* 1: 524). In *Aids to Reflection*[29] Coleridge appears to reflect on Wordsworth's speculation cited above from the first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs* that the 'fore-feeling' of immortality is among Reason's 'earliest offspring'. Consider, for instance, this meditation on infancy, which appears to suggest, as does the ode, that the light of Reason, and 'those first affections' and 'those shadowy recollections' are tantamount to one and the same thing. It does not mention Wordsworth but marries stanza 7 of the ode, and his own and Wordsworth's treatment of childhood, to his own sense of 'great First Truths':

> The great and fundamental truth and doctrines of religion, the existence and attributes of God, and the life after death, are in Christian countries taught so early, under such circumstances, and in such close and vital association with whatever makes or marks reality for our infant minds, that the words ever after represent sensations, feelings, vital assurances, sense of reality—rather than thoughts, or any distinct conception. Associated, I had almost said identified, with the parental voice, look, touch, with the living warmth and pressure of the Mother, [whose 'upraised eyes and brow are to the child, the Type and

[29] My quotations are from *Aids to Reflection and Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Bell & Sons, 1913; repr. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005).

> Symbol[30] of an Invisible Heaven!'] … these great First Truths, … in the preconformity to which our very humanity may be said to consist, are so infused,[31] that it were but a tame and inadequate expression to say, we all take them for granted. (*Aids* 157)

Somewhat surprisingly, it is only in *Aids to Reflection*, twenty one years after *Intimations*, that Coleridge first speaks clearly of the 'pre-assurances' implied in that poem:

> I am persuaded, that as the belief of all mankind, of all tribes, and nations, and languages, in all ages, and in all states of social union, it [the belief in immortality] must be referred to far deeper grounds, common to man as man; and that its fibres are to be traced to the tap-root of humanity.… no pre-assurance common to a whole species does in any instance prove delusive … nature is found true to her word…. (*Aids* 237)

Much of *Aids to Reflection* is corrective of Wordsworth. His climactic assault on the materialism of Priestley and his disciples backhandedly identifies *Tintern Abbey* as responsible for misguided doctrines that it has become Coleridge's life-mission to contest. Tintern Abbey exemplifies 'contagion', 'unhealthful influence', and a 'false and sickly taste' leading some religiously constituted people to prefer 'A sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused' [Coleridge quotes six lines of *Tintern Abbey* at this point], over 'the Jehovah of their Bible' (*Aids* 270). And the uncited text which is his ally in this rooting out of the naturalistic heresy is of course *Intimations*. On the very next page after quoting *Tintern*'s allegedly inadvertent heresy, Coleridge's peroration quietly annexes *Intimations* once again, giving his précis of stanza 9 a still more doctrinal inflection than he gave it in *The Friend*:

> Now I do not hesitate to assert, that it was one of the great purposes of Christianity, and included in the process of our Redemption, to *rouse and emancipate the soul from this debasing slavery to the outward senses, to awaken the mind to the true criteria of reality.* (my italics)

There, at last, is the simple and direct expression of the redemptive argument that Wordsworth failed to prioritize in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*.

For Coleridge 'that immortal sea / Which brought us hither' was, one supposes, the ocean of Platonic ideas, rather than the Darwinian one from which, for most of us today, all life emerged. As medicine for Coleridge—and the poem was, after all, conceived in that light—*Intimations* affects, or affects to affect, an argument of the kind to which the *Opus Maximum* and *The Recluse* were directed, an argument based upon eternal verities and a redemptive process. It is doubtful whether *Intimations* can ever be read in quite his way again. Without his particular confidence in things unseen, the fugitive argument of the Ode, like that of the *Extempore Effusion*, rests upon clouds and waves careering towards a nothingness crowned with darkness, as the poetic brothers pass in that gloomiest of valedictions, 'from sunshine to the *sunless* land'.

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[30] Compare Wordsworth's 'The types and symbols of Eternity' in the (very Coleridgean) diction of the *Prelude* Book 6: 571 (the Simplon Pass).

[31] 'Infused' may suggest that Coleridge is correcting Wordsworth's error in 'blest the infant babe', *Prelude* 2: 262ff: 'Along his infant veins are interfused / The gravitation and the filial bond / *Of nature* that connect him *with the world*' (my italics).

Along with the Calvinist baggage which Talfourd was pleased to have lost, Coleridge's Platonic baggage has gone missing also, and Emerson's new world optimisms are momentarily in abeyance. What Carlyle sardonically referred to as 'transcendental life-preservers' have been decommissioned. Without them, for all its rhetoric of compensations, the only heaven *Intimations* can truly envisage—and it is in this that its difference from Vaughan's *The Retreat* is most marked—is that of infancy. Compared with its argument for pre-existence—which is overt, emphatic and (we are told) no more than a poetic idea—its argument for immortality was never more than implied. Consequently, for a reader who lacks such instinctive pre-assurances, it is no longer there.

But it seems not to matter. Nowadays, for most readers, the poem's consolation derives from nature and nature's continuities, just as Dorothy takes the place of the divine comforter in 'The Poem upon the Wye', and Charles and Mary do for each other in the lines for Lamb. This poet, after all, never lyeth because he nothing affirmeth. As an expression of an ability to take *disinterested* pleasure in the sound of 'mighty waters rolling evermore'—waters with all their Darwinian freight of quite another kind of pre-existence—the *Ode* somehow crosses the bar between comforting faith and stoical unbelief. Neither those mighty waters nor 'the clouds that gather round the setting sun' have any bearing on personal immortality. Least of all does the poem's terminal *memento mori*, 'the meanest flower that blows'. But like Ted Hughes's post-Romantic harebell in the poem *Still Life*—a trembling harebell in whose delicate veins 'sleeps the maker of the sea'—such images movingly juxtapose the grand sources of life, water and sunlight, and all their fragile yet enduring syntheses. Such images may indeed bring 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'.

Tirril, Penrith

Happy Birthday, Mary

By NICK ROE

I MET MARY FOR THE FIRST TIME at the Wordsworth Summer Conference in August 1982. In those days conference papers were presented in the upper room of what was then the Library and I recall sitting at a large table, opposite Mary, to talk about 'Citizen Wordsworth'.

I immediately discovered that Mary's genial presence, smiling across the room, overlay a profound knowledge of William Wordsworth and English Romanticism and, of course, all things Elian. Fortunately for me, she agreed that Wordsworth had been a committed 'English Jacobin'! On succeeding days our conversations continued in walks around Grasmere, Rydal, and Buttermere, on a visit to the Bowder Stone, in the back bar of the Moss Grove, and aboard the steam yacht Gondola on Coniston Water. This last was the occasion when Peter Laver announced that one of the more exotic and enigmatic American delegates, in whom he had taken a particularly close interest, was a man in drag.

In 1984 I was fortunate to be asked to give a paper on 'George Dyer – Philanthropic Reformer', to the Charles Lamb Society at the Mary Ward Centre in Queen's Square. Mary was in the chair that day, and I found that, instead of the mild ridicule that was usually directed at Dyer, among Elians 'G. D.' was a hero of a sort, and esteemed for much more than the incident at the New River. So Mary, the Wordsworth Summer Conference and the Charles Lamb Society helped me gain confidence, as a temporary lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast, and still without a doctorate, that there might be something worth saying about Wordsworth's 'radical years' and his early friendship with dissenters like Dyer. From Mary I learned, also, that literary study thrives best in surroundings of friendliness, good humour, and convivial exchange rather than amid the jostle and backbite of 'the profession'.

I was thrilled when Mary accepted my paper for publication in the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, which she edited, and it appeared in the 'Golden Jubilee' special issue for January 1985. Thrilled, not least because Mary had told me that 'we don't publish any old rubbish you know!', but also because I knew that, over its long run since 1935, the *Bulletin* amounted to a treasure-house of Romantic scholarship and criticism. In recent years Mary had published new work by Gillian Beer, Richard Gravil, Alan Hill, Edwin Marrs, Lucy Newlyn, Bill Ruddick, Reggie Watters, and Robert Woof. I suggested several times to Mary that a single volume of 'classic' essays taken from all eras of the *Bulletin* would find an eager readership. And I knew that she had complete runs of the *Bulletin* stored in her garage at Sevenoaks.

Just as valuable and enjoyable are the gems in the back pages of each issue of the *Bulletin* under the heading 'News and Notes from Members'. Here Mary gathered items on Charles Lamb's Guinea-Pigs; the first Wordsworth Winter School, 19-24 February 1984, at which Mary lectured; Winifred Courtney on Lamb's pronunciation of *oeuf boulli*; and Henry Cotton, sub-librarian at the Bodleian, on G. D.'s visit in April 1816: 'Good Lord! What a dirty wretch!' Here, too, are notes that amount to a history of Romanticism in recent years – 'Wordsworth Conferences at Dove Cottage'; the sale of Coleridge Cottage, Clevedon, in 1988; the founding of the Friends of Coleridge (April 1988) and of the British Association for Romantic Studies (January 1989, the issue in which Mary handed-on the editorship to Bill Ruddick).

Mary's lecture at Christ's Hospital on the occasion of Leigh Hunt's bicentenary is a masterpiece that combines brilliant commentary on the friendships of Coleridge, Lamb and Hunt with personal reflections on her own childhood, schooldays, and her predicament as a conscientious objector during the second world war: 'I used to think of my own schooldays as a nine years' prison sentence and imagined that, if like Hunt I were to be shut up for my principles under the oppressive war-time legislation, I should slip into prison routine with all the ease of familiarity'. And with rose-trellised wallpaper, piano, and a poet's bust too! With characteristic modesty Mary footnotes her wonderful essay with an Elian disclaimer: 'Developed from a talk given at the Wordsworth Winter School'.

Thank you Mary! Happy Birthday!

University of St. Andrews

William Hazlitt (1737–1820) and the *Monthly Repository*: New Attributions

By DUNCAN WU

I REMEMBER MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH MARY at the Wordsworth Conference in 1985 and being stunned by her acute sensitivity to the nuances of great poetry. She is someone from whom I have learned much, and continue to learn. Her lectures remain exemplary for their intellectual energy and right-mindedness, as are her contributions to Charles Lamb Society meetings in London. She is a major figure in Romantic studies and it is an honour to be part of this birthday tribute to her. I hope that this short article on the latter part of the writing career of the father of the essayist William Hazlitt will be an appropriate tribute to someone who remains a guardian of good scholarship.

The Revd William Hazlitt, father of the essayist, remains an under-recognized figure. He is known to Elians principally as the recipient of the apologetic letter written by Lamb on 18 February 1808 – which, W. Carew Hazlitt notes, was 'the joint composition of the actual writer and the missing author-artist'.[1] (His son, the essayist, had left London for Winterslow on 6 February without telling anyone, in order to see his fiancée, Sarah Stoddart.) But he was much more than that. He became a Socinian while an undergraduate at the University of Glasgow, where he was tutored by Adam Smith and (possibly) the young James Watt.[2] He emigrated to America in 1783 where he was largely responsible for the adoption by King's Chapel, Boston, of a Unitarian liturgy, and then in 1787 for its detachment from the Episcopalian church and establishment as the first Unitarian church in the country. Had it not been for his support, William Bentley, pastor of the East Church, Salem, would not have adopted Priestley's catechism as a substitute for the Westminster catechism, nor made a spirited attack on the doctrine of the Trinity in a course of sermons delivered in 1787. Moreover, it may be more than mere coincidence that Charles Chauncey decided to publish his treatise on universal salvation, *The Mystery hid from Ages, or the Salvation of all Men*, shortly after his first encounter with Hazlitt in 1784. Hazlitt did not benefit directly from his American labours – at that time, immediately after the war, there was much bigotry against anyone identified as British, and his Unitarian views were regarded by hard-line Presbyterians as heretical – but others would reap the harvest. When Priestley landed in America in 1794 he found less resistance than he would otherwise have done, thanks to Hazlitt.

He is important as a writer, not just on theological but on literary matters. Between 1766 and 1808 Hazlitt published five volumes of sermons and discourses in volume form, mostly with the Unitarian publisher Joseph Johnson. He contributed eight articles to Priestley's *Theological Repository* between 1770 and 1788, and eleven to the *Boston Magazine* and the *American*

[1] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), ii: 270-1; W. Carew Hazlitt, *Four Generations of a Literary Family* (2 vols., London, 1897), i: 128.

[2] It is possible that he participated in some of the experiments that led to the discovery of latent heat, ongoing by 1757. For further details of Hazlitt's Glasgow years, see my '"Polemical Divinity": William Hazlitt at the University of Glasgow', *Romanticism* 6.2 (2000) pp. 163-77.

Herald between September 1784 and April 1785.[3] It is often assumed that after his return to England in 1786, Hazlitt settled down to a life of genteel retirement, educating his son (the future essayist), and ministering to the dissenting community in the small market-town of Wem, Shropshire. In fact, he continued to write: this is the first occasion on which the files of the *Monthly Repository* have been fully surveyed with a view to ascertaining the extent of his contributions to it.

The *Repository* was founded in 1806 by the well-established group of Unitarians in Hackney, so as to

> lay claim to the support of the liberal and enlightened part of the public, and on this ground the Editor is willing to rest its merits – namely, its being the only periodical publication which is open to FREE AND IMPARTIAL THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY AND DISCUSSION.[4]

In its earliest years, the *Repository* was accused of promoting exclusively Unitarian ideas, but was always catholic in its tastes, reflecting dissenting opinion from a diverse spectrum of religious affiliation. That said, it was edited by a Unitarian minister, Robert Aspland (1782-1845), of the Gravel Pit Chapel in Hackney, who founded the journal in 1806 with the support of prominent Unitarians in London. Over the years its contributors included Henry Crabb Robinson, Thomas Noon Talfourd, and Charles Lamb.[5]

Writing in 1944, Francis Mineka acknowledged Hazlitt's involvement with the *Repository*, though without giving specifics;[6] it was left to Ernest J. Moyne in his edition of Margaret Hazlitt's journal to attribute two articles to Hazlitt.[7] I have discovered a further twenty, spanning the years 1806 (that of the journal's inception) to 1818 – less than two years before Hazlitt's death at the age of eighty-three. It is a record that indicates that, far from retiring from the fray when he left the pastorship of the Unitarian meeting-house at Wem in 1813, Hazlitt continued, as he had been doing for the previous five decades, to express his views in print, unafraid of the controversy they might generate. Through the pages of the *Repository* Hazlitt's father meditated on theological questions that had long preoccupied him, and took stock of his long life, reflecting on the people and experiences that had shaped him and his family.

Each entry below begins with a heading that gives three pieces of information: the name over which the article was published; the title given to it in print (if any); and the precise bibliographical reference, including volume, date of publication, and page number(s). Annotations summarise the content of the article. In most cases Hazlitt's contributions are clearly

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[3] For the former, see my 'William Hazlitt (1737-1820), The Priestly Circle, and *The Theological Repository*: A brief Survey and Bibliography', *Review of English Studies* 56 (2005) pp. 758-66; his American publications are listed in 'The Journalism of William Hazlitt (1737-1820) in Boston, 1784-5: A Critical and Bibliographical Survey', *Review of English Studies* 57 (2006) pp. 221-46.

[4] *Monthly Repository* 1 (1806) pp. v-vi.

[5] For discussion of one of Lamb's contributions, see the present author's 'The Lamb Circle and the *Monthly Repository*', *Romanticism* (forthcoming, 2007).

[6] *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (Chapel Hill, 1944), p. 395.

[7] Moyne wrote that 'he contributed articles to the *Monthly Repository*', and attributed two: 'Particulars of Dr Chauncey' (no. 9 below) and 'Account of the State of Rational Religion in America' (no. 5), which he reprinted in Appendix I. See *The Journal of Margaret Hazlitt* ed. Ernest J. Moyne (Lawrence, Kansas, 1967), pp. 13, 113-23, 152n70.

distinguishable by the fact that they are signed with his initials. I have not invariably assumed that all such articles are his, but until 1817 no other contributor used the same initials. In that year, reports from the Western Unitarian Society, Devon and Cornwall Association, usually covering events at meetings in Exeter, began to appear as by W.H.[8] Although the supposition that Hazlitt was their author is plausible (he was resident in Bath and therefore eligible to attend), they are not demonstrably by him, and could be the work of another hand. Indeed, that published in the *Repository* for September 1817 mentions the Reverend W. Hincks, who is more likely to have been responsible for them. They are therefore excluded.

1. W.H., 'Remarks on Cappe's Discourses', ***Monthly Repository*** **1 (June 1806) p. 296**

This half-page letter to the editor initiates Hazlitt's career with the *Repository* with an attack on what he saw as an inaccurate reading of the Bible in the review of Cappe's *Discourses* in the February issue of the *Repository*.[9] It inspired an irritated response in the number for August (pp.421-5).

The same issued carries an advertisement, under the rubric, 'Religious, Literary, and Politico-Religious Intelligence':

> The Rev. W. Hazlitt, A.M. proposes to publish, by subscription, Fifty-two Sermons, in two octavo volumes, price 16s. in boards.
> Subscribers' names are taken by Mr. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-yard, and by the Printer of the Monthly Repository.[10]

This is probably a reference to Hazlitt's final book, *Sermons for the Use of Families*, which Joseph Johnson was to publish in 1808, funded largely by subscription. It would receive a favourable review in the *Repository* the following year (see *Monthly Repository* 4 [1809] p. 103).

Hazlitt was thus a contributor to the *Repository* from its first year of publication, suggesting that he was informed of its establishment early on in its existence, perhaps before it began to appear. His sons John and William were by then resident in London, and may have told him of it.

2. W. H., 'On Fasts', ***Monthly Repository*** **1 (July 1806) pp. 361-2**

Hazlitt contributed a letter 'On Fasts' to the July issue of the *Repository*, pointing out that fasts are observed by 'those who make use of those forms of prayer which are prescribed by the archbishops and bishops'. During his sojourn in America, Hazlitt caused outrage in the Episcopalian community of Boston by criticizing bishops in precisely this manner. He goes on to argue that 'We should obey God rather than man: we should not be subject to human authority in matters of faith' – another argument he had used years before when attacking what he saw as the injustice of the bishopric.

[8] See, for instance, *Monthly Repository* 12 (1817) pp. 505-6, 565-6, 669.
[9] *Monthly Repository* 1 (1806) p. 97.
[10] *Monthly Repository* 1 (1806) p. 334.

3. Philalethes, 'Reply to a Plain Christian, on the Writings and Character of the late Rev. E. Evanson', ***Monthly Repository*** **2 (February 1807) pp. 28-9**

This is one of the rare occasions on which Hazlitt contributed to the *Repository* using a pseudonym. Though not the only writer of his day to style himself 'Philalethes', the name was one he had used before. He had used it as early as 1770, 27 years prior to this brief article, when writing for Priestley's *Theological Repository* – something first made public in 1817 in a brief article in the pages of the *Monthly Repository* by one T.R.S.[11]

On this occasion Hazlitt came to the defence of 'the late worthy Mr. Evanson … one of the truest friends to genuine Christianity', who in the issue for November 1806 had been criticized by 'A Plain Christian' (where Hazlitt refers to as 'the P.C.') for taking the view that 'a sabbatical observance of Sunday is not a Christian duty'.[12] It was entirely in keeping with Hazlitt's liberal views to refute the idea 'that the observance of Sunday as a Sabbath has existed in every age of the Christian church'. The strength of feeling in Hazlitt's concluding paragraph is typical of him:

> Notwithstanding the insinuations of the P.C. in which he has displayed neither candor nor good sense; notwithstanding the feeble attempts of that narrow minded writer to prejudice your readers against the tenets of Mr. Evanson, they stand on too firm a rock to be in the least shaken by so weak a blast. The doctrine which the P.C. has condemned, will assuredly thrive in the world, and the writings which he has stigmatized, will be admired and esteemed by every discerning, unprejudiced reader.[13]

4. W.H., 'Summary of the Evidences of Revealed Religion', ***Monthly Repository*** **2 (May 1807) pp. 241-6**

This contribution is prefaced by a brief note by Aspland:

> The following Essay has been delayed very reluctantly on our part, till we could find an opportunity of printing the whole together. A number of papers of a more temporary nature has hitherto prevented this. We trust that the author, whose correspondence we justly value, will accept our apology.[14]

In keeping with views Hazlitt had expressed in print before, he deals with his suspicions of 'an intermixture of some human inventions foisted into the sacred Code', arguing that an incorrect translation of the Bible has led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and that on occasion it has been deliberately misconstrued. Even so, Hazlitt concludes that

> in our present most corrupt versions, the well disposed have still so perfect a rule of life that he who runs may read it. In the law and the prophets, and in Jesus Christ and his apostles, we have every thing that is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished in all good works.[15]

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[11] 'Names of Writers in the Theological Repository', *Monthly Repository* 12 (1817) pp. 526-7.
[12] See A Plain Christian, 'Remarks on the Writings of Mr. Evanson', *Monthly Repository* 1 (1806) pp. 580-3.
[13] *Monthly Repository* 2 (1807) p.129.
[14] *Monthly Repository* 2 (1807) p. 241.
[15] *Monthly Repository* 2 (1807) p. 246.

The essay also contains some rhetorical flights that are characteristic of Hazlitt, including a lengthy sentence that summarises the events described in Exodus, and a series of rhetorical questions on page 243.

5. An Old Unitarian, 'An Account of the State of Rational Religion in American; by an Unitarian Minister, who traveled in that country', ***Monthly Repository*** **3 (June 1808) pp. 302-7**

This important article recounts Hazlitt's experiences in America, 1783-7, and is reprinted as Appendix I in *The Journal of Margaret Hazlitt* ed. Ernest J. Moyne (Lawrence, Kansas, 1967), pp. 113-23. It was inspired by an error in the January issue which mistakenly claimed that James Freeman was ordained at King's Chapel, Boston, 'about fifty years ago' – an event which, as Hazlitt points out in his opening paragraph, was twenty years in the past, having occurred in 1787. He goes on to describe how the ordination came about, describing his own part in it, referring to himself as Bereanus. Hazlitt's use of this name is interesting: it was that under which Dr. Thomas Wright had contributed to Priestley's *Theological Repository* – one of Hazlitt's numerous adversaries in those pages. Hazlitt had first adopted the name when publishing *A Discourse on the Apostle Paul's Mystery of Godliness being made Manifest in the Flesh*, published in Falmouth, Maine, in 1786, as by Bereanus Theosebes; in this article for the *Monthly Repository*, 22 years later, Hazlitt recalled that '400 copies of it sold in one week'.[16]

This essay goes on to recall Hazlitt's attempts to find a post as a minister in America during 1783-7, describing his encounters with a number of eminent clergymen of the period. It is a principal source of information for the events that passed during those early years, and a reminder of Hazlitt's importance to the early growth of liberal theology in America, not least the foundation of Unitarianism.

6. W. Hazlett, 'Anecdote of Sterne', ***Monthly Repository*** **3, (July 2808) pp. 376-7**

This is a recollection of having encountered Sterne's 'very near neighbour' Dr. Marriot 'above forty years ago' (prior to 1768), who reacted to Hazlitt's 'frothy declamation' on the wonders of Sterne's writing by saying that, 'of all the men he ever knew, he was the most devoid of the feelings of humanity or of every thing that we call sympathy'. As evidence of this, Marriot cited Sterne's unfeeling response upon seeing his daughter in the grip of a near-fatal epileptic fit. It concludes with the characteristic comment:

> I shall only observe that, notwithstanding all the admiration which Sterne's Maria has produced, he could not, to save his life, have written anything Equal to David's lamentation over Absalom. He would like Dr. Swift, if in his situation, have been proud and witty, even when deploring the death of his lovely Stella.[17]

This underlines Hazlitt's love of literature, which he passed on to his son. In 'On Reading Old Books', the essayist was to remember his first reading of *Tom Jones*, 'when I was in my father's

[16] *Monthly Repository* 3 (1808) p. 307.
[17] *Monthly Repository* 3 (1808) p. 377.

house, and my path ran down with butter and honey'.[18] His first encounter with *Tristram Shandy* probably also took place at Wem.

7. W.H., 'Strictures upon the "Improved Version of the New Testament;" Matthew, Chapters I.-VIII.', ***Monthly Repository*** **3 (December 1808) pp. 675-7**

The corruptions introduced into the New Testament by the incompetence of translators and transcribers had been exercising Hazlitt since the 1770s, when he submitted a number of emendations and explications to the *Theological Repository*. It is not surprising, then, that a new translation should have spurred him to write to the *Monthly* with a list of corrections.

8. W.H., 'Mr. Stone's Arguments Against the Miraculous Conception Inconclusive', ***Monthly Repository*** **4 (October 1809) pp. 552-5**

In line with the Priestleyan view that Christ was a man, purely and simply, Stone argued that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary. One would suppose Hazlitt to be sympathetic to this – as indeed he is – but he wishes to note that the passages Stone cites from the Bible to support his position do not constitute conclusive proof of Stone's argument, and that the only way of doing so would be to show that 'the two first chapters of Matthew and the two first chapters of Luke are palpable forgeries, that is, that they did not belong to the original copies of those Evangelists'[19] – something Stone could not do.

Hazlitt soon moves on to the real point of his article, which is to criticize those Unitarian ministers who, rather than use a liturgy that reflects their convictions, perform the Trinitarian service. Once again, this is consistent with Hazlitt's lifelong views, and is a reminder that it was partly at his instigation that James Freeman of the King's Chapel, Boston, adopted a Unitarian liturgy – the first cleric in America so to do. Hazlitt ends the article with an inspired piece of rhetoric that deserves to be quoted here:

> I would say to all Unitarians who frequent the Trinitarian temple, Come out from amongst them, and be ye separate, and not ashamed of the religion of Christ; but honestly profess what you believe to be the truth, and make your light to shine, and I should think most meanly of those dastardly beings, who, when in the country, have not the courage to worship with a poor little flock; but to escape the sneer of the fashionable, and to see and be seen by them, run with the multitude to worship they know not what, whilst they may be sensible that this unprincipled practice renders them despicable, even to those with whom they associate.[20]

9. W.H., 'Particulars of Dr. Chauncey', ***Monthly Repository*** **9 (April 1814) pp. 232-4**

The lengthy gap between the preceding article and this one – almost five years – is baffling. It is possible that Hazlitt was too ill or too busy to write. At all events, the first contribution to the *Repository* after his retirement in 1813 and removal to Addlestone in Surrey looks back once more to his time in America, 1783-7.

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[18] The phrase is not Hazlitt's, but is quoted from Richardson's *Clarissa;* see *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt* ed. Duncan Wu (9 vols., London, 1998), viii: 208, 391n23.
[19] *Monthly Repository* 4 (1809) p. 553.
[20] *Monthly Repository* 4 (1809) p. 555.

When Hazlitt arrived in Boston in summer 1784, Chauncey was in his late seventies and at the centre of the liberal group of clergymen who formed the Boston Association of Ministers. Their interest in Priestleyan Unitarianism would have made Hazlitt a compelling and stimulating companion. Several members of the group assisted Hazlitt's efforts to find a posting in New England and Maine, none more so than Chauncey, who put him in touch with Ebenezer Gay, minister at Hingham, also recalled in this memoir. At that time, Gay was two years short of his ninetieth birthday, a Harvard graduate who with Chauncey had opposed the Great Awakening and revival of evangelical Calvinism. In 1759, when Hazlitt was an undergraduate at Glasgow, Gay had given the Dudleian lecture at Harvard which expounded his doctrine of 'supernatural rationalism', by which new developments in science were held to be compatible with the revealed religion of the Bible. His views were eminently compatible with Hazlitt's insistence on a rational religion, and Hazlitt would have approved that he omitted from his church business such doctrines as those of original sin and election to grace. Hazlitt preached more than forty times for Gay, on one occasion to a congregation that included Major-General Benjamin Lincoln (1733-1810).

In this article Hazlitt reminds his readers of Chauncey's belief 'that the righteous, after a certain period, would again be subject to death, after which they would pass into a higher state of felicity, and that thus advancing from glory to glory, such changes would await them through all eternity'.

10. W.H., 'Phrase "Son of God"', *Monthly Repository* 9 (June 1814) pp. 330-1

Hazlitt cautions against exclusive application of the phrase to Christ, saying that 'all men are the offspring of God'.[21]

11. W.H., 'American Divines', *Monthly Repository* 9 (July 1814) pp. 401-3

Hazlitt communicates to readers several notes from a volume of occasional sermons by American ministers, published in Boston in 1812. One of them concerns his old friend Charles Chauncey.

12. W.H., untitled letter, *Monthly Repository* 10 (January 1815) p. 29

Having been reading 'Chauncey's book on Universal Savation' – *The Mystery hid from Ages, or the Salvation of all Men* (1784) – Hazlitt writes to say that 'I must confess his arguments to be very ingenious, though I cannot yet say, that I think he has altogether proved his doctrine'.[22]

13. W.H., 'Rev. Thomas Jenkins', *Monthly Repository* 10 (August 1815) pp. 525-6

Jenkins was the Unitarian minister of Whitchurch, Shropshire; as 'an old friend', Hazlitt had come to know him during his time as minister at Wem, and recalls one evening when he entertained him and another dissenting minister, Joshua Toulmin. Hazlitt praises him as 'a man, whom no money could bribe to prevaricate and who would never crouch to the powerful in his straitest circumstances, though he was always truly thankful to those who extricated him from any difficulties'.[23] The obituary is dated 'Bath, 8th Aug. 1815'.

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[21] *Monthly Repository* 9 (1814) p. 331.
[22] *Monthly Repository* 10 (August 1815) p. 29.
[23] *Monthly Repository* 10 (1815) p. 525.

14. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 11 (February 1816) pp. 69-71
A consideration of Chauncey's theories still being within his view, Hazlitt wished in this letter to bring to the notice of the *Repository* 'one uncommon sentiment of Dr. Chauncey, which was, that the righteous, in successive ages, would pass through many deaths, or states of oblivion'.[24] He goes on to transcribe a lengthy passage from Chauncey's *The Mystery hid from Ages, or the Salvation of all Men* (1784) for 'your ingenious correspondents'; dated 'Bath, January 3, 1816'. This letter inspired a response from one J.T. in the *Repository* for April (p. 205), arguing that Hazlitt had misunderstood Chauncey.

15. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 11 (April 1816) pp. 200-1
Hazlitt attempts to explicate the meaning of the word 'angels', at Romans 8:28, finding it to mean 'the messengers of persecuting princes and of others, who by their murdering threatenings endeavoured to reduce all Christian preachers to silence'.[25] As one reads this, it is impossible not to be reminded that throughout his life, and particularly in America, Hazlitt encountered a good deal of 'murdering threatenings' in response to his distinctive religious convictions. Typically, he counsels his readers to 'cultivate a charitable disposition towards those who most widely differ from us, blessing them whilst they curse us, and exercising every act of humanity, whilst they do us every injury in their power'.[26] The letter is dated 'Bath, 10th December, 1816'.

16. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 11 (June 1816) pp. 331
Hazlitt first praises the late Francis Webb, whom he knew to be 'a most strenuous advocate for the cause of American resistance'.[27] He then turns to J.T., who in the April issue had challenged the interpretation Hazlitt had given to the theories of Charles Chauncey in February (no. 14), responding that 'I learned it in a long private conversation with [Chauncey], which he began by saying, 'I must pass through many sleeps'. He adds: 'The Dr. thought highly of my liberality, and was perhaps more open in his communications with me than with any person except his son Charles. Though we did not always agree, I always greatly esteemed and loved him'.[28]

Hazlitt then turns to Lord Stanhope's speech, saying that in order 'To make us a truly glorious nation, very many of our laws must be abolished'. A distrust of legal and governmental institutions was characteristic of Hazlitt and many dissenting voices. It is, for instance, echoed in the philosophy of William Godwin and the *Political Essays* (1819) of Hazlitt's son. The letter is dated 'Bath, June, 1816'.

17. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 11 (November 1816) p. 649
Hazlitt begins by refuting the doctrine of original sin, drawing evidence from Ezekiel, 'in which that impious doctrine is so clearly and emphatically condemned'.[29] He goes on to ask his readers 'to consider what is the real meaning of praying or doing any thing in the name of Jesus Christ'. It refers back to his first article for the *Theological Repository*, described in the contents list as 'Some thoughts on praying in the name of Christ' – which, he says, 'had the full approbation of

[24] *Monthly Repository* 11 (1816) p. 69.
[25] *Monthly Repository* 11 (1816) p. 200.
[26] Ibid., pp. 200-1.
[27] Ibid., p. 331.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *Monthly Repository* 11 (1816) p. 649.

Dr. Priestley'.[30] Hazlitt concludes with a reference to what he regarded as a misinterpretation of the status of Christ:

> Having still some room, I announce to you the opening of a very large Methodist chapel at Bath. In the front of this building is inscribed, *Deo Sacrum*, in capitals. I wish to be informed what they mean by *Deo*. Do they mean the One Father of all, or do they mean Jesus Christ, contrary to his own declaration? Or do they mean Trinity, according to the idolatrous doctrine of the Church of Rome, and of some other churches?

Hazlitt held the view that Christ was a man, no more and no less. He regarded the Trinitarian view not just as idolatrous but as unauthorised by the Bible. The letter is dated 'Bath, 9th Nov. 1816'.

18. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 12 (January 1817) pp. 22-3

This letter summarises a sermon preached at Lurgan, Ireland, before a body of Dissenting ministers, by Andrew Alexander. Hazlitt liked its attack on prejudice – which 'became to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness'. Indeed, he goes on, it 'is very conspicuous in the professed members of the Roman church, and … has been in all ages the grand obstruction to a more thorough and perfect reformation'.[31] Hazlitt had argued before that the Reformation had been thwarted by the willingness of the Anglican church to incorporate elements of Catholicism. The letter is dated 'Bath, Dec. 6, 1816'.

19. W.H., letter, ***Monthly Repository* 12 (April 1817) pp. 223-4**

This letter recalls the late Mr. Mackmurdo, who is described as 'a truly good man, and an uniform inquirer after truth'. Hazlitt goes on to recall another recently-deceased friend, Kirk Boott (here misprinted 'Root'). Boott is memorialised today in a plaque to be found on the wall of King's Chapel, Boston, the first Unitarian church in America, where he is remembered as an early benefactor. Originally from Derby in England, Boott set himself up as a merchant in Boston at 4 Butler's Row soon after the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783. By May 1784 he was in partnership with William Pratt, another recent arrival from England, and together they established a successful business. Boott and Pratt became members of the King's Chapel congregation soon after Hazlitt's arrival in town, perhaps as a result of his influence. Boott recognized the intelligence of Hazlitt's son William who he offered to bring up as a merchant. It is therefore fascinating to find this tribute to Boott in this late recollection by Hazlitt:

> He is a generous Englishman, and attentive to the wants of his fellow creatures, particularly to those who were strangers in distress. Many such he found, and cheerfully relieved them, and at the same time discovered that his circumstances were constantly meliorating in proportion to his liberality'.[32]

[30] See *Theological Repository* 2 (1770) pp. 159-67.
[31] *Monthly Repository* 12 (1817) p. 23.
[32] *Monthly Repository* 12 (1817) p. 224.

20. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 12 (July 1817) p. 410
This attack on the Mayor and Town Clerk of Liverpool was inspired by their persecution of a local dissenter, a Mr. Wright. It is dated 'Bath, 10th May, 1817'.

21. W.H., letter, *Monthly Repository* 12 (November 1817) p. 681
This letter begins by querying the usual attribution of Psalm 90 to Moses, before proceeding to query the idea that Christ 'is exalted to the government of the whole universe'.[33] It is dated 'Bath, Aug. 27, 1817'.

22. W.H., letter *Monthly Repository* 13 (October 1818) pp. 616-17
Hazlitt's last identifiable contribution to the *Repository* begins with a recollection of a coach-ride to London from Peterborough (and therefore dating from his years in Wisbeach, 1764-6), when he encountered a man 'bespangled with gold lace' who 'began immediately to harangue upon the Trinity'. He was an advocate for Trinitarian views Hazlitt had long abandoned, and this led to an exchange which culminated with Hazlitt fearing his interlocutor 'would have stabbed me, if he had thought of escaping punishment'. This letter is dated 'Bath, Sept. 15 1818'. Late the following year, Hazlitt moved to Crediton in Devon, where he died in 1820.

Conclusion
G. P. Hinton was responsible for an informative obituary of Hazlitt which appeared in the *Repository* in November 1820. It commemorated him not least for his achievements in Philadelphia, 1783-4:

> Mr. Hazlitt's visit to this town was not … in vain; for in a short time he had the satisfaction of being chiefly instrumental in forming the first Unitarian church in Boston, and thus laying the foundation of the present flourishing state of Unitarianism in that place. While in Boston, the University there offered to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, but which he declined; and during his stay in that place, which was about four years and a half, he published various tracts in support of Unitarian principles;[34] and after thus having prepared the way for the subsequent exertions of Dr. Priestly, (whose acquaintance he enjoyed, and by whom he was presented, at different times, with copies of his works on Electricity, and some other of his valuable productions,) he returned with his family to England, and became pastor of the Presbyterian congregation at Wem …[35]

As this survey of Hazlitt's contributions demonstrates, the years he spent in America were often in his mind in later years, particularly his involvement with King's Chapel and the Boston Association of Ministers. It was as if, in the pieces he wrote for the *Repository*, he retained a sense of the momentousness of the events of which he had been part, and wanted to convey their importance to its readers. This can only have been encouraged by the fact that the *Repository* carried regular reports of the advance of Unitarianism in America. He would, for instance, have

[33] *Monthly Repository* 12 (1817) p. 681.
[34] Hinton's reference to 'various tracts in support of Unitarian principles' can refer only to Hazlitt's appearances in the pages of the *Boston Magazine* and *American Herald*, which he may have been shown by Hazlitt himself.
[35] *Monthly Repository* 15 (1820) p. 678.

been pleased to see the report on King's Chapel in January 1812, where James Freeman, his old friend, was described as 'a most excellent man'.[36]

The character of his contributions to the *Repository* is consistent with those he submitted to other journals. He insisted on a 'rational' religion, one that conformed not to the 'corruptions' introduced by those who sought power within the institutions of the church but to a 'rational' interpretation of the Bible. As a result he denied the power of Bishops, Archbishops, and the panoply of the Catholic religion, preferring a simpler, less ornate approach to the business of Christian worship. Memorialising him in August 1820, *The Examiner* described him as a man 'who was through his whole life a friend to truth and liberty'[37] Though few, those powerful words do him ample justice.

These writings should be read in the larger context of those which he composed for the *Theological Repository,* the *Boston Magazine* and the *American Herald.* Taken together, they comprise a formidable body of work that reveals him to have been one of the most forthright religious and literary commentators of his time. It would have won the respect of his son's friends, not least Charles Lamb who, as late as October 1831, was wont to declare, referring to George Dyer, 'I am as old a one-Goddite as himself'.[38]

St Catherine's College, Oxford
Duncan Wu is a Major Research Fellow of the Leverhulme Trust, and wishes to acknowledge their generous assistance during the writing of this article.

[36] *Monthly Repository* 7 (1812) pp. 55-8, 56.
[37] *The Examiner* 6 August 1820, p.512.
[38] *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* ed. E.V. Lucas (3 vols., London, 1935), iii: 325.

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

My first acquaintance with Mary Wedd occurred at 9.30 precisely on the morning of Monday 11th February 1985. At that time she stood at the lectern in the basement of The Prince of Wales, Grasmere, in order to deliver to the Wordsworth Winter School (our first) a lecture on 'Wordsworth's Debt to the 17th Century English Bible and Prayer-book'. This was, in a sense, the archetype of the many lectures we have heard from her since, all of which have had that special, loveable, quality Mary brings to her talks – laced with personal reminiscences but full of learning, and, above all, displaying a scholarly rigour which, sadly, we seem to encounter more rarely these days. It is to Mary that Cecilia and I owe our introduction to The Charles Lamb Society, not to mention the acquisition of our first pairs of walking boots, both matters for which we remain eternally grateful! I am delighted that it has been possible to put together this special issue of the *Bulletin* in her honour.

The new season's programme of activities began on 7th October with a very fine lecture from Dr John Strachan of Sunderland University on the subject of Angling Literature in the Romantic period. He examined attitudes to Isaac Walton's *Compleat Angler* – a work highly commended by Lamb – in the writings of his contemporaries, and, indeed, their strongly differing views on the sport of angling itself. This paper will find its place in Dr Strachan's forthcoming book on sporting literature in the late Georgian period – definitely a work to look out for.

Members will find with this issue an invitation to apply for tickets for the annual Birthday Celebration Luncheon, which will take place, as usual, at 14 Prince's Gate, overlooking Hyde Park, on Saturday 17th February 2007, with Pamela Woof as our guest of honour. Do book early for this ever-popular event. The price remains the same as for last year's luncheon!

Please note that two errors have slipped in to the printed Programme circulated with the last Bulletin. The lecture by Stephen Hebron next April will take place on the 14th and not, as printed, the 7th (which is Easter Saturday). And the AGM and lecture by Duncan Wu will be on the 12th May and not, as printed, the 5th.

FROM D. E. WICKHAM

Wordsworth, Rembrandt and Me

The London *Daily Telegraph* newspaper of 24 February 2005 printed a brief article on the newish theory that Rembrandt had a 'lazy eye', just like mine. That is to say, the sufferer's eyes do not look forward in parallel but at about thirty degrees past parallel. In my case this is due to a congenitally weak muscle in the inner corner of the right eye and has also 'come out' in a Wickham aunt and in her sister's grandson.

This means that we cannot see in three dimensions and are hopeless at catching objects thrown towards us.

Or, as the article begins,

> The secret of Rembrandt's success [please note wording] was a lazy eye that meant he saw the three-dimensional world as flat, which helped him to put it on to a canvas. In most self-portraits by the 17th century Dutch master [in case you have never heard of him], his right eye looks straight ahead while the left one points away from his nose. But instead of being a hindrance, experts say the condition, known as stereo-blindness, would have been an asset.

Experts at Harvard University [that's in America in case you have never heard of it] have inspected thirty-six self-portraits by Rembrandt, including twenty-four oils and twelve etchings. The wandering eye can be seen in thirty-five of them.

I had always supposed that I could not draw successfully because of a lack of talent. Perhaps, after all, there would not be much difficulty in my drawing as well as Rembrandt if I had a mind to try it. It is clear then that nothing is wanting but the mind.

(Anyone who has lost the thread of this item might try Lucas's *The Life of Charles Lamb*, chapter 24, fairly near the beginning. Within a few days a British professional portraitist had disputed this attractive theory.)