The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

April 2007 New Series No. 138

Contents: A William Hazlitt Issue

Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion

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THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT HAZLITT'S EXCRUCIATINGLY CONFESSIONAL memoir *Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion* harmed his career and literary reputation irreparably. Reviewers in 1823 made fun of the book's sentimentality and vulgarity; modern-day feminists and new historicists have seen it as a prime example of the misogynist tendency at the heart of the Romantic imagination. Even Hazlitt-lovers have treated it as something of an embarrassment. But in spite of its indifferent critical history, general readers continue to be engaged by it. But what is the peculiar fascination of this unusual and often objectionable little book? What is the source of *Liber Amoris'*s unsung appeal?

Raw candour is one answer. *Liber Amoris* – the book of love - is quite simply one of the most exposed accounts of an unrequited love affair in English literary history, telling the story of Hazlitt's real-life infatuation with his landlord's twenty-year old daughter Sarah Walker. The story behind *Liber Amoris* is a simple one. In August 1820 Hazlitt had just moved in with the family of Micaiah Walker, a tailor who lived at a house in Southampton Buildings, Holborn. An author of some celebrity, known particularly for his literary criticism and political journalism, Hazlitt was forty three at the time, and recently separated from his first wife. Sarah Walker, the anti-heroine of the story, was the second of his landlord's three daughters, the first of whom had recently made a very successful marriage to one of their former lodgers, a man called Robert Roscoe, a member of the famous Liverpool banking family. Having been surrounded by male bachelor lodgers from her early teens, twenty-year old Sarah was clearly a peculiar mixture of modesty and flirtatiousness, who may well have been keen to emulate her sister and make a good match.

No sooner had Hazlitt moved into his little two-room back-facing apartment, than he had met and fallen head-over-heels in love with the shy, curious, teasing, tactile Sarah, but seems not to have heeded her early warning that, however friendly they might be, she knew that she could never love him. So it was that the pattern for the next few years of Hazlitt's life was set, for as time went on he became progressively more obsessed with Sarah, and she ever more ambiguous, evasive, and possibly even downright fearful towards him. In 1822 Hazlitt went up to Scotland to obtain a divorce from his first wife, an undertaking that cost considerable time and money, and all solely in order that he could go back to Southampton Buildings and ask for Sarah's hand in marriage, even though she had already told him quite clearly on a number of separate occasions that she would never change her mind.

Rejected by Sarah, and then increasingly avoided by her, Hazlitt's suffering went from bad to worse, and he experienced violent mood swings, ecstatic when he thought he could see signs of hope, angry and despairing when he contemplated the terrible prospect of living without her. More painfully still, he discovered that for some time past, and despite her protestations to the contrary, she had actually been involved with another lodger for much of the time they had been intimate, a man with whom she was eventually to set up home when she became pregnant in 1824. Some time before this however, Hazlitt decided that the only way to detach himself from Sarah, and to bury his obsession, would be to publish an anonymous book about her.

Liber Amoris retells the story of their affair in painstakingly obsessive detail. Part I succeeds in presenting the central relationship with a kind of dramatic impartiality, recording a series of

past dialogues between the love-lorn 'H' and the taciturn, non-committal 'S'. But all sense of 'S's voice – and of her side of the story – is lost in Part II of the book, which is based on the letters Hazlitt wrote to his friend P. G. Patmore while in Scotland awaiting his divorce. Part III, which brings the unhappy story to an end, is also presented as a series of letters – to 'J. S. K' (James Sheridan Knowles). But in this case the correspondence was entirely fictional, deliberately concocted as a means of relating the last part of the narrative. Hence, formally as well as emotionally, *Liber Amoris* describes a shift from dialogue to monologue, from objective to subjective history. It starts off by trying to maintain a degree of distance from the central character's monomania, yet slowly but surely becomes consumed by it.

> I cannot describe the weakness of mind to which she has reduced me. This state of suspense is like hanging in the air by a single thread that exhausts all your strength to keep hold of it; and yet if that fails you, you have nothing in the world left to trust to.

Liber Amoris was published anonymously on the ninth of May 1823 but so transparent was its authorship that within a week the *Literary Register* had already identified Hazlitt, Sarah, and a number of the other protagonists. The defence that *The Examiner* newspaper mounted of *Liber Amoris*'s extraordinary candour was that it was in the Rousseauvian confessional tradition, and there's no doubt that Hazlitt would have approved of the comparison. In his 1816 'Character of Rousseau', Hazlitt had highlighted the peculiar paradox of the *Confessions*, which was that a man so egotistically narrow in his sympathies should have evoked such powerfully sympathetic feelings in his readers. He even went on to argue that the two things were closely connected:

> [Rousseau's] interest in his own thoughts and feelings was always wound up to the highest pitch; and hence the enthusiasm which he excited in others. He owed the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, by which he created numberless disciples, and overturned established systems, to the tyranny which his feelings, in the first instance, exercised over himself'.

Represented in these terms, Rousseau becomes a kind of holy scapegoat, a revolutionary martyr whose self-immolation at the burning stake of sensibility had helped others to discover the new democracy of feeling. The *Confessions* had been important to the French revolutionary generation – indeed Robespierre had singled it out as Rousseau's most politically inspirational text in 1789. But it was indicative of Hazlitt's rather curmudgeonly post-revolutionary republicanism that for him Jacobinism was now *all* about personality. In his eyes those new 'state-doctors', the utilitarians, had hijacked the discourse of 'positive, practical piece-meal reform', and so the only possibility for an old-style Jacobin was to incubate idealism within the ego, remain steadfast and incorrigible, and devote himself to being a 'good hater'.

Rousseau's example undoubtedly provided a kind of philosophical and political justification for the cathartic urge at the heart of *Liber Amoris*, and for the Tory reviewers the French candour of the piece was clearly difficult to stomach. But it was only in combination with the book's social setting that it became truly reprehensible. There was something about the idea of love in a lodging-house that made the critics laugh – and got them angry. The *Literary Register* called it 'unprincipled and indecent trash', 'the ordure of a filthy mind', *The Times* considered it 'tawdry', and the *Weekly Review* found the book an insult 'to public decency and public morals'. Abuse

was also showered on the character of S herself – 'a tradesman's daughter – common flirt – a common lodging-house servant – nay, a common trader in indecencies with every fellow in the house', 'a pert, cunning, coming, good-for-nothing chit'.

To what can we attribute this ridicule and discomfort? Early nineteenth-century lodging-houses such as the one kept by the Walker family were lower-middle class in status, they existed in an uncertain interstitial realm between the polite and the plebeian. Part of the aim of the Tory reviews might have been about putting such places – and their inhabitants – back *in* their place – insisting upon their resolutely vulgar character. But in addition to this there is clearly a sense in which lodging-houses were also deemed a threat to good, decent middle-class domesticity, because they were based on a kind of false intimacy, a set of artificial relations. The relations between landlords and lodgers pretended to the familial but were closer to the commercial, and exactly the same could be said of the relation between lodgers and landlord's daughters. Above all, critics used the lodging-house setting to insist upon the grubby, cramped quality of Hazlitt's story – the sheer littleness of it – and contrasted that with the soaring, self-important language in which it had been couched.

Shortly before embarking upon the composition of *Liber Amoris*, when he was already seriously infatuated with Sarah Walker, Hazlitt wrote an essay 'On Great and Little Things' in which he reflected most interestingly on the tiny and the trivial. One of the most compelling things about this essay is that it feels like an essay that has been written by the unconscious, in which the chain of connection is all the more eloquent for being implicit. The imagination has a peculiar affinity, Hazlitt says, with minor details – so much so, indeed, that it is invariably the little things in life that we become genuinely obsessed by.

> . . .people have been known to pine and fall sick from holding the next number to the twenty thousand pound prize in the lottery. Now this could only arise from their being so near winning in fancy, from there seeming to be so thin a partition between them and success.

Later in the essay class difference between husband and wife is invoked as another 'little thing' that shouldn't provide an obstacle but in practice does, and this immediately leads Hazlitt into thoughts of servant girls in general and Sarah Walker – his 'Infelice' – in particular:

> But shouldst thou ever, my Infelice, grace my home with thy loved presence, as thou hast cheered my hopes with thy smile, thou wilt conquer all hearts with thy prevailing gentleness, and I will show the world what Shakespeare's women were! – Some gallants set their hearts on princesses, others descend in imagination to women of quality; others are mad after opera singers . . . I admire the Clementinas and Clarissas at a distance; the Pamelas and Fannys of Richardson and Fielding make my blood tingle. I have written love-letters to such in my time *d'un pathétique à faire fendre les rochers*, and with about as much effect as if they had been addressed to stone.

Why a fondness for servant girls? One might easily point to Hazlitt's frustrated sexuality, his precarious status as a freelance man-of-letters, his dubious gentility (he had been pilloried by the Tory press for some years as a vulgar Cockney). We might point to all these things and conclude that a taste for servants in Hazlitt was all about maintaining a sense of power and superiority. But in the passage itself what seems equally striking is the servant as a figure of latent social

possibility. Shakespeare's heroines are frequently angels in disguise – and here too Sarah Walker is explicitly imagined as a creature of hidden revolutionary potential, a challenge to the poetic imagination, promising a new kind of intimacy and transparency in the relations between the sexes.

The irony of this, in both the essay and *Liber Amoris*, is that this promise is never to be fulfilled; in the essay Hazlitt describes how he has written ardent letters to servant girls in the past and as he put it, 'the simpletons have only laughed at him'. And he quotes Rousseau in order to make fun of his misplaced sentiment. The joke is, I take it, on both him and the girls in question. The experience is even more painful in *Liber Amoris* where Sarah becomes a figure of extraordinary unresponsiveness – but the book still captures both sides of that joke – functioning simultaneously as an amorous complaint from a middle-aged scholar and a form of self-critique.

The reference to stone is interesting, given that the ironic subtitle of *Liber Amoris* is 'The New Pygmalion' and the book itself is referred to by H in Part II as 'a record of my conversations with the statue'. The *Literary Register* had picked up on this in its review of the book, giving the protagonist the nickname 'Pyg' throughout. Less well known is the fact that only three years previously, in May 1820, Hazlitt's friend Leigh Hunt had devoted half an issue of *The Indicator* to a new translation of Rousseau's one-act drama *Pygmalion*, supplying a brief critical preface on the various ways of interpreting the legend. Hunt criticized the way Rousseau had made Pygmalion fall in love with his own work 'almost out of vanity', wishing instead that he had represented him 'fashioning the likeness of a creature after his own heart, lying and looking at it with a yearning wish that he could have met such a living being, and at last, while indulging his imagination with talking to her, making him lay his head upon hers, and finding it warm'. Clearly for Hunt the Pygmalion story should have been about a real romantic connection – about imagination becoming real. What he disliked about Rousseau's rendering was that it was so unapologetically, so self-confessedly solipsistic. To him it hovered uneasily between romance and satire.

Something of the same air surrounds *Liber Amoris* – both in terms of the tone of the piece and in terms of its deeply claustrophobic setting. And this lack of perspective has made it difficult for critics to get any kind of distance on the drama. The urge has always been to pick sides, and defend either Hazlitt or Sarah. But what the passage from 'On Great and Little Things' suggests is that we should concentrate less on Sarah's character than on her position within the book. In Parts II and III, especially, she is a liminal, shadowy figure, somewhere between a servant and a lady, a figure of tantalizing proximity and maddening illegibility for Hazlitt, the ultimate test of a great critic's powers of reading. It was perhaps natural that Sarah should appear in an essay about the perplexing nature of little things because everything about Hazlitt's lodging-house love affair was little – Sarah herself, the room he rented and in which she served him breakfast, the presents he showered her with (including brooches containing locks of his own hair), the space between them (she is repeated pictured hovering uncertainly in the doorway to his room in *Liber Amoris*, taking up the servant's characteristic station). And the conversations H has with her – or overhears – do always seem to turn on little things (second-hand compliments, half-heard innuendoes, indistinct vulgarities). But as in the essay, so too in the memoir, these trivialities are deceptive. Quite a lot depends on them.

Part II of *Liber Amoris* roams through Scotland – Edinburgh, the Borders, Stirling Castle, the mountains – as 'H' endures a kind of self-imposed exile from 'S' as he awaits his divorce. It also ranges widely through literary history. But the young lady in the lodging-house remains the centre of it all – and everything relates back to her, as if in corroboration of Stendhal's famous

theory of crystallization. The landscape of Loch Lomond coquets with Hazlitt in a manner reminiscent of her. The naked figure of Truth in a Giordano painting in Dalkeith Castle looks just like her.

On the surface at least the play of allusion in *Liber Amoris* is all about Sarah providing a kind of fulfillment and redemption of bookish daydreams that H has been incubating for years. The romantic topos of Rousseau's great novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* is invoked in this spirit exactly:

> It is just what I proposed to her to do – to have crossed the Alps with me, to sail on sunny seas, to bask in Italian skies, to have visited Vevai and the rocks of Meillerie, and to have repeated to her on the spot the story of Julia and St. Preux, and to have shown her all that my heart had stored up for her – but on my forehead alone is written 'Rejected!'

Like many of the allusions in *Liber Amoris*, however, this is only sunny on the outside, since the letter to which it refers is in fact one of the darkest and most dramatic letters of Rousseau's novel, carrying within it a painful account of exile, longing and the temptation towards suicide. Banished from Vevey and his beloved Julie, her former tutor Saint-Preux borrows a telescope from a local priest and climbs the rocks of Meillerie. From there he finds he can see all the way across the lake that divides him from his lover, and right into her house and quarters. 'Here it is' he writes to Julie, 'that your unhappy lover is enjoying to the full perhaps the last pleasures he will taste in this world,' before concluding his letter with the words: 'the mountainside is steep, the water deep, and I am in despair' (Part I, Letter 26).

So too, in many of the other allusions in the book, the references are frequently to dramas of a peculiarly domestic kind. Stray images or quotations lead us to stories of middle-aged jealousy in *Othello* and *Mirandola*, or to the love of a spirited servant girl in the case of Byron's *Sardanapalus*. But the most resonant of all are the references to Jacobean drama – which all relate to adultery in modest middle-class settings: Hippolito's suspicions of Infelice and their footmen in Dekker's *The Honest Whore*, the betrayal of Frankford by his wife and their house guest Wendoll in John Ford's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. Last but not least there is Leantio's long speech in praise of his humble home in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* which begins, 'How near am I to happiness / That earth exceeds not'. On his return to Southampton Buildings in Part III of *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt quotes the ecstatic part of the speech at length, but he does make a point of suppressing the rather gothic ending which compares base lust in marriage to 'a fair house built by a ditch side' and the body of a strumpet to 'a goodly temple that's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting'. Having enjoined his mother to keep his young wife Bianca under lock and key while he is away, Leantio clearly feels he can return to his house with confidence. The irony of the situation, as every member of the audience is only too aware, is that Bianca has already been unfaithful in his absence, artfully and forcibly seduced by the unscrupulous Duke of Florence. Unbeknown to himself, Leantio *is* returning home to a 'fair house built by a ditch side'. The parallels between this homecoming scene and H's own homecoming from Scotland are striking enough, but Hazlitt's use of literary quotation here does also point up a broader tendency in *Liber Amoris* for allusion itself to function as a kind of 'goodly temple / That's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting', since it is by no means the only example in the book of a seemingly romantic reference carrying a highly apposite hidden irony.

Liber Amoris is a claustrophobic little text not least because even the most apparently far-flung reference always brings us back to the little lodging house in Holborn. From the moment when Sarah first brought up Hazlitt's breakfast tray on August 16, 1820, and looked back at him for a few moments before closing the door, the maddening effect of her opacity was always exacerbated by her extreme proximity, her status as the beautiful but unresponsive statue in Pygmalion's studio. *Liber Amoris* is one of the least voyeuristic romances ever written in this respect, because it is a text almost entirely lacking in perspective, either visual or moral. Sarah is always too near at hand to be viewed properly, in a sense too convenient, too close. And it is that that fuels Hazlitt's dream of domesticity – and its nightmare opposite.

At the beginning of the fifth dialogue in Part I, H. displays the unstable nature of his imaginings, as he questions S. about her behaviour towards the other male lodgers:

> H. Are you angry with me?
> S. Have I not reason?
> H. I hope you have; for I would give the world to believe my suspicions unjust. But, oh! My God! After what I have thought of you and felt towards you, as little less than an angel, to have but a doubt cross my mind for an instant that you were what I dare not name – a common lodging-house decoy, a kissing convenience, that your lips were as common as the stairs –
> S. Let me go, Sir!
> H. Nay – prove to me that you are not so, and I will fall down and worship you. You were the only creature that ever seemed to love me; and to have my hopes, and all my fondness for you, thus turned to a mockery – it is too much! Tell me why you have deceived me, and singled me out as your victim?
> S. I never have, Sir. I always said I could not love.
> H. There is a difference between love and making me a laughing-stock.

Like a new Rousseau, or like a Robespierre in love, Hazlitt develops a Jacobin plot about Sarah in which either she loves him, and it is only difficult circumstances that prevent her from saying so, or she is actively and poisonously treacherous towards him, a monumental pillar of ill-will. To speak of *Liber Amoris* in terms of the belated resurgence of revolutionary idealism might seem a little far-fetched, but there are a number of threads that serve to back up this analysis, and which give this very domestic disaster, this crisis of 'commonness' a wider context. In Part I of the narrative Sarah expresses a passing interest in H.'s little bust of Bonaparte, if only because it reminds him of the look of a former beau. H. gives it to her only too willingly, but in such a manner as makes clear that all his former public hopes are being invested in the little bust, for Sarah's personal safe-keeping. Later, in despair at the collapse of their relationship, and full of suspicions that S. has started seeing someone else, H. smashes the little Bonaparte to the ground, and the effect of this is simultaneously both frightening and farcical:

> I gave way to all the fury of disappointed hope and jealous passion. I was made the dupe of trick and cunning, killed with cold, sullen scorn; and, after all the agony I had suffered, could obtain no explanation why I was subjected to it. I was still to be tantalized, tortured, made the cruel sport of one for whom I would have sacrificed all. I tore the locket which contained her hair (and which I used to keep continually in my bosom, as

> the precious token of my dear regard) from my neck, and trampled it in pieces. I then dashed the little Bonaparte on the ground, and stamped upon it, as one of her instruments of mockery. I could not stay in the room; I could not leave it; my rage, my despair were uncontrollable. I shrieked curses on her name, and on her false love; and the scream I uttered (so pitiful and so piercing was it, that the sound of it terrified me), instantly brought the whole house, father, mother, lodgers and all, into the room. They thought I was destroying her and myself.

Can it be an accident that the two great texts on disappointed love in the period - Stendhal's *De l'Amour* and Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* – were both written by disappointed Bonapartists, by militant liberals whose hopes rose and fell with Napoleon? Certainly, what Bonaparte represented to Hazlitt and Stendhal was not simply a body of political ideas – republicanism, equality, meritocracy, but also, more concretely, a certain model of masculinity, a model that did not celebrate aristocracy, breeding or physical stature, but genius, enthusiasm, and the individual energy of the man of destiny.

The anger and frustration in the passage quoted above is not, I would suggest, solely directed towards Sarah, but also, through her and beyond her, to the figure of the 'little Bonaparte', which serves as an ironic reminder of H.'s failure to rechannel disappointed public hopes into the private realm, and also, yet more painfully, as a symbol of his defeatedness, his outmodedness, and the pathetic diminution of his masculinity. On smashing the Bonaparte to the ground, H. utters a shriek so loud and piercing that everyone in the house assumes it must have come from a woman: he has been unmanned by love and history; this is his personal Waterloo.

In the *Lyrical Ballads* and his *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807, Wordsworth had made much of the imagination's capacity to attach deep significance to apparently mean or trivial things; a ruined cottage, a withered thorn, clouds, leech gatherers, daffodils. So too in Rousseau's *Confessions* apparently insignificant objects were often the prompt for the most sublime personal associations. Hazlitt saw a democratic quality in all this. To him such highly individual imaginative investments were a potent antidote to the gaudy pomp of aristocracy in Burke and Byron. It celebrated poetic egotism as the battering-ram of feudal power:

> When Rousseau called out – *Ah! Voilà de la pervenche!* in a transport of joy at the sight of the periwinkle, because he had first seen this little blue flower with Madame Warens thirty years before, I cannot help thinking that any astonishment expressed at the sight of a palm-tree, or even of Pompey's Pillar, is vulgar compared to this!

Characteristically, in the Cockney drama of *Liber Amoris*, the fetish object is not a flower but a kitschy ornament, and its cultivation as a symbolic focus for H.'s hopes is all too easy to deride. But the little Bonaparte is a resonant symbol nonetheless, not merely of the diminutive general's extraordinary career as a man of talent, but also, more generally, of the revolutionary potential of investing in little things.

Seen in this light, the continual emphasis that Hazlitt makes on the objective insignificance of the story, and the absolute littleness of its setting, becomes a means of celebrating the imagination's extraordinary power to remake and redeem nature, to find value in common experience. The problem is, of course, as Hazlitt himself recognised in relation to Wordsworth's poetry, that the greater the emphasis on the imagination as a faculty for bringing life and

bestowing value, the greater the corresponding sense of the outside world as something in and of itself, fixed and dead. And indeed, the more Pygmalion-like H. becomes in his desire to bring Sarah to life through love, the more her reticence is construed as something not merely corrupt but deathly.

And so it proves. Some time after the Bonaparte-smashing incident, H. and S. come to a kind of rapprochement, and S. agrees to try and see whether the little ornament can be mended. In real life, there seems to have been a certain ambiguous sweetness in Sarah Walker's behaviour at this time. Fear may have had something to do with it, since as P. G. Patmore pointed out in one of the letters contained in Part II, the entire family was, by this point, not a little afraid of him. More concretely, however, there was also the fact that during this period Hazlitt had expressed a wish to rent all the free rooms in the house, which led Mrs. Walker to urge Sarah to make an extra effort to be friendly. Scarcely any of these economic concerns are visible in *Liber Amoris*. Instead the emphasis is on the continuing sense of entitlement H. feels because of the intensity of his feelings, and on the cruelty of S's increasingly distant but still strangely ambiguous manner.

In the dénouement of *Liber Amoris*, H. briefly turns stalker, following S. on a trip to Somers Town, where she is supposedly going to visit her grandmother. Discovering Sarah walking in the street with 'a tall, rather well-looking man', H. is ignored by her completely, despite the fact that he twice crosses her path. Later H. recollects him to be John Tomkins, one of the Walkers' former lodgers, the one he had been most jealous of a few months before; and soon after he discovers that Sarah had been carrying on with this man at more or less the same time as she had been trifling with him. And in the closing pages of the book he is self-tormentingly exultant at having finally torn away her 'mask'.

One of Hazlitt's favourite Wordsworth poems was the famous 'Immortality Ode', which described how the Child's visionary idealism is slowly diluted as he becomes conscious of his mortality, and 'at length the Man perceives it die away / And fade into the light of common day'. The story that Wordsworth tells is entropic, even tragic, but there are consolations to be had from a growing sense of common humanity, and in recollections of the past. This sense of life as a tragic dwindling of early visionary promise was a profoundly persuasive one for Hazlitt, but he was far less able than Wordsworth to find 'strength in what remains behind'. Hence whenever he cited the Immortality Ode in his political or reflective essays, it was generally to lament the conquering of utopian idealism by the forces of cold, hard, historical reality, and to bemoan the imagination as a promise that is doomed to go unfulfilled. *Liber Amoris* is a poignant example of this, all the more poignant because it has the force of many previous disappointments, both political and professional, weighing upon it. But as with so many of Hazlitt's other reworkings of Wordsworth, the metropolitan context does transform it, and turn it into a theatrical revelation of disenchantment.

> Such is the creature on whom I had thrown away my heart and soul – one who was incapable of feeling the commonest emotions of human nature, as they regarded herself or anyone else. 'She had no feelings with respect to herself' she often said. She, in fact, knows what she is, and recoils from the good opinion or sympathy of others, which she feels to be founded on a deception; so that my overweening opinion of her must have appeared like irony, or direct insult. My seeing her in the street has gone a good way to satisfy me. Her manner there explains her manner in-doors to be conscious and overdone; and besides, she looks but indifferently. She is diminutive in stature, and her measured step and timid air do not suit these public airings. I am afraid she will soon grow common

> to my imagination, as well as worthless in herself. Her image seems fast 'going into the wastes of time', like a weed that the wave bears farther and farther from me. Alas! poor hapless weed, when I entirely lose sight of thee, and for ever, no flower will ever bloom on earth to glad my heart again!

A possible angel in the house, S. is confirmed (in H's mind at least) as a whore in the street – the change of setting and perspective helps rectify his former error. On first reading it's difficult to get beyond the sheer misogyny of this passage, but there are a number of other things going on here as well. One is the subtle shift, a very painful one for an old-style Jacobin to make, between the positive, rather democratic connotation of 'common' at the beginning of the passage, and the contemptuous flavour it carries later on. The phrase 'I am afraid she will soon grow common to my imagination' recalls that earlier accusation of his that Sarah was a 'common lodging-house decoy' with 'lips as common as the stairs'. The sense of commonness as something shared now evokes not common humanity but prostitution, and S is dismissed as having been unworthy of his love.

Liber Amoris is an ironic sequel to Rousseau's drama in that it describes a man who falls in love with a statue only for the statue to fail to come to life. The narrator H, who is as close to Hazlitt as it is possible to be, clearly thinks that it is an indictment of the world in general – and of S. in particular – that she has failed to live up to his dream of love. This is the irony of the story in his eyes. But the *book* keeps reminding us of just how solipsistic, how *un*common, that love was from the beginning, in the dialogues, in the fear of the family towards H, and in the sense of another, alternative history lurking somewhere beyond his consciousness. The book's ironic perspective is gained by stepping outside the studio of Pygmalion's imagination, and exploring the narrowness of *his* sympathy, not hers. By taking S outside into the street at the end the book finds a means of condemning her but also freeing her – from H's love, from the Jacobean drama of the lodging-house, and from the pressure of being a statue – and her drift into the wastes of time is also a return from the world of art to nature, and a 'fading into the light of common day'.

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Hazlitt versus Malthus

By SYBIL OLDFIELD

‘The mind revolts against certain opinions, as the stomach rejects certain foods’.

Characteristics in the manner of Rochefoucauld’s Maxims, 1823. (no. ciiivi)

HAZLITT PUT HIS CASE AGAINST MALTHUS’S *Essay on Population* in his *Reply to Malthus*, the first three Letters being published anonymously in Cobbett’s *Weekly Register* in May, 1807, when Hazlitt was 29.[1] He subsequently wrote ‘Mr. Malthus and the Edinburgh Reviewers’, in Cobbett’s *Weekly Political Register* in November 1810 – a riposte to a hostile ‘review’, one possibly written by Malthus himself in the *Edinburgh Review*. He published ‘Queries relating to the Essay on Population’ in *The Examiner* in October 1815, and reprinted four short pieces from his 1807 *Reply* in the *Morning Chronicle* and *Yellow Dwarf* of 1817; they were then, together with the 1815 ‘Queries’, slightly revised and collected as the five last essays in his book *Political Essays*, 1819. In 1825 he wrote his ‘Character of Mr. Malthus’ in *The Spirit of the Age* and in February 1826 he made his last, desperate attack on ‘The New School of Reform’, collected in *The Plain Speaker*. For twenty years, therefore, Hazlitt’s domestic bugbear was the social implication of Malthusianism, while his foreign bugbear was hereditary, absolutist `Legitimacy`. His unapologetic, class-based social Radicalism was never more fiercely and lucidly articulated than in his now little-read *A Reply to Malthus*.

I shall begin by summarizing the six heads under which Hazlitt attacked Malthus; then I shall connect that attack with the definition of his own ethics and aesthetics. Finally I shall claim that Hazlitt was a true social prophet.[2]

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[1] Hazlitt’s *A Reply to the Essay on Population by the Rev. T.R. Malthus* consists of two parts: a) Five *Letters* (104 pp.) referred to hereafter as *Reply*, followed by b) *Extracts from the Essay with Commentary and Notes*, (79 pp.) referred to hereafter as *Extracts.* All references are to A.R. Waller and Arnold Glover, eds. *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, London, J.M. Dent and Co., 1902, vol. iv.

[2] Hazlitt was not the only prophet denouncing the social consequences of Malthus’s theory at this time. See Blake’s *Song of Los*. (c. 1798?):

‘Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath?
Nor the Priest for Pestilence from the fen?
To restrain! to dismay! to thin!
The inhabitants of mountain and plain;
In the day of full-feeding prosperity;
And the night of delicious songs.

‘Shall not the Councellor throw his curb
Of Poverty on the laborious?
To fix the price of labour:
To invent allegoric riches: …

To turn man From his path,
To restrain the child from the womb,

‘To cut off the bread from the city,
That the remnant may learn to obey, …

And Blake’s later work *Vala*, or *The Four Zoas* (c. 1807-1815?) has Urizen advise in Night the Seventh: …let Moral Duty tune your tongue,

1. First, Hazlitt focuses on Malthus's own initial motive in writing – his wish to attack the Godwinian utopian social theory of Human Perfectabilitarianism (in *Political Justice*) by pointing out the indisputable fact that we inhabit a limited earth with a limited fertility but that we witness a continual increase in human population. (The famous arithmetical and geometric ratios). Sooner or later our species will overpopulate the globe – with catastrophic social consequences. How does Hazlitt counter that diagnosis and prognosis? He argues that Malthus confused *potential* over-population with the *actual* under-population of our planet, taking no account either of the human capacity for technical progress in increasing the fertility of the earth nor the human capacity for social adaptation, including 'medical advances' – an oblique reference to birth control, – migration to unpopulated areas and the radical redistribution of the earth's resources in order to avert famine.

2. Hazlitt points out that Malthus wrote as though the human sex drive were an uncontrollable appetite, an essential survival need, just like our need to eat and drink, and equally unamenable to any restraints of rationality or self-control. That simply was not true.[3]

3. Hazlitt attacks Malthus's insistence that the evils of war, famine, and plague, those riders of the *Apocalypse*, are 'necessary' evils to check population growth and therefore not really evil, properly understood, at all. Hazlitt's Letter 111 begins by saying that Malthus would seem to have turned our whole moral world based on humane values 'topsy-turvy':

> The common notions that [had used to prevail] … were that life is a blessing, and that the more people could be maintained in any state in a tolerable degree of health, comfort and decency, the better: that want and misery are not desirable in themselves, that famine is not to be courted for its own sake, that wars, disease and pestilence are not what every friend of his country or his species should pray for in the first place; that vice in its different shapes is a thing, that the world could do very well without, and that if it could be got rid of altogether, it would be a great gain.[4]

(I hear Dickens, a great admirer of Hazlitt, and his later irony here).

Regarding Hazlitt's own faith in social progress, writing here in 1807 after the defeat of his Revolutionary hopes,[5] he has to confess that deep down, he too, is no longer a great optimist – but he cannot bear, on that account, to surrender all hope of hope:

> Perhaps if the truth were known, I am as little sanguine in my expectations of any great improvement to be made in the condition of human life either by the visions of philosophy, or by downright, practical, parliamentary projects, as Mr. Malthus himself can be. But … [it] requires some exertion and some freedom of the will to keep even where we are…. Take away the hope and the tendency to improvement,

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But be your hearts harder than the nether millstone…
Compell the poor to live upon a Crust of bread…
& when a man looks pale
With labour and abstinence say he looks healthy and happy
And when his children sicken let them die; there are enough
Born, even too many & our Earth will be overrun
Without these arts.

(G. E. Bentley, Jr. ed., *William Blake's Writings*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

[3] See *Reply*, pp. 54-5 and p. 62.

[4] See *Reply*, p. 18.

[5] See my essay 'What were the leaders of the Revolution to do?': Hazlitt on Revolutionary Terror in his *Life of Napoleon*', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, ns 132 (October 2005) pp.104-109.

> and there is nothing left to counteract the opposite never-failing tendency of human things 'from bad to worse'.[6]

Malthus, however, was put in such a panic by his own mathematical ratios that he regarded all increase in population, no matter how happy and prosperous in the actual present, as constituting merely the harbinger of an inevitable, eventual social disaster.

4. Hazlitt attacks Malthus's *relish* for his grim scenario, his wallowing in examples of brutalizing 'squalid poverty' – especially that of 'savages'. Hazlitt declared himself shocked by Malthus's insistent, 'civilized' revulsion:

> There is something in this mis-placed and selfish fastidiousness, that shocks me more than the objects of it. It does not lead to compassion but to hatred. We … lose the passive feelings of disgust excited in us by others in the active desire to inflict pain upon them. Aversion too easily turns into malice. Mr. Malthus …triumphs over the calamities and degradation of his fellow-creatures…. Through a dreary space of 300 'chill and comfortless' pages, he ransacks all quarters of the globe … in anxious search of calamities … and eagerly gropes into every hole and corner of wretchedness to collect evidence in support of his grand misery-scheme…. His tongue grows wanton in the praise of famine.[7]

I am struck in that passage by Hazlitt's implicit question: 'What was psychologically wrong with Malthus that he should *enjoy* thinking, *want* to think, the terrible things that he thought?' For not only did Malthus enjoy his pessimistic prophesying, he also enjoyed arguing that the poor had no right *not* to starve. Hazlitt quotes Malthus's declaration that he felt 'bound in justice and honour *formally to disclaim the right of the poor to support*'.[8] At which Hazlitt explodes that Malthus '[engrafted] the vices of a bad heart on a perverted understanding'.[9] For did he not get a sadistic satisfaction from his ruthless, imaginary infliction of necessary pain, when he advocated banning charity, forbade the poor to marry, and punished poor mothers for giving birth to still poorer babies? The Rev. Malthus's humanity, said Hazlitt was 'of a singular cast… He is a kind of … patriotic Jack-Ketch [the hangman]. He never flinches when there is any evil to be done, that good may come of it'.[10] A right-wing Robespierre or Lenin.

In rooting Malthus's political and economic theories in that clergyman's own psychological propensities, Hazlitt was anticipating by a century Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1912):

> Philosophy answers to our need of forming a complete and unitary conception of the world and of life, and as a result of this conception, a feeling which gives birth to an inward attitude and even to outward action. But the fact is that this feeling, instead of being a consequence of this conception is the cause of it. Our philosophy – that is our mode of understanding or not understanding the world and life – springs from our feeling towards life itself. And life, like everything affective, has roots in subconsciousness, perhaps even in unconsciousness. It is not usually our ideas that make us optimists or pessimists, but it is our optimism or our pessimism, of

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[6] See *Reply*, p. 34.
[7] See *Reply*, p. 44 and footnote; and *Extracts*, p. 136.
[8] See *Extracts*, p. 138.
[9] See *Extracts*, p. 144.
[10] See *Extracts*, p. 165.

> physiological *or perhaps pathological* origin, as much the one as the other, that makes our ideas[11](my italics).

We might also note the contemporary philosopher Mary Midgley's reminder `that philosophical positions are not arrived at quite as impersonally as many philosophers would like to believe…. Even the most aseptic philosophical enquiry has a frame of reference defined at least in part by unargued intuitions and passions`.[12]

5. Hazlitt next attacks Malthus for his exclusive solicitude towards the rich and for his absolute refusal to indict the rich as the prime cause of inequality and the problem of hunger: 'It is to me pretty clear that as long as there are such passions as sloth and rapacity, these will be sufficient to account for the unequal division of property … by force or fraud'.[13] Far from entertaining any possibility of the re-distribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, however, Malthus actually insisted on enforcing 'the rights of the rich'.[14] Hazlitt's sense of justice was outraged:

> It is one thing to have a right to the produce of your own exertions, and another to have a right to the produce of the earth, that is, of the labour of others….[15] …To hear Mr. Malthus talk, one would suppose that the rich were really a very hard-working, ill-used people, who are not suffered to enjoy the earnings of their honest industry in quiet by a set of troublesome, unsatisfied, luxurious, idle people called *the poor*.[16] …Why does Mr. Malthus practise his demonstrations on the poor only? Why are they to have a perfect system of rights and duties prescribed to them? I do not see why they alone should be put to live on these *metaphysical* board wages … nor why it should be meat and rink to them, more than to others, to do the will of God. Mr. Malthus's gospel is preached only to the poor![17] …[Has not] Mr. Malthus been too much disposed to consider the rich as a sort of Gods upon earth?…[18]

In Hazlitt's England the rich privileged even their dogs over the poor:

> When I see a poor old man, who after a life of unceasing labour is obliged at last to beg his bread, driven from the door of the rich man by a surly porter, and half a dozen sleek well-fed dogs, kept for the pleasure of their master or mistress, jumping up from the fire-side, or bouncing out of their warm kennels upon him, I am, according to Mr. Malthus, [to think] … that by the laws of nature [the rich man] is bound to give [his superabundance] to his dogs, because if we suffer the poor to work upon our compassion at all, this will only embolden their importunity.[19]

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[11] Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*. New York, Dover Publications Inc. - reprint of 1921 English transl., London, Macmillan., ch.1, pp.2-3.
[12] See Raymond Tallis, review of Mary Midgley, *The Owl of Minerva*, (London: Routledge, 2005), in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 April, 2006.
[13] See *Reply*, p. 71.
[14] See *Extracts*, p. 125.
[15] See *Extracts*, p. 129.
[16] See *Extracts*, p. 131.
[17] See *Extracts*, p. 176.
[18] See Hazlitt's 'Queries relating to the *Essay on Population*', *Round Table* essays in *The Examiner*, October, 1815, reprinted in *Political Essays*, 1819, Query 17.
[19] See *Extracts*, pp. 136-7.

Although he was no longer a Christian, Hazlitt had had a thorough education in the *New Testament* which he put to eloquent use, quoting St. Matthew, xxiii, 4, on the rich who 'lay heavy burdens on the poor and needy, which they will not touch with one of their fingers'. [20]

Finally, as against Malthus' defence of the rights of the rich, Hazlitt insists on the rights of the poor. He reminds his readers of Condorcet's recent plan for a national savings fund into which all should contribute and which could be drawn upon to support the old, the sick, the widowed and the fatherless children. Malthus had opposed Condorcet's scheme because it would militate against prudent self-reliance by the poor at all times. Hazlitt quarrels with such an exclusive onus of total economic responsibility being placed upon the poor as though they alone were subject 'to this disease of population… In his division of human life, he has allotted to the poor *all* the misery'.[21]

Brilliantly, Hazlitt then quotes Malthus's own most pitiless prophecies and social prescriptions in order to condemn him out of his own mouth:

> Those who were born after the division of property [into private ownership] would come *into a world already possessed*…. The members of a family which was grown too large … *could not then demand a part of the surplus produce of others as a debt of justice. It has appeared from the inevitable laws of human nature some human beings will be exposed to want. These are the unhappy persons who in the great lottery of life have drawn a blank. All who were in want of food would be urged by imperious necessity to offer their labour in exchange*…

[The sick, the old, the babies?]

> A man who is born into a world already possessed,… if the society does not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food and in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him.[22]

'[There] are plenty of vacant covers', retorts Hazlitt, 'but that the guests at the head of the table have seized upon all those at the lower end, before the table was full'.

As against the Malthusian right of the rich to enjoy superfluity in the midst of hunger, Hazlitt contends 'that the mass of the labouring community always have a right to *strike*, to demand what wages they please'.[23] An outspoken Radical, he advocates repealing the Combination Acts against forming Trade Unions; he wants 'a general combination of the labouring poor' to insist on a living wage as against the combination of the rich to monopolize and raise the price of corn; he wants price controls on food and a rise in wages in hard times, and he wants, *pace* Malthus, to see relief distributed in time of scarcity, in relation to the price of grain.[24] The 'natural order', by which people starve in times of scarcity, was to Hazlitt a very artificial order which might – and should be – artificially redressed through enlightened Poor Law provision.[25] Hazlitt was as appalled as he was incredulous at Malthus's proposal to abolish Poor Relief altogether lest one increase the number of paupers who apply.

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[20] See *Extracts*, p. 150.
[21] See *Extracts*, p. 130.
[22] Malthus quoted in *Extracts*, pp. 135-36.
[23] See *Extracts*, p. 133.
[24] See *Extracts*, pp. 149-50.
[25] See *Extracts*, p. 153.

But it is when Malthus blames the poor themselves for all their suffering, when he condemns them for their 'carelessness and want of frugality', that Hazlitt rises to a climax of incandescent outrage. First he quotes Malthus himself once more:

> The labouring poor, to use a vulgar expression, seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their whole attention; and they seldom think of the future. Even when they have an opportunity of saving, they seldom exercise it; but all that they earn beyond their present necessities, goes, generally speaking, to the alehouse.[26]

Hazlitt's tremendous rejoinder begins:

> The poor live from hand to mouth, because, in general, they have no hopes of living in any other way. They seldom think of the future, because they are afraid to think of it…. If what they earn beyond their immediate necessities goes to the ale-house, it is because the severe labour they undergo requires some relaxation, because they are willing to forget the *work-house,* their old age, and the prospect of their wives and children starving, and to drown care in a mug of ale, in noise, and mirth, and laughter, and old ditties, and coarse jokes, and hot disputes; and in that sense of short-lived comfort, independence and good-fellowship, which is necessary to relieve the hurt mind and jaded body…. No human patience can submit to everlasting toil and self-denial…. You reduce them almost to the condition of brutes, and then grudge them their coarse enjoyments.[27]

That defence of the labourer's recourse to ale reminds one irresistibly of the classic climactic passage in Scott's *The Antiquary* of 1816, when Maggie Mucklebackit, the fisherman's wife, gives her unanswerable defence of the fisherman's need for a dram. (The local gentleman, Jonathan Oldbuck, has just expressed his hope that the local whiskey distillery will stay closed down for the rest of his lifetime):

> 'Aye, aye – it's easy for your honour, and the like o' you gentlefolks, to say sae, that hae stouth and routh, and fire and fending, and meat and claith, and sit dry and canny b the fire-side – But an' ye wanted fire, and meat and dry claise, and were deeing o' cauld, and had a sair heart, whilk is warst ava'.and had just tippence in your pouch, wadna ye be glad to buy a dram wi't, to be eliding and claise, and supper and heart's ease into the bargain, till the morn's morning?' [28]

Is it just conceivable that Scott might have read – and remembered – the long, anonymous attack on Malthus (no friend of his) in Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*? Or was it enough that Scott should have had 'five hundred hearts beating in his bosom?'[29]

If the poor had no right to exist themselves, they had even less right to beget and bear children according to Malthus:

> The common people … are themselves the cause of their own poverty; …[they] ought not to bring beings into the world for whom [they] cannot find the means of support… [When] the wages of labour will not maintain a family, it is an

[26] See *Extracts*, p. 157.
[27] See *Extracts*, pp. 157-8.
[28] *The Antiquary*, vol.1, ch.11.
[29] See Hazlitt, 'On the New School of Reform', *The Plain Speaker*, 1826.

> incontrovertible sign that *their king and country do not want more subjects*, … that if they marry in this case, so far from fulfilling a duty to society, they are throwing a useless burden on it; and that they are acting directly contrary to the will of God.[30]

Resistance to this view of things is useless, Malthus preached, because it was against Nature, against God – and against the Government which, however benevolent, is powerless to alleviate hunger. Malthus advocated that one to two years after his proposed abolition of poor relief, no poor child 'should ever be entitled to parish assistance', and any private charity to the starving would have to be received with the most humble gratitude.[31] Then, says Hazlitt, Malthus would indeed have achieved his anti-Godwinian Utopia. We would call it a Dystopia; Hazlitt called it 'Euthanasia':

> … the struggle would be over, each class would fulfil the task assigned by heaven, the rich would oppress the poor without remorse, the poor would submit to oppression with pious gratitude and resignation, … there would no longer be any seditions, tumults, complaints, petitions, partisans of liberty, … no grumbling, no repining, no discontented men of talents proposing reforms, … but we should all have the same gaiety and lightness of heart, that a man feels when he is seized with the plague,… [and] knows that his disorder is without cure.[32]

But although the men might be puzzled into acceptance of that alleged 'grinding law of necessity', Hazlitt is 'afraid that the *women* might prove refractory…. Surely the children of the poor are as good as puppy-dogs!' Or as the Squire's new hunter? So might run any poor wife's indignant curtain-lecture. A mob might then gather in Mr. Ma1thus's parish, and our unfortunate Essayist be 'ordered to the lamp-post ["à la laterne!"] … his book committed to the flames'.[33] For when the poor see their 'children starving at the doors of the rich', Hazlitt warns menacingly, they see also that '[it] is not by their own fault alone that they have fallen into this degradation; those who have brought them into it ought to be answerable for some of the consequences'.[34] That is what might happen, Hazlitt threatens, in the immediate future. Given ever more crushing poverty under a pitiless Malthusian state-regimen, however, the poor might actually become so browbeaten as to go under, their spirit of resistance totally broken. ('Incendiary' Cobbett was not the only incendiary writing then).

Can one connect Hazlitt's passionate, socio-political anti-Malthus polemic with his much better-known later writings on experience and on literature? I see Malthus as Hazlitt's anti-self who helped him existentially to define his own self in opposition. How do we know who we are? We know we are not X. Hazlitt knew that he was not Malthus. Malthus' self-declared credo ran: '[The] principle of utility [is] the great foundation of morals'.[35] In contrast, Hazlitt countered what he called Malthus' 'flinty heart'[36] by saying 'I hope I shall sometimes be allowed to appeal to my *feelings* [and] the common sympathies of our nature … against Mr. Malthus's authority'[37](my italics). It was a case of the ever-recurrent opposition of tough mindedness against tenderness of heart: reason condemned as unfeelingness versus feeling despised as sentimentality.

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[30] See *Extracts*, pp. 164-5.
[31] See *Extracts*, pp. 173-4.
[32] See *Extracts*, p. 178.
[33] See *Extracts*, pp. 178-9.
[34] See *Extracts*, p. 134.
[35] See *Extracts*, p. 162.
[36] See *Extracts*, p. 138.
[37] See *Extracts*, p. 143.

Fellow-feeling was Hazlitt's grounding for his ethics, his politics and his literary response. But in order to be capable of fellow-feeling, one has to believe that others are as emotionally vulnerable as oneself. Hazlitt endorsed Rousseau's *Third Maxim* in *Emile*:

> The pity we feel for others is proportionate, not to the amount of the evil, but to the feelings we attribute to the sufferers. We only pity the wretched so far as we think they feel the need of pity … the rich console themselves for the harm done by them to the poor, by the assumption that the poor are too stupid to feel.[38]

This human capacity for fellow-feeling is our only counter to our other tendency – callous self-interest. *Hazlitt's Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, hammered out just two to three years before his *Reply to Malthus*, had argued that humans *are* capable of disinterested transcendence of self through the faculty of sympathetic imagination. In contrast, 'Hazlitt took the doctrines of Malthus to be … a pernicious outcome of allowing the erroneous *self*-interest theory to stand unchallenged'[39] (my italics). His white-hot anger, revulsion – and dread – between 1807 and 1815, at the righteous social callousness of Malthusianism, strengthened the affective base for all Hazlitt's later writing on experience and literature. For example, poetry (by which, like Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*, he meant all imaginative literature), is for him the great expression and inspirer of human fellow-feeling in every culture. In his opening lecture 'On Poetry in General' in *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818, Hazlitt declares his literary credo:

> Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. …If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider…. It strengthens the desire of good…. [It] shews us the rich depths of the human soul. … makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life; tugs at the heart-strings; … and rouses the whole man within us.

Every phrase there, appealing to our sense of common, universal humanity rooted in our most intense personal experience, is un-Malthusian, anti-Malthusian, for it assumes both an equal human right to live and a view of all human life as rooted in emotion rather than in rationality. 'I felt before I thought' as Rousseau said in his *Confessions* – one of Hazlitt's sacred texts. Human feeling, the pulse of the passions, has been the same and as well understood, for thousands of years past, Hazlitt believed.

In his 'Lecture on Shakespeare and Milton' in *Lectures on the English Poets*, Hazlitt declares Shakespeare the greatest literary genius of the world because his work 'was like the genius of humanity … all the people that ever lived are there'. And writing of *Measure for Measure*, in *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), Hazlitt seems to claim Shakespeare himself as the greatest of all Anti-Malthusians:

> Shakespeare was in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies; [we remember Malthus's fastidious antipathy to 'savages' and to the brutish, fornicating, self-reproducing, ale-downing poor] and his talent lay in *sympathy* with human nature, in *all* its shapes, degrees, depressions, and

[38] Rousseau, Emile, (1760), London, Dent,1963, Book 1V, p.186.
[39] See A.C.Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age, The Life and Times of William Hazlitt*. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000, ch. 6, pp. 112-116, for a short discussion of the context and reception of Hazitt's *Reply*. For a summary of Hazlitt's critique of Malthus see Kenneth Smith, *The Malthusian Controversy*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, pp. 70-81.

> elevations…. He showed the greatest knowledge of humanity with the greatest *fellow-feeling* for it (my italics).

Even the convicted murderer Barnardine rouses Shakespeare's – and our – sympathy when he refuses, in a very un-Malthusian way, to get up and let himself be hanged.

Hazlitt's essay 'On Reason and Imagination' (1826) is the essay where he most explicitly links humane ethics with the emotional effect of sympathy. It begins with characteristic passionate directness: 'I hate people who have no notion of any thing but generalities, and forms, and creeds, and naked propositions' – he might well have added 'of arithmetic and geometric ratios'.

> Men act from passion; and we can only judge of passion by sympathy …Those evils that inflame the imagination and make the heart sick, [Hazlitt has been evoking the torment of the African slaves' *Middle Passage*] ought not to leave the head cool…. I would not wish a better or a more philosophical standard of morality, than that we should think and feel towards others as we should, if it were our own case… [As for Bentham's and Malthus's calculus of utility], a calculation of the mere ultimate advantages, without regard to natural feelings and affections, may improve the external face and physical comforts of society, but will leave it heartless and worthless in itself…

Hazlitt's final attack on Malthus and his utilitarian disciples occurs in the dialogue between a rationalist and a sentimentalist in *The Plain Speaker* essay 'The New School of Reform' (1826). Hazlitt lambasts their whole philosophy as 'a dull antithesis to human nature':

> This is their *idea of a perfect commonwealth*: where each member performs his part in the machine, taking care of himself and no more concerned about his neighbours, than the iron and wood-work, the pegs and nails in the spinning-jenny. Good screw! good wedge! good ten-penny nail!…[They] *snub* and lecture the poor *gratis*…. There is not enough of evil already in the world, but we must harden our feelings against the miseries that daily, hourly present themselves to our notice,. . .

It is worth looking at one of those miseries in more detail in order fully to understand Hazlitt's abhorrence of Malthusianism in action. He asks, regarding the Utilitarians, 'Do they not wish to extend "the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers" by putting a stop to population – to relieve distress by withholding charity, to remedy disease by shutting up hospitals?' Shutting up hospitals? In a recent *Westminster Review* essay, July 1824, the Malthusian author of the essay 'Charitable Institutions', had advocated their wholesale abolition, including that of the Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital, and had quoted a description of women in the very last stage of pregnancy or already actually in labour, struggling to reach a Lying-in hospital somewhere in London, commenting:

> We agree with Mr. Highmore that nothing can be more shocking than that women should be running around about in such a state, totally unprovided; but we would ask him whether the occurrence of such events is not entirely owing to the existence of Lying-in hospitals. If there were no such receptacles women would then be left to their own prudence, and might, perhaps, reflect upon the inconveniences that necessarily attend a state of pregnancy, and guard against them before-hand. The

> principle of population assures us, that the miseries of the poor can only be provided against by their own prudence.

Hazlitt's response to such Pharisaism is expressed in his Characteristic no. ciiivi:
'The mind revolts against certain opinions, as the stomach rejects certain foods'.

Conclusion.

Hazlitt did not live to see the 1834 New Poor Law that attempted to abolish pauperism by punishing the poor for their poverty, withholding every form of 'out-relief', bringing back slavery into Britain in the shape of compulsory twelve hours' daily unpaid hard labour in the workhouse, separating husbands from wives, parents from children, brothers from sisters, socially stigmatising them through workhouse uniform (with shaved heads for the children) and all this on an official starvation diet that was part of the 'lesser eligibility principle'. Conditions in the workhouse had to be made deliberately worse than any suffering outside it, in order to cut the number of claimants. But Hazlitt had seen it coming. On the very first page of his *Reply to Malthus' Essay on Population* he had written already in 1807: 'Mr. Malthus' reputation may, I fear, prove fatal to the poor of this country'. He was right.

University of Sussex

The 2007 Elian Birthday Toast

By DICK WATSON

The 2007 Elian Birthday Lunch was held on Saturday, 17 February at the Royal College of General Practitioners, Kensington, London.

IN PROPOSING THE TOAST TO THE IMMORTAL MEMORY of Charles Lamb this year, I have two things in mind. The first is that this year marks the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Tales from Shakspear*. I shall not dwell on the *Tales* in detail, because this Society once heard what I think is the finest discussion of the topic, Professor Tom Craik's Ernest Crowsley Lecture of 1984; and in the same number of the *Bulletin* there is the best discussion of the early editions by Dr. D. G. Wilson. But the *Tales* were a notable achievement; as Tom Craik put it, they succeeded in making Shakespeare accessible to children by taking a play and being 'faithful to its spirit but not necessarily to its details'. Mary found *All's Well that Ends Well* the most difficult, perhaps not surprisingly; it 'teazed me more than all the rest put together'. My own favourite is *Cymbeline*, in which the extraordinary final scene – that scene which Bernard Shaw though so complicated, that he wrote *Cymbeline Refinished* – is related with a remarkable clarity. Mary's treatment of the Queen and Cloten is exemplary in telling us what happened to them but also in its firm dismissal of them as blots on the landscape:

> How Cymbeline's wicked queen, through despair of bringing her projects to pass, and touched with remorse of conscience, sickened and died, having first lived to see her foolish son Cloten slain in a quarrel which he had provoked, are events too tragical to interrupt this happy conclusion by more than merely touching upon. It is sufficient that all were made happy, who were deserving;…

2007 is also important for another anniversary, one that has been widely noted: the passing of the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Lamb was sympathetic to the campaign by nature, reading, and experience. Cowper, one of his favourite poets, had had plenty to say on the topic, and the Lambs were very friendly with Thomas and Catherine Clarkson, whom they visited at Bury St. Edmunds for a visit that Mary Lamb described as more memorable than the visit to the Lake District. Clarkson, more than anyone else except Granville Sharp, was responsible for the campaign, which was led in Parliament by Wilberforce. Lamb liked Clarkson, although in 1806 he described him as 'somewhat fidgety, but a good man'. No doubt Clarkson *was* fidgety and on edge, as the time approached for yet another attempt to get the Bill through. When they were at Bury St. Edmunds, Mary Lamb helped the Clarksons' son Tom to rob a cherry tree; they seem to have been saved from any serious consequences by the Clarksons' cook, and Mary remembered the episode with the glee. In December 1808 the Clarksons sent a Suffolk turkey to London, which delighted Mary and Charles even more, she wrote: 'because he is fonder of good eating than I am, though I am not amiss in this way'.

The bond between the Lambs and the Clarksons was built upon a shared sense of the political and social evil that needed to be rooted out. They shared a fundamental humanity with a whole network of people to whom an abhorrence of the dreadful trade was as natural as breathing. Many of them were Quakers, people whom both Lamb and Clarkson admired. When Wordsworth wrote a sonnet to Clarkson, beginning 'Clarkson! It was an obstinate hill to climb', he was expressing what had often been felt but never so well expressed; that Clarkson had spent his life, as Granville Sharp had done in the cause of humanity and justice. And Lamb, like Wordsworth, had an acute sense of fairness, and a strong compassion for those who were the victims of a cruel and oppressive system.

His admiration may have stretched to Wilberforce also, for his part in getting the Bill through Parliament; but the Evangelical piety of the Clapham Sect would not have been to Lamb's taste. In 1800, when Coleridge almost got him to write for *The Morning Post*, he was intending to make a little sport with 'Mr. Pitt, Mr. Wilberforce, Mrs. Fitzherbert, the Devil &c. Gentry, dipt in Styx all over'. This may have been no more than the kind of general feeling that all politicians were fair game; but Lamb's distaste for Wilberforce went deeper than this, certainly in later years. Wilberforce was notorious for being strait-laced, Lamb included him in a letter to Bernard Barton in 1824 complaining about Sunday being spoilt by too much strictness and church going. Office workers, as Lamb knew from experience, needed Sunday as a holiday. In 'The Superannuated Man' he had written of the drudgery of work 'in the irksome confinement of an office', with 'prison days prolonged through middle age down to decrepitude and silver hairs, without hope of release or respite'. This was its own slavery, not as horrible as the middle passage, but still slavery. Sunday was a day off, but he found it gloomy. Evangelicals such as the Clapham sect had turned it into a joyless day, and Wilberforce, he thought, 'would turn the six days into sevenths', 'And those 3 smiling seasons of the year/ Into a Russian winter'. It is a marvellous image for a goodness that has become oppressive.

Lamb earns our respect and our love for his steadfast adherence to an un-oppressive and natural good. It is, we can see, a Shakespearean rather than a Wilberforcean good. We find it in Lamb's own life and experience, and in the final sentence of the prefact to the *Tales of Shakespear*, in which he hopes that the child will grow up to know the plays in later years, and that they will prove

> Enrichers of the fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thought, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thought and actions, to teach you courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity; for of examples, teaching these virtues, his pages are full.

I find it hard to think of a better way to describe what is important in Shakespeare, and in other great writers; and why I became a teacher of English literature. And we who admire Lamb for saying that so clearly, also love him because we can find the same things in his own pages. It is in that spirit that I invite you to rise and drink the toast to THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB.

J. R. Watson and Mary Wedd

Pamela Woof and Felicity James

Elians at the 2007 Birthday Annual Luncheon and Toast

Rescues and Rescuers among the Romantics

What follows is the response to the 2007 Elian Birthday Toast:

By PAMELA WOOF

No rescue? What, a prisoner? I am e'en
The natural fool of fortune. (*History of King Lear,* scene 20)

And the mad Lear sets off at a run pursued by two gentlemen. When we are born, he has just told the blinded, eyeless Gloucester,

We cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools *(Ibid.)*

After relinquishing his throne, he had been determined not to cry at his daughter Regan's cruelty:

You think I'll weep,
No, I'll not weep
I have full cause of weeping… *(Ibid.,* scene 7)

Full cause indeed, and his further experience only taught him that a man may become entirely a man of salt,

use his eyes for garden water-pots
Ay, and laying autumn's dust. (*Ibid*., scene 20)

But Shakespeare at this late point provides some rescue. 'Be your tears wet?' (*Ibid*., scene 21), he asks his new-found daughter, Cordelia, as her crying from compassion brings healing to the 'great breach' in the father's 'abusèd nature'. Such rescue from the heart totally changes things, and to be a prisoner now for Lear is not at all to see himself as the 'natural fool of fortune', but to feel specially blessed, to 'take upon's the mystery of things'; he urges Cordelia,

Come, let's away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage. (*Ibid*., scene 24)

But the singing turned to hanging for Cordelia and to dying for Lear. Shakespeare could do nothing else; he had so, in Charles Lamb's words, put Lear through a 'living martyrdom', so exposed the 'flaying of his feelings alive' (*The Reflector,* 1811) that the playwright could no longer follow his source material: his Lear could not be rescued; there could be no restoration to the throne as there was in the old Chronicles, or in Spenser; there could be no living and loving Cordelia. Lamb sums it up: a fair 'dismissal from the stage of life' was 'the only decorous thing for him'.

Yet audiences could not bear it, and for a hundred and fifty years, from 1681 to Macready in 1838 – with a brief, unsuccessful attempt by Kean in 1823 to restore Shakespeare's ending – *King Lear* was played in Nahum Tate's 1681 version. In this there is no truth-telling Fool to add gall to Lear's bitterness, and alongside a joyful return to his throne, this Lear gives his blessing to the marriage of Edgar and his daughter Cordelia.

Dr Johnson, in his editorial notes to the play in 1765, endorsed the audience's preference, since 'all reasonable beings naturally love justice'; he continued:

> If my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.

Writers of the Romantic period, concerned, as one would expect, with individual response rather than 'general suffrage', often avoided the theatre where Tate's version was played with Edmund Kean as Lear. The 'old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick' made Lamb feel in 1811 that 'the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted'. For Hazlitt in 1820 'the most that Mr Kean did was to make some single hits here and there' (*London Magazine,* June 1820). That rescuing of Lear by Nahum Tate, despite the 'general suffrage' supporting it, seemed to mean a diminishment of the whole play, and the Romantic writers preferred to the stage the fullness of imaginative suffering as it inheres in the poetry. For Coleridge, who said of Shakespeare, 'I have been almost daily reading him since I was ten years old' ('The Drama Generally and Public Taste', *Literary Remains), Lear* was 'the most tremendous effort of Shakespeare as a poet' (*Table Talk*, 29 December 1822), his greatest poem. For Lamb, 'while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear – we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur' ('On the Tragedies of Shakespeare', *The Reflector,* 1811). For Keats, in his sonnet 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again', the 'old oak forest' of the play – incidentally Keats's image here hardly differs from Dr Johnson's own view of Shakespeare's plays as 'a forest in which oaks extend their branches . . .' (*Preface to Shakespeare,* 1765) – for Keats the 'old oak forest' *King Lear*, in his sonnet, entailed a 'fierce dispute' that he had to 'burn through' alone, and that would 'consume' him in its fire. It meant for him the Sublime. For these writers, at least in terms of this tragedy of Shakespeare's, the idea of rescue was reductive of life's darkness and of man's engagement with that darkness.

Likewise, the painters. Artists of the Romantic period were commissioned by Josiah and James Boydell to render in oils for their new Pall Mall Shakespeare Gallery – and for subsequent engravings – their responses to the plays, and the artists too seemed to respond to reading rather than to theatrical experience: romantic landscapes, distant vistas, sunny glades and huge trees attest to the freedom of the imagination in depicting scenes from *As You Like It*, and James Barry's 1786-7 *Lear Weeping over the Body of Cordelia* (now in the Tate) leaves us in no doubt that Shakespeare's tragic text was preferred to Tate's staging of a happy ending. But, to return to the writers: rejecting Tate's optimism as they did, how did they, modern creative spirits, how did they deal with the all too human longing for rescue?

Coleridge, in his mid-twenties, recalls an illuminating escapade of his childhood; he was six or seven when his elder brother not only minced his cheese against his known wishes, but - Coleridge having flown at him – this same Frank pretended serious injury and then 'gave me a

severe blow in the face' as the smaller boy hung over him, 'moaning and in a great fright' that in his anger at the cheese mincing he had felled his brother. Making again for Frank, and now with a knife as well as with renewed passion, Coleridge's violence was frustrated by his mother, and he ran away 'to a hill at the bottom of which the Otter flows, about a mile from Ottery'. There he stayed, and stayed all night, fitfully sleeping, rolling to within three yards of the river, a thorn bush, he says, pulled over him for a blanket in the stormy night, unable to move in the cold waking dawn or attract attention. As the previous night had fallen, Coleridge recalls

> taking out a little shilling book which had, at the end, morning & evening prayers, I very devoutly repeated them – thinking *at the same time* with inward & gloomy satisfaction, how miserable my Mother must be!

Such prayerful attention to God had drawn down some possible divine response in that, half the town having been up all night, ponds and river dragged, the boy cryed by the Town Crier, his own feeble voice was ultimately heard and he was carried home:

> I remember, & never shall forget, my father's face as he looked upon me while I lay in the servant's arms – so calm, and the tears stealing down his face; for I was the child of his old age – My Mother, as you may suppose, was outrageous with joy – in rushed a *young Lady*, crying out – 'I hope, you'll whip him, Mrs Coleridge!' This woman still lives at Ottery, & neither Philosophy or Religion have been able to conquer the antipathy which I *feel* towards her, whenever I see her – I was put to bed & recovered in a day or so – but I was certainly injured – For I was weakly & subject to the ague for many years after'. (Coleridge, *Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs, I, 352-5).

The lost child was found; there was rescue, but it was imperfect: Coleridge was subject to the ague for many years after, but then his appeal to God had been less than perfect for it was accompanied by an inward and gloomy satisfaction at the thought of 'how miserable my Mother must be.' Humanity was fallen for Coleridge, certainly his own, and he could perhaps never envisage or feel deserving of total rescue. Indeed, the opposite: images of abandonment litter his poetry. Here, for instance, in desolated mood, in April 1802, Coleridge finds in the wind's music the voice

> of a little Child
> Upon a heathy Wild,
> Not far from home, but it has lost its way –
> And now moans low in utter grief and fear –
> And now screams loud, and hopes to make its Mother hear!

His own boyhood experience must somehow be behind this, but Coleridge expressly says in these Dejection verses written to Sara Hutchinson that he was thinking of such a 'tender Lay' 'as William's self had made'. But Wordsworth had made no such 'tender Lay'. He did indeed have a lost girl, Lucy Gray, and she, alongside Coleridge's own earlier self, must surely be a presence in the 1802 wind that sounds to the poet like a bewildered child. Yet Lucy Gray had been given

no such fear to express; she neither moaned low nor screamed loud in hopes to make her Mother hear, nor was she offered rescue. Wordsworth's narrative simply tells us that

> A storm came on before its time,
> She wandered up and down,
> And many a hill did Lucy climb
> But never reached the Town.

And immediately the poem's focus moves to the searching and wretched parents who come upon the child's doomed footsteps; Lucy has gone, is dead; yet elusive, spirit-like, almost apparent, she is an aspect of the wind – and not an unhappy one:

> O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
> And never looks behind;
> And sings a solitary song
> That whistles in the wind.

Lucy has always been part of nature: in life,

> The sweetest thing that ever grew
> Beside a human door;

And death makes no difference; she sings still, and her song whistles in the wind. Wordsworth dwells not at all on the fear, panic or abandonment that Coleridge's poem would later dramatise, but rather on continuing presence within the natural world:

> Yet some maintain that to this day
> She is a living child
> That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
> Upon the lonesome Wild.

Yet is this enough? Despite Wordsworth's effort, it is hard to see this questionable ghostliness as rescue, particularly as Wordsworth allows into 'Lucy Gray' a reference to that saddest of all ballads 'The Babes in the Wood', known to Wordsworth most probably from school days and from Knox's *Elegant Extracts in Verse and Prose* (see Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770 – 1799*)[1]; more pertinently perhaps the old ballad would be recalled to mind in 1798-9, shortly before the composition of 'Lucy Gray', through Dorothy's and Wordsworth's purchase in Hamburg in September 1798 of the fourth edition of Bishop

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[1] Notice too James Beattie's ample re-telling of the woes of the 'orphan-babes' in his *Minstrel*, 1779 (I, stanzas 45 & 46) where Beattie's version of a line that features significantly in Wordsworth's Preface discussion is highlighted by quotation marks: 'For from the Town the man returns no more'. Wordsworth had been introduced to Beattie's writing whilst still at Hawkshead Grammar School by Thomas Bowman, the headmaster.

Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in which 'The Babes in the Wood', with slight variants, was printed.

Written in that German winter in Goslar, 'Lucy Gray' was published on Wordsworth's return in the new edition of *Lyrical Ballads* 1800. And for that volume, Dorothy and Coleridge hovering about him with help and ideas, Wordsworth wrote his Preface on the nature of poetry, particularly his own, and quoted in his discussion 'one of the most justly admired stanzas of "The Babes in the Wood:"'

> These pretty Babes with hand in hand
> Went wandering up and down;
> But never more they saw the Man
> Approaching from the Town.

This is not a long way from 'Lucy Gray's' verse:

> The storm came on before its time,
> She wandered up and down,
> And many a hill did Lucy climb
> But never reached the Town.

The ballad Babes had not been offered even the half-spiritual after-life in the song of the wind that Lucy had. There is a finality about their being covered with leaves by birds. The very pathos of the verse quoted by Wordsworth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, telling of the children's fruitless deathward wanderings, throws its long shadow forward to 'Lucy Gray' in the second volume, and the two verses are close enough for the echo to be remarked. This must at least darken Wordsworth's already scarcely confident suggestion for his own lost Lucy of some sort of partial rescue into the eternal life of nature.

The ink of the Preface was hardly dry – 'Wm & I were employed all the morning in writing an addition', wrote Dorothy on 5 October 1800; next day, 6 October, the decision was made 'not to print Christabel with the L.B.' and within the week Wordsworth was occupied, and pretty well occupied for two months, with his poem 'Michael', necessary now to fill up the pages left blank in the *Lyrical Ballads* volume in expectation of Coleridge's 'Christabel'. Wordsworth's stanzaic half-comic attempt at a shepherd poem was burned within the first month of work, and there followed a flood of blank verse, not all of it finally finding a place in the finished poem 'Michael'.[2] One rejected passage is indeed the story of a rescue:

> At the first falling of autumnal snow
> A shepherd and his son one day went forth . . .

So it begins, as a story, and it was a true story. The two were seeking 'a straggler of their flock', and from Grasmere to Helvellyn and beyond, Wordsworth has father and son peep from the mountain ridges 'Down into every glen'. The son then remembers that sheep always return to

[2] For the first full discussion of this stanzaic text and its relation with the finished 'Michael', see R. S. Woof, 'John Stoddart, *Michael*, and *Lyrical Ballads*', *Ariel*, April 1970, I, 2, 7-22.

the pastures where they had been first with their mothers, and so, rushing off alone, he climbs in thick storm and rain for three hours up the channel of a rocky brook:

> at length
> He spied the sheep upon a plot of grass,
> An island in the brook . . .
> Before the boy knew well what he had seen,
> He leapt upon the island with proud heart
> And with a prophet's joy. Immediately
> The sheep sprang forward to the further shore
> And was borne headlong by the roaring flood . . .

The boy is too afraid to leap back

> Cross the tempestuous torrent: so he stood,
> A prisoner on the island.

The father, finally home, at the approach of evening, 'went forth to meet his son', and just as the boy 'spied the sheep upon a plot of grass', the father too, not knowing quite why he tracked the brook,

> espied the boy,
> Where on that little plot of ground he stood
> Right in the middle of the roaring stream . . .
> The shepherd heard
> The outcry of his son, he stretched his staff
> Towards him, bade him leap – which word scarce said,
> The boy was safe within his father's arms.

A pattern of duplicated action and duplicated words; searching for a sheep, searching for a boy; the loss of the sheep but the rescue of the son. Abraham and Isaac, the sheep sacrificed, the son restored. Yet Wordsworth did not keep the story in his poem 'Michael'. Perhaps it would have been too optimistic and thus too complicating for the single-plot austerity of 'Michael', a tale of an old shepherd who, at least for his own life-time, appears to have rescued his land but in doing so he has lost his son. Something has gone out of Michael's life with his son Luke's defection in the city; a covenant has been broken, and life thereafter can only be endurance. Wordsworth admits no real rescue into the poem. The main character is impotent.

That story of the boy rescued by his father's staff seemed not only wrong for 'Michael' but ultimately for *The Prelude* where it was allowed briefly into the 1805 fair copy as part of the discussion of shepherd life in Book Eight, but thereafter it was discarded. Wordsworth's own father, we must remember, had died when Wordsworth was thirteen, leaving him without support, or staff, abandoning him to a numbness, a guilt and a grief that took years to bring to,

first halting, and then to the moving expression that is in *The Prelude* (Book XI). Wordsworth could give no credence to the idea of total rescue.

Dorothy Wordsworth, however, could. But then, she was writing for little children, and she took, like Wordsworth, a story of shepherd life. Her story is diminutive, a tale of a child and a lamb, rather than of a boy, a sheep and a roaring torrent. 'Mary Jones and her Pet-lamb, a Tale written to amuse John & Dorothy' must belong to late 1806 or early 1807 with John Wordsworth almost four and Dora three. The story depicts a world the Wordsworth children would recognise: mountains, a valley, a cottage, trees about it, beehives, and a happy child, Mary Jones:

> It was a pretty sight to see her by the blazing fire; often with one cat on her knee, another at her feet, and a pair of kittens playing beside her; she had pigeons, too, & they would peck out of her hand, and she loved to sit and watch the bees carry their burthens to the hive: she was not afraid of them, for, as she did not tieze them, they never stung her. One snowy morning in February her Father brought a young Lamb home . . .

The helpless creature was nursed and fed by Mary and when it grew stronger 'it followed her all about in house and field, so that you hardly ever saw Mary without her Lamb, except when she went to Church. . .' One day, on returning from Church, 'it did not run to her as usual, & it was nowhere to be found'. Mary searched and called and cried and on the evening of the second day, at suppertime,

> She bethought her that the Lamb had been brought from the mountains, & perhaps was gone thither again; so, without telling any body what was in her mind, she left her porringer of milk upon the table, put her piece of bread into her pocket, and, slipping out of doors, began to climb the mountain, and she had got to the very top without observing that the sun had long been sunk behind the hills on the other side of the Valley. She then sate down quite tired; but she looked about for her Pet Lamb, and fancied she saw it jump down a Rock at a little distance: she shouted; & presently the Creature ran to her, & leaping up, put its paws round her waist. I know not whether the Child or her Lamb was more glad. Mary sate down to rest again, and took out her bread, & they feasted together.

The Lamb is found, but, as you can imagine, the Child is lost. Mary stumbles about, night comes on, and weeping, Mary, the Lamb close to her, drops into sleep. The parents, of course, duplicating the action, wander about the mountainside all night, and,

> just after the sun had risen they came to the spot where she had fallen asleep & still lay with her arms clasped round the Lamb's neck, as the Babes in the Wood were lying when Robin-Redbreast covered them with leaves.

It is the old story, but this time it has a happy ending. Both lamb and child are fully alive, and the realist in Dorothy makes her explain why Mary Jones (unlike the child Coleridge) was not afflicted with an ague for years after sleeping on the ground all night: she

> had lain in the midst of a large plot of hether (perhaps the toil of wading through it had caused her to drop down there!) and the hether was so thick and dry that the damp from the ground could hardly reach her.

It appears too that the Heavens were gracious, and it was a mild dry night. Dorothy brings the story to its pious conclusion:

> The Father & Mother fervently thanked God for having preserved their Child and she, from that day, never strayed from home unknown to them & was a very dutiful and good Girl and continued to be a comfort to her Parents and after she was grown up to be a Woman, took care of them when they were infirm and old. The Pet-Lamb became a fine Ewe and brought forth many Lambs, and the Father said that in memory of that night, it should never be killed by knife, so it lived on many years and died of old age in the field close to the house, and was buried under a rose tree beside the bee-hives.

Resolution is total. Innocence is rescued, goodness rewarded and duty pursued.

There is something of the religious tract in the style and shape of this nursery story – moral purposiveness rather than the fantasy of fairy-tale. Dorothy's invention reaches for a providence so benign as to be all but incredible; for credibility she provides a setting entirely familiar to the Wordsworth children. 'I wished for nothing that was not there,' she had written in her Scottish *Reminiscences* in 1803 (18 September) thus astutely offering an analysis both of her strength – that of observation, accurate yet imaginative – and her limitation – lack of creative invention. Neither Wordsworth, Coleridge nor Lamb could be so uncomplicated.

Entirely the reverse of Dorothy's straight rescue of Mary Jones is Coleridge's tangle of threads, far from benign and far from resolution. Christabel could not be rescued. While Wordsworth's Michael, taking Christabel's place in *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 did achieve partial rescue, the rescue of his land, Christabel had none. Her poem had come out of the shared Somerset world of 1797-8 where Coleridge had written, and indeed finished, his *Ancient Mariner*, managing that completion perhaps because his disinclination to rescue and finish was itself part of the poem's subject. He has his Ancient Mariner describe an experience of absolute loneliness, of cursed alienation from nature, from living men, from dead men, from angelic comfort,

> And never a saint took pity on
> My soul in agony,

from God,

> So lonely 'twas, that God himself
> Scarce seem'ed there to be.

Yet still, despite such alienation, from within himself, somehow without help, while watching lowly water-snakes, a spring of love did gush unaware, and this it was that brought the Mariner home, not to rescue but to temporary alleviation. How temporary we know: he will never, despite

his sense of the sweetness of the marriage feast, be able, as it were, to go to the wedding. In the never-ending circularity of his psychological imprisonment, he will never be rescued from his own story,

> That moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me:
> To him my tale I teach.

But Christabel is denied even the Mariner's confessional respites, for she cannot teach her tale; the mysterious being Geraldine makes sure of that,

> In the Touch of this Bosom there worketh a Spell
> Which is Lord of thy Utterance, Christabel!

Nor seemingly can the poet teach her tale. So potent a spell has Coleridge woven, so articulate is he about inarticulacy, that dream, ambiguous evil, ambiguous good, attraction, mysterious sexual initiation, helpless holiness, lead Christabel to incommunicable isolation. In 1800 Coleridge added a further, more topographical, plotted Lake District sequel to the enchanted, enchanting first part, its purposed destiny, as we know, the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*; and Christabel was still locked in her dumbness, with the spellbinder Geraldine in full sway over the misunderstanding father. Though Dorothy Wordsworth declared that she and Wordsworth were 'Exceedingly delighted with the 2nd part of Christabel' (*Grasmere Journal*, 4 October 1800), the poem was not rescued for the volume, the heroine not rescued from her powerlessness, nor Coleridge from his own dismay that he could do nothing about the hinted beginnings and troubling suggestions that give the poem such psychological complexity. Coleridge, nevertheless, always said that the idea of the whole was complete in his mind, and after his death accounts of what he had planned were variously aired. All involved the victory of goodness and love and the rescue of Christabel. But Coleridge could not get there. Charles Lamb indeed thought he had gone too far even in writing the second Lake District part: 'I was very angry with Coleridge,' he told James Gillman after Coleridge's death in 1834, 'when I first heard that he had written a second canto and that he intended to finish it' (James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 1838, 302-3). Lamb knew that a poem need not have a finished story to be great, that Aristotle's beginning, middle and end were not an inevitable structure. It was to be Byron, himself the master of the unfinished and probably unfinishable *Don Juan*, who recognised in 1816 that those two fragments, *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* should be published exactly as they were.

Lamb understood; and he could he have no truck with the tidiness of completion or the idea of rescue that resolution would entail. He is pleased, for example, at Shakespeare's minute care for human truth: that the dramatist did not, for instance, rescue Kent from the unappreciated and anonymous loyalty with which in storm, rejection and madness he had so selflessly done Lear service. Constriction on time was not a factor, for in Act V Shakespeare did give precious stage-time to Kent for a last conversation with the dying Lear but in it he did not allow either character to give comfort to the other by rescuing him from ignorance. Lamb comments:

> That a pudder would a common dramatist have raised here of a reconciliation scene, a perfect recognition, between the assumed Caius and his master. (*Table Talk by the late Elia,* 1833).

It is a fine insight by both Shakespeare and Lamb.

In life, much as in literature, it is the partial rescue that predominates. What generosity there is in Lamb's rescue of Mary after the mad murderousness of 1796, for his sister's rescue was at immense cost and still was unable to take from either Lamb or from Mary the pain of many subsequent relapses. A different kind of rescue brought gladness to both Charles and Mary – the orphan Emma Isola became their joy, their schoolgirl, their girl of gold, finally their adopted daughter for whom, said Lamb, 'we have always a home' (26 February 1830). Smaller isolated rescue incidents from life were able to make the crossing into literature with relative ease, moving from letter to essay. Lamb writes to Sarah Hazlitt in November 1823 of the elderly poet George Dyer's now famous misadventure and rescue, when, having called on Mary

> on his way to dine with Mrs Barbauld . . . [Dyer] had deliberately, staff in hand, in broad open day, marched into the New River. He had not his spectacles on. . .

A mob collected, and 'between 'em they got him out.' By four o'clock when Lamb got home Dyer was between blankets and warm in bed with brandy and water. This letter, embellished with literary mock comic learning became the essay *Amicus Redevivus* with now the entire rescue performed single-handedly by Lamb himself. And now, in the essay, the three men, the comfortable convalescent, the doctor – and undoubtedly the host – take plentiful draughts of medicinal brandy, and wander in happy thought about the world's waters and rivers from Enfield to Babylon, from the Cam to Lethe.

There was more ambivalence for Lamb in the transition from work at the Counting House to leisured retirement. Lamb wrote to Wordsworth announcing his unexpected retirement in April 1825 and in the letter he also offers Wordsworth condolence on the death of Thomas Monkhouse; thus, almost by chance, death and unlooked-for rescue from work become aspects of the same thing:

> I came home for ever on Tuesday in last week. The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelmed me. It was like passing from life into Eternity.

As ever, Time is Lamb's subject. *The Superannuated Man,* published the following month, May 1825 and developed from the letter, is an elegiac farewell to the prison of work; Lamb speaks of the relief as from the Bastille. Yet he feels acutely the pain of the separation. His essay is a coming to terms with the true nothingness and pastness of those occasionally significant and forward-flying thirty-six years, with the pointlessness of his own footsteps upon the 'everlasting flint' of city work. Juliet's light foot, recalled here in Lamb's use of Shakespeare's phrase, 'the everlasting flint', will ne'er, as Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet* remarks, 'wear out the everlasting flint', and that flint recognised by Lamb for its immovable and remorseless power adds, as it does in *Romeo and Juliet,* a deathly grimness to Elia's hard-won and fragile tranquillity:

> I have done all that I came into this world to do. I have worked task-work, and have the rest of the day to myself.

But it is not long. The 'everlasting flint' is potent; retirement from work and a pension only in part constitute a rescue.

If we look finally at an entirely fictitious account, a dream essay, the same impetus is there: Lamb, like Coleridge, or Wordsworth, could not imagine absolute rescue. His essay, *The Child Angel; a Dream*, 1823, tells of a dream inspired by reading Tom Moore's poem about the Loves of Angels for Mortal Women. Lamb's dream is of a baby wrapped in 'little cloudy swaddling bands' and the baby, as the dream has it, is being christened by angels in heaven. But it never grows wings, only manages again and again to grow on its shoulders little shoots that cannot develop, and as it becomes a Child it limps as it walks, this Child Angel. The angelic music is too much for it and has to be muffled. The full angels are touched with pity. We learn at the end of the dream-story that its father, the Angel Nadir, had fallen from heaven, not, through pride, as the rebel angels fell, but through love of a mortal woman. He is Nadir, a being fallen to the bottom, but he did manage by some astonishing paternal energy to spring back up to heaven with the child of his love and leave it there to be christened, a beautiful half-earthly, half-angel babe, but one who limps eternally, must remain a child angel for ever and has no wings.

Meanwhile the dreamer dreamed of a scene on earth: by the banks of the river Pison (which flows, not in, but out of Eden),

> lone sitting by the grave of the terrestrial Adah, whom the angel Nadir loved, a Child; but not the same which I saw in heaven. A mournful hue overcasts its lineaments; nevertheless, a correspondency is between the child by the grave and that celestial orphan, whom I saw above; and the dimness of the grief upon the heavenly, is a shadow or emblem of that which stains the beauty of the terrestrial. And this correspondency is not to be understood but by dreams.

On earth, by the grave of a dead mother who cannot help, there is a mourning child, and in the courts of heaven there is a child who cannot ever reach full spiritual power. Neither on earth nor in heaven is there a whole child who could ever, even in metaphor, trail clouds of glory, or sport upon the shore or hear the rolling of the mighty waters. As Lamb remarks, none of this can be understood but by dreams, but it would seem that there is a sense here, whether one's context is earth or heaven, of permanent loneliness, even grief, a permanent lack of complete fulfilment. Yet alongside that mournful absence there is also the knowledge that the father did struggle to throw his child into heaven and give him thus some sense of what the 'shady groves and rivulets' of heaven are like and some knowledge of the care and pity of full-natured angels for a defective creature; and likewise even the constant mourning of the earthly child by a mother's grave implies a feeling heart, a recognition that love has existed. The most we could hope for, the fable implies, is partial rescue. But that is also, to put it another way, the least we can hope for, and if we can settle for this even near as well as Lamb could, we might hope that for most of us, though the vision, the glory and the dream might fade, there is probably not awaiting us, except in our

imagination as we read, that terrible dark pain of Lear. We are not after all quite bereft of ideas of rescue.

Centre for British Romanticism
Dove Cottage, Grasmere

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Lamb, chicken, pheasant, salmon, lamb, chicken, beef, pheasant, lamb.

Some people I talk to suppose that, when it comes to our feasting, we in the Lamb Society adopt a monotonous diet. This is not the case! Since 1999 our annual Birthday Celebration Luncheons have provided a variety of dishes as the above list of their successive chief ingredients shows. This year members were surprised and delighted by the Tagine of Lamb. We are extremely fortunate in having superb caterers to provide truly celebratory meals at our February gatherings: Mrs Verena Restell and her band of ladies always do us proud. The number attending has been rising for several years; and this February 52 members and guests sat down to lunch – the highest figure for more than ten years. We were specially pleased to welcome the new owners of Westwood Cottage, Enfield, Mr and Mrs David Thurston. As usual, a warm sun shone as we took our pre-lunch drinks on the garden terrace at 14 Prince's Gate. Pamela Woof, our guest of honour, delivered a very fine lecture after lunch entitled 'Rescues and Rescuers among the Romantics'. Altogether this was another very enjoyable Society occasion.

I must sound a note of warning, though. Rumour has it that the Royal College of General Practitioners have decided to move from 14 Prince's Gate and, indeed, may have sold the building already. If so, we may no longer be able to lunch at these premises, which have served us so well for nearly 20 years – and our catering arrangements may also in consequence need to change. However, I am pleased to say that I have been assured by College staff that our 2008 luncheon, at least, should be able to follow the usual pattern.

Members may know that the future of the Wordsworth Winter School and Summer Conference at Grasmere fell into doubt last autumn following the death in the summer of their Director, Professor Jonathan Wordsworth. Thanks to an initiative from another of our long-standing members, Richard Gravil, these two conferences were saved for 2007. A good many Lamb Society members gathered as usual at Grasmere for the Winter School in the week following our Luncheon. A future issue of the Bulletin is to be devoted to some of the very worthwhile lectures delivered there. And it is good to report that, as has become not uncommon, more than one new member of the Society was recruited!

For many years, since the Society received a generous legacy under the will of our former Editor, Bill Ruddick, we have made a grant to his old university, Manchester, to fund bursaries for post-graduate students to attend academic conferences. Professor Jacqueline Pearson of the Department of English and American Studies at Manchester recently wrote to me saying,

> I cannot emphasise too strongly how much our postgraduates appreciate the opportunities offered by the bursary, which makes conference attendance possible for students without other avenues for funding. From February 2006 to February 2007, we have assisted one PhD student to attend the IV International Richard Aldington Society conference at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer; another to attend the 'Englishness: Embodiment, Identity and the Hero' conference at the Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma, Mallorca; a

PhD student to attend the British Society of Victorian Studies conference at Liverpool; two PhD students to attend the 'Authenticity' conference at Salford, one of whom will achieve her first academic publication in the conference papers; two students to attend conferences on 19th-century topics at St Deiniol's Library; and we have also contributed towards research trips by several students, including one to Venice by a PhD student working on relations between the visual arts and literature.

Last year, the Council decided to extend our grants for bursaries by donating £1,000 to The Friends of Coleridge for them to use to facilitate attendance by UK post-graduates at their conferences, at either Cannington or Kilve, which have long had a strong Elian connection. This year, it has been decided to make an equivalent donation in support of the coming Wordsworth Summer Conference, and four Charles Lamb Society bursaries of £250 each have just been awarded to young participants in that event. The Society hopes that the Winter School and Summer Conference at Grasmere will both soon be back on a firm footing (see note following).

We were saddened by recent news of the death of Stella Pigrome, a long-standing Society and Council member and a stalwart and honorary vice-president of the Johnson Society.

2007 WORDSWORTH SUMMER CONFERENCE

The Wordsworth Summer Conference 2007 will run from 30 July to 8 August. The conference fee (£195) includes all excursions except an all-day one. An assortment of accommodation packages makes the conference much more affordable than in previous years.

Speakers: Frederick Burwick, Tim Fulford, Richard Gravil, Nick Groom, Regina Hewitt, Deborah Kennedy, Molly Lebebure, Tomoya Oda, Michael O'Neill, Nicholas Roe.

Details on website: http://www.wordsworthconfrences.org.uk or from Heather Haynes, heatherjhaynes@aol.com or Richard Gravil, richardgravil@hotmail.com.

FROM D. E. WICKHAM

Lamb vs. Thoreau

Charles Lamb's advices to Bernard Barton, the Quaker banker and poet, regarding his ambitions and his career hardly needs *further* repetition, but I was amused to read the opinion offered by the American H.D. Thoreau (1817-1862) in similar circumstances. He is quoted on page (2) of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Newsletter* No. 8, June 2003, a summer number, which is why the Editor's regular contribution is headed 'A view from the editor's deckchair'. Ho! Ho! Ho!

The editor tells how, despite their moanings and wage claims, oppressed academics are generally doing what they would want to do anyway and so they cheer on Thoreau's remark that 'This spending of the best part of one's life earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it, reminds me

of the Englishman who went to India to make a fortune first, in order that he might return to England and live the life of a poet. He should have gone up garret [sic] at once!'

Lucas's The Life of Charles Lamb*: The Index*

I had always supposed that, almost magically, the excellent index to the canonical biography 'worked' even if the volumes were of different sizes. Of course, the slightest check shows that the head-words may be the same throughout but the page numbers are entirely different. May I offer two additions to the index, the first from reviewing Kathy Watson's *The Devil Kissed Her*, 2004, the second from my own problems over the years in always (wrongly) attributing the pun to Lamb himself.

1) Miss *Faint*, the future Mrs Randal *Norris*, for whom MARY *LAMB* acted as a bridesmaid in 1801.

1905 edition:	Vol. I, p. 206
1921 (small) edition:	p. 251

This is omitted from Mary Lamb's index entry, though her being a bridesmaid for Sarah Stoddart, the future Mrs Hazlitt, in 1808 *does* appear.

2) The puns about herbs, leading to 'Now it's your turn—It's *CUMIN*' are very difficult to find, unless you remember that this one was by H.F. Cary, the translator of Dante. Give it a separate reference:

1905 edition:	Vol. II, p. 38
1921 (small) edition:	p. 539

3) And, of course, for *Payhouse* in the 1921 index (and perhaps elsewhere), read *Playhouse*.

The Hoxton Madhouse Dis-Located!

Bulletin, N.S. No. 95, July 1996, pp. 127-30, contains an item by me attempting to locate the asylum in which the Lambs were confined during the 1790s. Towards the end of the paper I describe my exploration of the dilapidated west side of Kingsland Road and its numerous cul-de-sacs, including Redvers Street and the glimpses through to the east side of Hoxton Street where I suggested that the asylum might have been. A further glimpse late in 2003 suggested that major changes had occurred in this area and I donned full exploring kit for an expedition up Hoxton Street in the spring of 2004.

Yes, the case is altered. There are several blocks of flats dating from the 1930s or the 1950s, but they were there before. Now, covering a large section of the east (right-hand) side of Hoxton Street, the likely madhouse site, is a vast ultra-modern building in plain cream brick. It is the Community College [of] Hackney.