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Walton, Wordsworth and Late Georgian Angling Literature

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In June 1796, Charles Lamb writes thus to S. T. Coleridge: 'I have just been reading a book, which I may be too partial to as it was the delight of my childhood; but I will recommend it to you. – it is *Izaak Walton's Compleat Angler*'! All the scientific part you may omit in reading. The dialogue is very simple, full of pastoral beauties, and will charm you'.[1] Lamb was not alone in his enthusiasm for Walton's work; his friend William Wordsworth was also amongst the writer's Romantic period admirers. This paper examines how Walton was read in the early nineteenth century, by enthusiasts such as Lamb and Wordsworth but also by highly antipathetic critics, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt most notably. It is part of an ongoing project which examines how, from the publication of Peter Beckford's *Thoughts on Hunting* in 1781 to the first classic of Victorian literature, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-7), sport resounded through the print and periodical culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This study will offer a survey of the enormous growth in writing about sport and sports publishing which followed Beckford, both in periodical and in book form, alongside individual chapters on the literary representations of the most important sports of the day: bare-knuckle boxing, horse-racing, fox-hunting and angling, all of which had both enthusiastic partisans and appalled antagonists, before ending on the even more morally contentious activities of cock-fighting and animal baiting, both of which met their legislative end in 1835.

In terms of the way in which it was conceptualised, angling is something of an anomaly in Romantic period readings of the cultural significance of sport. With reference to the most notable spectator sports of the day, boxing, horse-racing and even cricket, partisans argued that such activities inculcated a whole slew of morally laudable characteristics which, it was claimed, were the province of the British male: bravery, strength, courage, and most importantly of all, manliness. Take pugilism for instance; in the opinion of the most famous sporting journalist of the Regency, Pierce Egan, boxing was by definition noble, and, to a degree, the epitome of the national psyche. Egan declares in the first volume of *Boxiana* that boxing was 'a national trait': 'we feel no hesitation in declaring, that it is wholly - BRITISH'.[2] 'By the exercise of those manly sports', Egan maintains, the people have 'acquired that peculiar *strength of arm* which rendered them so decisive in warlike combats'.[3] Having said this, I want to argue here that literary enthusiasts for sport did not always invoke the manly or the martial spirit in their apologia. In one particular

[1] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr., (3 vols., Ithaca, 1975-8) (Hereafter: Marrs), 1, 22-3. The boy Lamb angled in imagination rather than in practice. Neither was he sporting in more vigorous pastimes: according to B. W Proctor's biography when Lamb was at Christ's Hospital 'His delicate frame and difficulty of utterance … unfitted him, it is said, from joining in any boisterous sports'. Barry Cornwall, *Charles Lamb*: *A Memoir* (London, 1866), 23.

[2] Pierce Egan, *Boxiana* (London, 1813), 3.

[3] Ibid., 14.

manifestation, angling, devotees often made an appeal to more rarefied emotions, arguing that the practice appealed to the transcendental sense, inculcated an awareness of the sublime and was capable of bringing individual humanity closer to nature and, indeed, even to the Almighty. Literary representations of angling often characterised it, to borrow T. H. Hulme's famous phrase, as a kind of spilt religion, or even, to adapt the same phrase, a kind of spilt Romanticism.

Whilst partisans of boxing and cricket stressed their social cohesiveness or exemplary manliness, angling, devoid of audience and competitor, was often represented as a more solitary activity, and one in which the individual communes with nature against a backdrop of natural beauty. Anglers are not generally portrayed as congregating with fellow sportsmen; in many late Georgian accounts of fishing there is, as in Romantic nature poetry, a frequent concentration on the notion of solitude before the face of the landscape. In 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth describes the poet meditating on the relationship between the individual and nature 'by the sides / Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams', and angling, enacted in the same natural arena, was often seen in similar terms. The angler, by these accounts, like the Wordsworthian poet, is a privileged being, capable of feeling and articulating a deeply-held response to the beauty of nature. Indeed, Edward Jesse, in his exemplary *Scenes and Tales of Country Life* (1844), goes further, privileging the angler over the poet or philosopher in his capacity to respond to the natural world. The contemplation of the creation, he argues, is common to both natural philosopher and poet alike:

> The satisfaction and complacency, which arise from a contemplation of the beauties of the works of creation, our walks in verdant fields and shady woods, the song of birds, and the calmness and stillness of nature in her more retired spots, all these have been dwelt upon and described both by naturalists and poets.[4]

However, the angler has an even more heightened sense of awareness of the natural world: 'But it is to the honest and patient Angler, that such scenes afford the greatest enjoyment and admiration'. 'The pleasure of angling', for Jesse, is inseparable from the delightful and instructive contemplation of nature: 'we are convinced that the mere act of fishing is only a secondary consideration with those, who join with it a fondness for the charms of nature'.[5] Like high Romantic conceptualisations of poetic composition which see it as best indulged away from both the city pent and the everyday horde, the angler, 'far removed from the noise and turmoil of the world … prepares his rod'. Jesse offers a near-Coleridgean vision of angling in which the fisher, pursuing, in Izaak Walton's phrase, 'the contemplative man's recreation',[6] views nature as a symbol of the almighty manifest in a benevolent creation:

> Nor is this all. A reflective angler will derive many useful lessons of instruction from the visible objects of creation which surround him, all of which serve to prove the infinite perfection and unbounded benevolence of the Great Creator.[7]

Angling, like Coleridgean neo-pantheism, offers something spiritual but beyond organised religion, an experience of nature accompanied by an intuition of the transcendental.

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[4] Edward Jesse, *Scenes and Tales of Country Life* (London, 1844), 81.
[5] Ibid., 82.
[6] The subtitle of Walton's *The Compleat Angler*.
[7] Jesse, *Scenes and Tales of Country Life*, 82.

It should be pointed out that the spiritualisation of fishing is nothing new, and dates back at least as far as Walton's great seventeenth-century meditation on the subject, *The Compleat Angler* (1653-76). Indeed, such was the perception in the early nineteenth century; Thomas Boosey's declaration in his *Piscatorial Reminiscences and Gleanings* (1835) is typical: '*Walton* long ago made Angling a medium for inculcating the most fervent piety and the purest morality'.[8] *The Compleat Angler* itself maintains that 'the very sitting by the river's side is not only the quietist and fittest place for contemplation, but will invite a man to it', and Walton reminds anglers to make their daily prayers 'to Him that made the sun, and us, and still protects us, and gives us flowers, and showers, and stomachs, and meat, and content, and leisure to go a-fishing'.[9]

Izaak Walton is the great patriarch of late Georgian angling literature, and, perhaps, even a neglected father figure of Romantic poetry itself. Certainly William Wordsworth esteemed him highly, composing two sonnets in his memory, 'Walton's Book of Lives' (1822) and the lines 'Written upon a Blank Leaf in "The Complete Angler"' (1819). Indeed, Hazlitt, in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), specifically identifies Walton as one of the very few 'prose writers' of whom Wordsworth 'approves', in contradistinction to 'the dry reasoners and matter-of-fact people'.[10] 'Walton's Book of Lives', not insignificantly one of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, emphasises the author's spirituality, celebrating Walton's biographies as 'dropped from an Angel's wing', gentle testimonies of 'faith and purest charity'.[11] Indeed, Walton, in this account, is such a paragon of goodness and godliness that even the worthies who made up his *Lives* (John Donne and George Herbert amongst them) are but 'Satellites burning in a lucid ring / Around meek Walton's heavenly memory'.[12] Wordsworth's notion of the gentle piety of Walton is no uncommon opinion in his age. 'Walton was a man of genius – of simple calling and more simple habits'[13] writes James Gillman in his *Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1838) and Charles Lamb also recommended Walton's book as similarly worthy in another 1796 letter to Dr Gillman's most notable patient: 'It breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart' and 'would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it; would Christianise every angry, discordant passion; pray make yourself acquainted with it'.[14] Lamb returned to the subject in 1801, writing to Robert Lloyd asking his opinion of Walton's book, and taking the answer for granted:

> The delightful innocence and healthfulness of the Anglers mind will have blown upon yours like a Zephyr. Dont you already feel your spirit *filled* with the scenes? – the banks of rivers – the cowslip beds – the pastoral scenes – the neat alehouses – and

[8] Thomas Boosey, *Piscatorial Reminiscences and Gleanings by an Old Angler and Bibliopolist* (London, 1835), vi.

[9] Izaak Walton [and Charles Cotton], *The Compleat Angler or The Contemplative Man's Recreation* (1653-76), introduced by Howell Raines (New York, 1996), 255. It might be pointed out that Walton's was by no means the first book to link piety and angling. Gervaise Markham's *The Pleasure of Princes* (1615) declares that 'the Art of Angling … hath become the sport of recreation of Gods saints, of most holy Fathers, and of many worthy and reverend divines' (*The Pleasure of Princes, of Good Men's Recreation: Containing a Discourse of the General Art of Fishing, and Otherwise and of all the hidden-secrets belonging thereunto together with the Choyce, Ordering, Breeding and Dyetting of the Fighting Cocke. Being a Work Never in that Nature Handled by any Former Author* (London, 1615), 1.

[10] *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., Toronto, 1930-34), 11, 93.

[11] Wordsworth, 'Walton's Book of Lives', ll. 3-4 (*The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols, Oxford, 1940-1949) (Hereafter: *Poetical Works*), 3, 387).

[12] Ibid., ll. 13-14

[13] James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1838), p., vii

[14] Marrs, 1, 57.

> hostesses and milkmaids … far exceeding Virgil and Pope … Are not you ambitious of being made an Angler? … The complete angler is the only Treatise written in Dialogues that is worth a halfpenny … in Walton … *every thing* is *alive*, the fishes are absolutely *charactered*.[15]

In Lamb and in Wordsworth's account, the author of *The Compleat Angler* was seen as a pious and ingenuous sage. Certainly his hybrid of sporting and spirituality dignified angling in spiritual and philosophical terms and, indeed, offered sanction to contemporary piscatorial writing. As Edward Fitzgibbon ('Ephemera', angling correspondent of *Bell's Life in London*), writes in 1847, 'No sporting writer is so generally known as Izaak Walton, and his "Compleat Angler" has earned for him an immortality which will last until the art of printing shall be forgotten. Angling, then, cannot be a theme unworthy of a modern pen'.[16] The modern pen of William Wordsworth, in his second sonnet to Walton, celebrates *The Compleat Angler* as a 'sweet Book' and is worth quoting in full:

> While flowing rivers yield a blameless sport,
> Shall live the name of Walton: Sage benign!
> Whose pen, the mysteries of the rod and line
> Unfolding, did not fruitlessly exhort
> To reverend watching of each still report
> That Nature utters from her rural shrine.
> Meek, nobly versed in simple discipline,
> He found the longest summer day too short,
> To his loved pastime given by sedgy Lee,
> Or down the tempting maze of Shawford brook –
> Fairer than life itself, in this sweet Book,
> The cowslip-bank and shady willow-tree;
> And the fresh meads – where flowed, from every nook
> Of his full bosom, gladsome Piety![17]

Here again, Walton is seen in religious terms, a 'Sage' whose book, to quote the characteristic Wordsworthian litotes, does 'not fruitlessly' encourage its readers to 'reverend watching' and to worship at the 'rural shrine' of nature. Again, Walton's 'Piety' is eulogised, and again the physical realities of fishing, which Walton nowhere attempts to evade in *The Compleat Angler*, are ignored. In Wordsworth's account, the emphasis is upon the wisdom of the sporting mystic, and the religious lessons to be learned from his work.

From its first edition of 1653, *The Compleat Angler* included praise poems – both English and neo-Latinist – to Walton; Wordsworth's efforts participate in a long tradition and are but the most well-known examples of Romantic period eulogies to Walton in both verse and prose. The Quaker poet (and friend of Charles Lamb) Bernard Barton, for example, offered 'Verses Written in a Blank Leaf of the Compleat Angler' (1824), a conscious imitation of Wordsworth's poem of five years previously, in which he conceptualised angling as what seems to resemble a Waltonian/Wordsworthian hybrid, celebrating Walton's treatise as:

> The quiet gushings forth of genuine feeling;

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[15] Ibid., 1, 270.
[16] 'Ephemera' [Edward Fitzgibbon], *The Angler's Handbook* [1847], 4th ed. (London, 1865), 2-3.
[17] Wordsworth, 'Written upon a Blank Leaf in "The Complete Angler"', ll. 1-14 (*Poetical Works*, 3, 9).

> The simple workings of unworldly thought;
> Imaginative glimpses, light revealing,
> From more than outward sunshine brightly caught.[18]

To the conventional salutes to the 'unworldly' and 'simple' Walton is added a distinctly Romantic sensibility. *The Compleat Angler*, in its 'gushings forth' offers a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, and Barton continues his post-Wordsworthian expressive metaphors in the notion of the imagination stemming from a 'more than outward' source. The idea of creativity 'caught' is no innocent term either: the imagination is a kind of literary fishing pool, which both overflows – William Wordsworth's own watery metaphor – and provides a teeming resource in which the mind can angle for its own imaginative catch.

Though Walton's greatest literary devotee meditated poetically on 'great rivers' in the 'Lines composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey**,** On Revisiting The Banks Of The Wye During A Tour. July 13, 1798', the adult Wordsworth generally preferred to see rivers and their banks as places for, to use Walton's terminology, contemplation rather than recreation.[19] However, this had not always been the case. As a boy, in what *The Prelude* calls his 'glad animal days', Wordsworth had been a keen angler (in a note to the *Sonnets on the River Duddon* (1820) the poet declared that 'in early boyhood [u]pon the banks of the Derwent, I had learnt to be very fond of angling').[20] In Book 8 of the 1850 version of his masterpiece, the poet describes his youthful occupations as a 'rambling schoolboy' in the meditation on the Lake District shepherd in his rural grandeur and solemn sublimity:

> thus
> I felt his presence in his own domain,
> As of a lord and master, or a power,
> Or genius, under Nature, under God,
> Presiding; and severest solitude
> Had more commanding looks when he was there.
> When up the lonely brooks on rainy days
> Angling I went, or trod the trackless hills
> By mists bewildered … Thus was man
> Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
> And thus my heart was early introduced
> To an unconscious love and reverence
> Of human nature.[21]

Amidst the lowering storm and the Lakeland brook, 'lonely' in human terms but also shot through with life, Wordsworth is introduced to the 'love and reverence' of both the natural world and of human nature The poet explicitly links his angling with the perception of the tutelary presence of the sublime shepherd, part of learning, albeit unconsciously, how to hear

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[18] Bernard Barton, *Poems*, London, 1825, 123.

[19] Though not invariably. In her '*Christopher North*': *A Memoir of John Wilson, Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh* (New York, 1863), Mary Gordon tells of a remarkable fishing party organized by her father: 'One lovely summer day, in the year 1809, the solitudes of Eskdale were invaded by what seemed to be a little army of anglers … Among the gentlemen of the party were Wilson, Wordsworth, De Quincey [and] Alexander Blair' (84).

[20] *Poetical Works*, 3, 504.

[21] *The Prelude* (1850), ll. 256-79. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1959), 285-7.

what he would later denominate as 'the music of humanity'. Indeed, James Wilson, zoologist and brother of John Wilson of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* quotes from that very passage from 'Tintern Abbey' in *The Rod and Gun* (1844) in arguing that there was an inevitable link between the love of angling and the love of nature: 'The Sportsman was – and how could he be otherwise – what Wordsworth somewhere calls "A lover of the meadows, and the woods, / And mountains"'.[22] Both poet and angler learn 'natural piety' from the landscape. Wilson reminds the angler of the importance of angling to early Christianity ('Let the Angler in the midst of all of his amusements remember to what high and holy calling his ancient predecessors were promoted')[23] and argues that the angler should conduct his sport 'with never ceasing reference to the great Giver of all earthly blessings'.[24] Similarly, Wordsworth stands, in 'Tintern Abbey', 'on the bank of this delightful stream' as a 'worshipper of Nature', one who 'hither came … with far deeper zeal of holier love'. In Wordsworth's great poem, the river Wye, warmly commended in *The Compleat Angler* for its abundance of salmon yields up another form of catch, an imaginative 'tribute', to borrow Shelley's phrase 'br[ought] of waters'. Wordsworth's terms of 'holiness', 'worship' and 'nature' are those of Walton before him; perhaps the very heart of Romantic poetry owes a little of its movement to *The Compleat Angler.*

II

The poet Wordsworth is the inspiring spirit behind the most expansive Romantic period meditative account of childhood angling, by the brother of the author of *The Rod and Gun* in the first of his 'Christopher in his Sporting Jacket' essays, which was published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in September 1828. Musing on childhood, and infant amusements, Wilson dismisses the activities of the playground – playing marbles, running with a hoop and the like – as benign but philosophically insignificant activities; however, this being the same critic who had argued nine years previously of the social significance of sport ('The character of a people is to be sought for and found in their amusements'),[25] the sporting education of the child is rather more psychologically revealing. Wilson opens his sustained meditation on field sports by reflecting on angling, offering a remarkable account of the boy angler making his first catch:

> Angling seems the earliest of them all in the order of nature. There the new-breeched urchin stands on the low bridge … with crooked pin, baited with one unwrithing ring of a dead worm … there will he stand during all his play-hours, as forgetful of his primer as if the weary art of printing had never been invented, day after day, week after week … in mute, deep, earnest, passionate, heart-mind-and-soul-engrossing hope of some time or other catching a minnow … A tug – a tug! With face ten times flushed and pale by turns ere you could count ten, he at last has strength, in the agitation of his fear and joy, to pull away at the monster – and there he lies in his beauty … a fish a quarter of an ounce in weight, and, at the very least, two inches long! Off he flies, on wings of wind, to his father, mother, and sisters, and brothers, and cousins, and all the neighbourhood, holding the fish aloft in both hands, still fearful of its escape, and, like a genuine child of corruption, his eyes brighten at the

[22] James Wilson, *The Rod and Gun* (Edinburgh, 1844), 279.
[23] Ibid., 3.
[24] Ibid.
[25] *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 6 (December 1819), 280.

> first blush of cold blood on his small fishy-fumy fingers. He carries about with him, up-stairs and down-stairs, his prey upon a plate; he will not wash his hands before dinner, for he exults in the silver scales adhering to the thumb-nail that scooped the pin out of the baggy's maw – and at night, 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confined', he is overheard murmuring in his sleep – a thief, a robber, and a murderer, in his yet infant dreams![26]

In his portrayal of the infant angler, 'a genuine child of corruption', Wilson constructs a miniature vision of the Fall. Angling is the Ur-sport, 'the earliest of them all in the order of nature', and the boy's first wet line, and, most importantly, his first catch, are rites of passage into a world that is both exhilarating and sanguine. The boy, who has 'brought no book' as surely as the child in Wordsworth's poem 'Lines Written at a Small Distance from my House', moves from an intellectual world of school and primer to a world more sublime and almost primeval. He is both enraptured and tormented by his kill: exultant in his day of triumph but plagued in the night as surely as Macbeth after the murder of Duncan (in the Thane's guilt-laden words brilliantly invoked in the passage: 'cabined, cribbed, confined'). Wilson captures what fellow Romantic period enthusiasts for angling so frequently sidestep, the thrill of death attendant to fishing and articulates the complex moral reaction of the child to sports which end in death, whether the first catch at angling, or the hunting child being 'blooded', face smeared with the blood of the dead fox, a loss of innocence symbolised in the reference to 'the first blush of cold blood'. Wilson's poetic prose is deeply informed by Wordsworth's conceptualisations of childhood. The passage resembles a Wordsworthian spot of time, particularly the darker spots (the Patterdale boat theft most particularly, in which the boy's 'troubled pleasure' leads to the night-time torment of the 'guilty' child suffering the strange 'trouble of my dreams'), and it is possible that Wilson, who was one of the few intimates outside the poet's immediate family to have heard portions of *The Prelude*,[27] may be offering a conscious imitation of Wordsworth's work, especially that part of it in which sublimity, exhilaration and guilt intertwine. Indeed, Wilson makes the allusion to Wordsworth explicit by citing, at the end of his account of fishing, the famous lines from the poet's 'The Rainbow':

> The yellow trout forsakes his fastness beneath the bog-wood, and with a lazy wallop, and then a sudden plunge, and then a race like lightning, changes at once the child into the boy, and shoots through his thrilling and aching heart the ecstasy of a new life expanding in that glorious pastime even as a rainbow on a sudden brightens up the sky…
>
> > The child is father of the man,
> > And I would wish my days to be
> > Bound each to each by natural piety![28]

[26] Ibid., 24 (September 1828), 274.
[27] In 1810: 'I read it during a grand storm of thunder and lightning and, whether influenced by that, together with the excitement of finding myself so honoured by Wordsworth, I know not – but I thought it one of the finest things I ever read'. Quoted in Robert Morrison, '*Blackwood's* Berserker: John Wilson and the Language of Extremity', *Romanticism On the Net*, 20 (November 2000). (http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2000/v/n20/005951ar.html#b11)
[28] Ibid., 275-6.

III

Angling for John Wilson was a 'fierce passion' rather than a contemplative and spiritually improving activity. However, what Christopher North celebrated, other Romantic era writers condemned: angling provoked enthusiastic partisanship but also prompted a great deal of moral censure and disapprobation. The sport was not infrequently subject to moral condemnation. Some reacted with horror to Walton, to angling, and sometimes to anglers. The principal antagonists were the men of *The Liberal*, Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and P. B. Shelley. Take Leigh Hunt's 'Angling', published in *The Indicator* in November 1819. Hunt finds anglers guilty of a lack of thought rather than of conscious cruelty:

> We do not say, that all anglers are of a cruel nature; many of them, doubtless, are amiable men in other matters. They have only never thought perhaps on that side of the question or have been accustomed from childhood to blink it.[29]

Whilst Romantic period post-Waltonian writing stresses the innocence of angling as a pastime – Wordsworth writes of it as a 'blameless sport' – Hunt is having none of it: 'the anglers boast of the innocence of their pastime; yet it puts fellow-creatures to the torture'.[30] Hunt also explicitly denies the very notion of anglers as a contemplative breed: 'They pique themselves on their meditative faculties; and yet their only excuse is a want of thought. It is this that puzzles us'.[31] When anglers do confront the sanguinary nature of their sport, the argument 'about fishes being made for "man's pleasure and diet"' is 'all that anglers have to say for the innocence of their sport'. Hunt finds this a 'rank sophistication':

> To kill fish outright is a different matter, Death is common to all; and a trout, speedily killed by a man, may suffer no worse fate than from the jaws of a pike. It is the mode, the lingering cat-like cruelty of the angler's sport, that renders it unworthy.[32]

Aware of the centrality of Walton to the angling literature of the age (Hunt explicitly labels him the 'patriarch' of fishing authors), the essayist ponders on the nature of *The Compleat Angler*:

> The book of Isaac Walton upon angling is a delightful performance in some respects. It smells of the country air, and of the flowers in cottage windows. Its pictures of rural scenery, its simplicity, its snatches of old songs, are all good and refreshing; and his prodigious relish of a dressed fish would not be grudged him, if he had killed it a little more decently.[33]

The contrast drawn by Hunt – between Walton's piety and his 'indecent' treatment of the creation – appears frequently in contemporary anti-angling rhetoric. Indeed, Hunt sees fishing as 'torture', provocatively arguing that Walton, the 'patriarch' of angling literature,

[29] *Essays of Leigh Hunt*, ed. R. Brimley Johnson (London, 1891), 22.
[30] Ibid., 17.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 20.
[33] Ibid., 18.

with his writhing frog baits, impaled worms and hooked jaws, is actually little more than a trout-fishing Thames Torquemada:

> Old Isaac Walton, their patriarch, speaking of his inquisitorial abstractions on the banks of a river, says,
>
> > Here we may
> > Think and pray,
> > Before death
> > Stops our breath.
> > Other joys
> > Are but toys,
> > And to be lamented.
>
> So saying, he 'stops the breath' of a trout, by plucking him up into an element too thin to respire, with a hook and a tortured worm in his jaws –
>
> > Other joys
> > are but toys.
>
> If you ride, walk, or skate, or play at cricket, or at rackets, or enjoy a ball or a concert, it is 'to be lamented' …But to put a hook into the gills of a carp – there you attain the end of a reasonable being; there you show yourself truly a lord of creation.[34]

Putting irony aside, Hunt proceeds to load his discussion of angling with philosophical and political significance. Fishing is cruel and unnatural and, building upon his notion of Walton as Inquisitor, Hunt implies that it might well be seen as a metaphor for human cruelty in a wider sense: if men can torment the brute creation then it is but a small step to the torture of mankind: 'If fish were made to be so treated, then men were also made to be racked and throttled by inquisitors'. The cruelty and violence which Hunt saw as inherent in the political system of post-Napoleonic Europe is symbolised in this favourite sport of the ruling caste. For the radical Hunt, angling is by implication a Tory sport, and he goes on to read seventeenth-century angling in similarly political terms. Walton's Toryism and overtly Royalist sympathies during the Civil War are of a piece with his thoughtless and relentless cruelty. *The Compleat Angler* inculcates a slavish, politically quietist submission to authority:

> The anglers of those times … were great fallers-in with passive obedience. They seemed to think … that the great had as much right to prey upon men, as the small had upon fishes; only the men, luckily, had not hooks put into their jaws, and the sides of their cheeks torn to pieces.[35]

[34] Ibid., 17-18. It might be pointed out that *The Compleat Angler* clearly attributes this poem to John Chalkhill rather than Walton himself.
[35] Ibid., 21.

Walton's protégé, the poet Charles Cotton,[36] who contributed the section on fly fishing to the final edition of *The Compleat Angler* (1676), is equally culpable as his master in inculcating this meek submission to the great. Hunt quotes some jovial doggerel of Cotton's as evidence:

> Indeed, among other advantages of angling, Cotton reckons up a tame, fish-like acquiescence to whatever the powerful choose to inflict:
>
> > We scratch not our pates,
> > Nor repine at the rates
> > Our superiors impose on our living;
> > But do frankly submit,
> > Knowing they have more wit
> > In demanding, than we have in giving.
> >
> > Whilst quiet we sit,
> > We conclude all things fit,
> > Acquiescence with hearty submission, &c.[37]
>
> And this was no pastoral fiction.[38]

The Tory angler resembles a fish limp on the line, refusing to struggle and accepting of whatever fate the mighty might afford him. Here Walton's famed 'meekness' is reinterpreted in ideological terms; what Walton and Cotton offer is acquiescence, quietism and submission to cruel authority.

In 'Angling', Leigh Hunt concludes with an ingenious variation on this theme with a final rhetorical flourish against Izaak Walton, playing the old game of *reductio ad absurdum* with the author of *The Compleat Angler*, and playing it expertly. How would the author of Wordsworth's 'gentle book' like to be treated as he does his prey?:

> Let us imagine ourselves, for instance, a sort of human fish. Air is but a rarer fluid; and at present, in this November weather, a supernatural being who should look down upon us from a higher atmosphere would have some reason to regard us as a kind of pedestrian carp. Now, fancy a Genius fishing for us. Fancy him baiting a great hook with pickled salmon, and twitching up old Isaac Walton from the banks of the river Lee with the hook through his ear. How he would go up, roaring and screaming, and thinking the devil had got him!
>
> > Other joys
> > Are but toys.[39]

Hunt's fine conceit is echoed in one of his finest poetical achievements, 'The Choice', first published in *The Liberal* in 1823, a poem on the rural life which also targets angling. He begins, as he did four years previously in *The Indicator,* by stressing the unthinking nature of

[36] A poet greatly admired by our author: 'Cotton was a first rate' writes Lamb to Wordsworth in March 1803 (Marrs, 2, 102).
[37] Ibid., 20-21.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 22.

the angler:

> Fishing I hate, because I think about it,
> Which makes it right that I should do without it.[40]

Eating fish is acceptable, but not those caught by the angler's cruelty:

> A dinner, or a death, might not be much:
> But cruelty's a rod I dare not touch.
> I own I cannot see my right to feel
> For my own jaws, and tear a carp's with steel;
> To troll him here and there, and spike, and strain,
> And let him loose to jerk him back again.[41]

Reverend gentlemen do not abuse their clerks with pitiless cruelty, so why should they treat fish with such implacable brutality?:

> Suppose a parson at this sort of work,
> Not with his carp or salmon, but his clerk:
> The clerk he snatches at a tempting bit,
> And, hah! an ear-ache with a knife in it!
> That there is pain and evil is no rule
> That I should make it greater, like a fool.[42]

Hunt then retreats from the label 'fools', given the literary excellence of many fishing authors and their 'deity' Walton. However, perhaps this makes their implacability worse. Praising angling is a waste of literary talent, mere 'sophistry' which glosses over the inexcusable nature of the pursuit. Hunt imagines himself as a fish and Walton 'tearing his face':

> Nay, 'fool's' a word my pen unjustly writes,
> Knowing what hearts and brains have dozed o'er 'bites';
> The next conclusion to be drawn, might be,
> That higher beings made a carp of me;
> Which I would rather should not be the case,
> Though 'Izaak' were the saint to tear my face,
> And, stooping from his heaven with rod and line,
> Made the damn'd sport, with his old dreams divine,
> As pleasant to his taste, as rough to mine.
> Such sophistry, no doubt, saves half the hell,
> And fish would have preferr'd his reasoning well,
> And, if my gills concern'd him, so should I.
> The dog, I grant, is in that 'equal sky',
> But, Heaven be prais'd, he's not my deity![43]

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[40] Leigh Hunt, *Poetical Works, 1822-59*, ed. John Strachan, in *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, gen. eds. Robert Morrison and Michael Eberle-Sinatra, 6 vols. (London, 2003), 6, 26-7.
[41] Ibid., 27.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

Angling is no fit way to exercise; Hunt refuses to 'rid me of my rust [in] so vile a way'. Instead he vows to indulge in 'manly play', at health-giving sports, the 'butchering shows' of boxing apart, to inculcate physical health and moral vigour:

> All manly games I'd play at, – golf and quoits,
> And cricket, to set all my limbs to rights,
> And make me conscious, with a due respect,
> Of muscles one forgets by long neglect.[44]

In *Peter Bell the Third* (1819), his sustained satire on Wordsworth, Hunt's friend Shelley, vegetarian and proponent of the rights of beasts, also reads angling in ethical terms. Shelley views Wordsworth's enthusiasm for angling as but one of his many moral failings, attacking the elder poet for his description, in Book 8 of *The Excursion*, of the 'large store of gleaming crimson-spotted trouts' caught by the Pastor's son and his friend, and proffered on a plate of blue stone. These are Wordsworth's lines:

> And, verily, the silent creatures made
> A splendid sight, together thus exposed;
> Dead – but not sullied or deformed by death,
> That seemed to pity what he could not spare.[45]

Wordsworth is more interested here in the experience of the child rather than that of the fish. His praise of the 'animation in the mien / Of those two boys' and the healthful boyish sport which they enjoy in the Lake surroundings is the idealized counterpart of the dystopian 'Picture of a Child employed in a Cotton-mill' earlier in Book Eight. The factory child languishes in a kind of mental and physical captivity; the rural boys live out the idealized Wordsworthian childhood. There is no requirement on satirists to be fair or judicious, however, and Shelley suggests that in viewing the fish Wordsworth was motivated by his stomach rather than by a philosophy which laments for the death agonies of a living creature:

> In the death hues of agony
> Lambently flashing from a fish,
> Now Peter felt amused to see
> Shades like a rainbow's rise and flee,
> Mixed with a certain hungry wish.[46]

Shelley adds a note explaining the source of his parody: 'See the description of the beautiful colours produced during the agonizing death of a number of trout, in … a long poem in blank verse, published within a few years. That poem contains curious evidence of the gradual hardening of a strong but circumscribed sensibility, of the perversion of a penetrating but panic-stricken understanding'. Wordsworth has no intuitive perception as to the suffering of his fellow creatures. In this he has, as Shelley memorably puts it elsewhere in *Peter Bell the Third* 'as much imagination / As a pint pot'.[47]

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[44] Ibid.
[45] *Poetical Works*, 5, 284.
[46] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. G. M. Matthews (Oxford, 1969), 359.
[47] Ibid., 353.

I want to conclude by looking at the views on angling of the last of the Tuscan coadjutors of *The Liberal*.[48] Lord Byron abominated the sport in the thirteenth canto of *Don Juan*, also published in 1823, in which he labels the author of *The Compleat Angler* a 'cruel coxcomb'. Byron makes the same grim jest as Leigh Hunt of Walton being hoist by his own petard: 'The quaint, old, cruel coxcomb, in his gullet / Should have a hook, and a small trout to pull it'.[49] 'Angling' far from being a virtuous solitary communion with nature is actually 'solitary vice', 'whatever Izaac Walton sings or says'. In a note to the passage, Byron scoffs at the supposed 'innocence' (Wordsworth's word) of angling. Far from being a spiritually improving and bucolic diversion, angling is the 'cruelest' sport, as demonstrated in Walton's most unflinching moments:

> This sentimental savage, whom it is a mode to quote (amongst the novelists) to show their sympathy for innocent sports and old songs, teaches how to sew up frogs, and break their legs by way of experiment, in addition to the art of angling, the cruelest, the coldest, and the stupidest of pretended sports.[50]

Like Leigh Hunt, Byron has no objection to eating fish, nor to more 'humane' ways of fishing, but the angler is beyond the pale. Far from being the contemplative lover of nature, he is both cruel and greedy:

> They may talk about the beauties of nature, but the angler merely thinks of his dish of fish; he has no leisure to take his eyes from off the streams, and a single *bite* is worth to him more than all the scenery around. Besides, some fish bite best on a rainy day. The whale, the shark, and the tunny fishery have somewhat of the noble and perilous

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[48] The principal London contributor to *The Liberal*, William Hazlitt, who did not venture his opinion of angling to the journal, seems to have been less antipathetic to the practice and, indeed, was capable of viewing angling in aestheticised terms. Whilst on his second honeymoon in Scotland in 1824, during which he chose to forego the exclusivity usually attendant to such occasions, Hazlitt invited William Bewick to visit him at Melrose, where James Sheridan Knowles was already in residence. Bewick recalls that at his arrival, Knowles 'had gone out on a fishing expedition; and Hazlitt, after presenting me to his bride, proposed that we should take a walk by the river to find Knowles'. Hazlitt's description of the angler, unlike those of Byron, Hunt and Shelley, pays no mind to the exigencies of fishing and concentrates on his corporeal grace:

> 'Let us steal slowly along unperceived,' said he, 'and I will promise you a higher treat than you have ever seen at Carlisle's lectures at Somerset House. It was down here I found him, and lest I should disturb his pleasure I sat down behind this bush and watched for half-an-hour his motions, as he threw the line from him among the rocks with such certainty and dexterity that I could not but enjoy his rare skill, the easy sway and graceful gesture of his whole figure as he threw his long rod and line with silent sweep, so that they seemed part of his frame, all moved by one spontaneous impulse. I never could have imagined that such beautiful grace and action could belong to old Walton's passion of angling'. (*Life and Letters of William Bewick*, ed. T. Landseer (London, 1871), 157-8.

I am grateful to Duncan Wu for drawing my attention to this passage.

[49] Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J McGann, 7 vols (Oxford, 1980-93), 5, 556. Byron had not always been so antipathetic towards angling. In *Hours of Idleness*'s 'Childish Recollections', his salute to Alonzo (his Harrow contemporary the Hon. John Wingfield), the poet recalls them 'shar[ing] the produce of the river's spoil'.

[50] Ibid., 759

> in them; even net fishing, trawling, &c., are more humane and useful. But angling![51]

Whilst the Waltonian devotee sees angling as morally and spiritually improving, Byron draws exactly the opposite conclusion, bluntly declaring that 'No angler can be a good man', testimony to the moral contentiousness of Romantic-era sports, and the radically different conclusions drawn from them in the literature of the age.

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[51] Ibid.

Lamb's First Play: An Editorial Enigma

By STEPHEN BURLEY

John Woodvil is widely regarded as Charles Lamb's first play. The idea for it evolved in the summer of 1798 as a result of Lamb's burgeoning friendship with Robert Lloyd. Winifred Courtney writes that as Lamb 'thought things through he concluded that at the root of his own depressions and of Robert's lay the sin of pride, or selfishness, which had tragic implications for the proud but was redeemable through penitence, humility, and courage'.[1] It is, however, possible that Lamb explored these themes in a neglected dramatic piece, the very authorship of which has been a contentious subject for many editors and scholars of his work.

In 1864 Coventry Patmore presented to the British Museum a collection of dramatic works sent to, but rejected by R.B. and Tom Sheridan, for performance at Drury Lane Theatre, with bibliographical notes by P.G. Patmore. Of these plays Add. Mss. 25,924 is described as 'An opera without title, in three acts, by Charles Lamb'.[2] E.V. Lucas and Edwin Marrs rejected Patmore's assertion that the play was Lamb's. They were highly sceptical that the manuscript was in Lamb's hand and it was duly absent from Lucas' standard edition of *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*. Earlier scholars and friends of Lamb disagreed: Moxon, Talfourd, P.G. Patmore and a later editor of Lamb's works, Charles Kent, were entirely convinced that the opera was written in Lamb's hand and the latter two asserted with great confidence that this was Lamb's first play. A full exploration of this controversy and an analysis of the relationship of this work to *John Woodvil* and the early sonnets published in Cottle's edition of *Poems on Various Subjects* support the possibility that the unnamed opera is a valuable addition to Lamb's body of early writings. Unfortunately, there is no direct reference to the piece in the Lambs' correspondence and this prevents absolute certainty in the matter; yet, as Patmore states, 'there are passages in it which would confirm, if necessary, by internal evidence, the unimpeachable testimony of the handwriting'.[3] It is important to present all the available material regarding the controversy of the authorship of the piece and then to examine the 'internal evidence' of the play itself. Both of these factors combine to suggest that this dramatic opera, rather than *John Woodvil*, was perhaps the first play penned by the young Charles Lamb.

The case against Lamb's authorship consists of the two editorial footnotes to a letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt dated 10 September 1808, in E.V. Lucas's edition of the *Letters* in 1935 and Marrs's standard edition of 1976. Lucas writes,

> Charles Kent, in his Centenary edition of Lamb's Works, printed a comic opera, said, on the authority of P.G. Patmore, to be Lamb's, and identified it with the

[1] Winifred F. Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802* (New York UP: New York and London, 1982) 215 (Hereafter: Courtney).

[2] The manuscript is mentioned by Barbara Rosenbaum, *Index to English Literary Manuscripts Vol. IV: 1800-1900 Part 2* (London and New York: Mansell, 1990), 657 but is not included in the entries of known Lamb manuscripts because of the uncertainty surrounding it.

[3] P.G. Patmore, *My Friends and Acquaintances* 3 vols. (London: Saunders & Otley, 1854) appendix to volume one (Hereafter: Patmore).

> experiment mentioned by Mary Lamb [see below]. But an examination of the manuscript, which is in the British Museum, convinces me that the writing is not Lamb's, while the matter has nothing characteristic in it ... Mr. Blunden, however, thinks that some of the names look like Lamb's writing.[4]

The questions surrounding Lamb's handwriting are, perhaps, the most puzzling of all, as it is on this point that Patmore and Kent are most convinced. Marrs, however, agrees with Lucas:

> Kent follows Patmore in ascribing it [the comic opera] to Lamb primarily on the basis that 'nobody else claiming it, it is undoubtedly every bit of it in his own handwriting'. Lucas noted that Edmund Blunden, though not persuaded as much as Patmore and Kent, thought some of the names in the manuscript looked as though they were in Lamb's handwriting. But Lucas was convinced (as I am) that 'the writing is not Lamb's'.[5]

This, however, is a rather cursory and selective summary of the arguments of Kent and Patmore and does neither of them full credit. Kent's thesis did not centre on the point that nobody else claimed the manuscript, whilst Patmore's evidence was more convincing than the issue of handwriting alone. Central to the arguments of these two scholars is the above-mentioned letter of Mary Lamb. Kent and Patmore assume that in this letter Mary Lamb must be referring to the manuscript of the comic opera. The letter, however, is dated 9 December 1808 and Kent and Patmore assign the opera to the period 1795-6. A considerable time lapse between first draft and final version was not unusual for Lamb: for *John Woodvil* the process took four years, whilst *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* was five years, according to Ainger, between original composition and publication in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1830. Yet, this gap of twelve or thirteen years until the first possible mention of it in the correspondence of the Lambs does raise further questions about the veracity of this letter as evidence. Nonetheless, Mary's letter is intriguing. She writes:

> The Skeffington is quite out now, my brother having got drunk with claret & Tom Sheridan. This visit and the occasion for it is a profound secret & therefore I will tell nobody but you and Mrs. Reynolds. Through the medium of Wroughton there came an invitation and proposal from T.S. that C.L. should write some scenes in a speaking Pantomime the other parts of which Tom, now, and his father formerly, have manufactured between them. So in the Christmas holydays my brother and his two great associates we expect will be all three damned together, that is I mean if Charles's share, which is done and sent in, is accepted.[6]

Thus it appears that Tom Sheridan advised the stage manager at Drury Lane, Richard Wroughton, to invite Lamb to write some scenes in 'a speaking Pantomime' in the

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[4] E.V. Lucas, ed., *The Letters of Charles Lamb* 3 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1935) II 61.
[5] Edwin W. Marrs, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* 3 vols. (Cornell UP: Ithaca and London, 1976) II 288 (Hereafter: Marrs).
[6] Marrs, II 286.

manner of the work of the fop and playwright Sir Lumley St. George Skeffington. Charles Kent, however, rather than seeing a problem in the date of the 1808 letter and the supposed composition of the comic opera twelve years previously, instead draws his reader's attention to the links between Mary Lamb's reference to 'a speaking Pantomime' and the 'harlequin' drummer, whose colloquy with Halbert opens Act One. After quoting Mary Lamb's letter and agreeing with and adding to Patmore's account of the origins of the manuscript, Kent writes,

> The importance of this side-light thus thrown upon Charles Lamb's earlier life by his sister will be readily appreciated when the rumoured origin of this manuscript is taken into account. According to the story as it now runs, Charles Lamb, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and the latter's son, Thomas Sheridan, were wont, in the winter of 1795-6, to meet evening after evening (Charles being then a youngster of little more than twenty) for the purpose of hobnobbing, smoking, joking, and confabulating, while engaged in the joint composition of just such a dramatic production as the one subjoined. The coincidence is, at the least, remarkable, that here is precisely the kind of comic opera that these three are reputed to have thus concocted together, and the whole of it from beginning to end is indisputably in Charles Lamb's handwriting. Another odd coincidence has until now been wholly unnoted – namely, that while Mary Lamb refers in so many words to 'some scenes in a *speaking pantomime*', strangely enough the very first utterance in this comic opera is the inquiry addressed to the Drummer by Sergeant Halbert, 'What news in the Garrison to-day? Thou'rt a very *harlequin* messenger, and of as many colours'. …Although it may still be matter of question with some whether, after all, this Comic Opera is really Charles Lamb's own composition, it is here deliberately appended to his acknowledged dramatic effusions, for the reason already given, because, nobody else claiming it, it is undoubtedly every bit of it in his own handwriting.[7]

Kent here makes a fascinating connection between the letter and the play: Halbert's description of the drummer as a 'harlequin', the mute character of English pantomime, is particularly pertinent to Mary Lamb's allusion to 'a speaking Pantomime'. He asserts his complete confidence, contrary to Lucas and Marrs, that the manuscript 'is indisputably in Charles Lamb's hand'. Patmore, indeed, was so convinced of the handwriting and authorship that he added the following appendix to his entry on Lamb in *My Friends and Acquaintances* and printed a facsimile of the opening page of the manuscript at the front of his memoir:

> I am in possession of an unpublished drama by Charles Lamb, which, as it is unquestionably his first substantive production, and dates at a very early period of his life, may claim to rank among the most interesting and valuable of our 'Curiosities of Literature'. It is a complete Opera, in three acts, and the numerous songs and concerted pieces are written expressly to popular melodies of the time, in the manner afterwards adopted by Moore.

[7] Charles Kent, ed., *The Works of Charles Lamb* (London: George Routledge, 1876) 172 (Hereafter: Kent).

> Of the existence of this drama not one of Lamb's friends (myself included) was aware until after his death. Unfortunately, I am not able to account, even by remote conjecture, for this latter circumstance, though Lamb was the last person in the world to keep a secret, especially his own. This only makes the drama still more an object of literary interest and curiosity, considering that its authenticity is placed beyond question, by every portion of it, even to the minutest alterations, erasures, &c., being in his own handwriting – a hand that is too peculiar to be mistaken by any one who has once seen a page of it. Moreover, though this drama is entirely different in its general style, as well as in the character of the materials employed in its construction, from anything in Lamb's other writings, there are passages in it which would confirm, if necessary, by internal evidence, the unimpeachable testimony of the handwriting.
>
> I have used every means at my disposal, but in vain for ascertaining the early history of this autograph. I have searched in vain for any 'direct' glimpse of such history in the 'Life and Letters' and the 'Final Memorials' of Mr. Talfourd. But I find a passage in the last named work, in a letter from Miss. Lamb to Mrs. Hazlitt, which will, perhaps, leave as little doubt in the reader's mind as it does in mine, as to the true origin of this production…[he then quotes the above letter of Mary Lamb].
>
> The passage, though it has no direct reference to the drama now in question, establishes beyond a doubt a personal as well as professional connection between Lamb and the Sheridans; and it is well known to those familiar with the dramatic history of the time, that they (the Sheridans) were in the habit occasionally, in the case of dramas that they did not like to part with, yet could not produce at the moment, of either purchasing such dramas at a small price, or giving small sums in advance on them, when their authors became inconveniently pressing for a decision.
>
> Coupling the above with the facts, – first, that this drama belongs to a period precisely corresponding in date with that at which Lamb is described by his biographer as struggling to better the condition of his aged parents and his sister by any and every literary exertion and resource that he could call into play; and that at the period in question the drama was 'the be-all and the end-all' of his literary ambition; these circumstances being taken into consideration, little doubt will remain as to the early history of this curious Ms.
>
> I have given the first leaf of this drama in fac-simile. The Ms. was shown to the late Mr. Justice Talfourd (one of Lamb's executors) immediately on its discovery by me, and also to Mr. Moxon (his friend and publisher), neither of whom raised the smallest doubt as to the handwriting.[8]

Patmore was obviously keen to gain his reader's trust and presents his argument in a compelling manner. Unfortunately, he does not explain further the 'internal evidence' that he refers to, nor do Lucas and Marrs find the handwriting 'unimpeachable testimony' to Lamb's authorship. This, then, is the surviving account of the controversy surrounding the comic opera and it is a truly enigmatic subject: on the one hand, there are the assertions of Lucas and Marrs that the opera is not Lamb's composition because the

[8] Patmore, appendix to vol. 1.

handwriting is too dissimilar and those claims are to the precise contrary of Patmore, Kent, Moxon, Talfourd and, to some extent, Munden. Thus it appears that there will always be an element of doubt in regarding this piece as entirely Lamb's work until or unless further information comes to light regarding his relationship with the Sheridans during the period in question.

The issue, however, raised by Patmore of 'internal evidence' is an intriguing one. Patmore mentions the biographical background of the piece and if the opera is placed in the context of Lamb's writings between 1795 and 1798 there can be little doubt that it shares many thematic and structural similarities to *John Woodvil* and the early sonnets of 1795-6. In many respects it is possible to see the comic opera as a preparatory piece for *John Woodvil*, as a template, almost, in which Lamb tests and explores ideas that gain full fruition in the latter tragedy. There are five key areas of interest with regard to the opera's relationship to Lamb's body of work during this period: the repeated exploration of the concept of melancholy and its similarities to Lamb's own effusions about his love for Ann Simmons; the concern with ideas of suicide; the use of the theme of the pride's cure as a structural dynamic for both the opera and *John Woodvil*; the detailed interest in the pleasures and dangers of alcohol; and the characterisation of strong, courageous heroines in Margaret and Violeta. Yet before analysing these similarities, it is perhaps useful to briefly outline the general plot of the opera.

The plot is divided into two main strands that mirror each other and centre on the overriding theme of love and, specifically, unrequited or severed love. The opera is loosely based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (as *John Woodvil* is analogous in some ways to *As You Like It*) and the action takes place at the British military garrison at Gibraltar. The arrival of the beautiful wife of Captain Lapelle sets the island astir with love and passion ('She is the finest piece of red and white flesh that England ever trusted on salt water'[9] asserts the drummer), but she soon succumbs to the charms and compliments of Bloomer, the aide-de-camp to the Governor. Meanwhile, one of the new arrivals, Violeta, has made the voyage to Gibraltar in the guise of an officer with her servant Jesse (dressed as a footboy), in order to pursue her rejected suitor, Lovelace. The latter, in a fit of grief at Violeta's disdainful attitude towards him, enlisted as a soldier and was stationed in Gibraltar under the command of Captain Lothian and Major Aptjones. The two plots merge in Violeta's search for her love and in a moment of confusion in which Violeta and Lovelace meet at the parade ground, but fail to recognise each other. Lovelace, a distraught melancholic, attempts to stab Violeta with his bayonet and is duly court-martialled. In the final trial scene the grief-stricken Lovelace reveals his true identity and is reunited with Violeta and harmony is restored. The overall tone of the opera is highly discrepant to that of *John Woodvil*: one is a poignant tragedy, the other a farcical comic opera; yet the thematic and structural affinities between the two are compelling.

Melancholy is a predominant theme in much of Lamb's writing in the mid-1790s and is embodied in the opera through the character of Lovelace. The autobiographical resonance of this becomes clear in the context of Lamb's relationship with Ann Simmons from whom he was cut off suddenly in 1794 (Courtney speculates that the cause was 'probably … Simmons [sic.] family pressures'[10]). Repeated allusions to Simmons

[9] Kent, 173.
[10] Courtney, 75.

throughout Lamb's work reveal the grief and sadness that he experienced for many years following the separation. It was the breakdown of this relationship that contributed significantly to Lamb's six-week stay in an asylum in Hoxton in December 1795 and January 1796. Even his Elia essays of 1820-1 refer to the overwhelming and dangerous power of this first love. In 'New Year's Eve' he writes,

> Methinks, it is better that I should have pined away seven of my goldenest years, when I was thrall to the fair hair, and fairer eyes, of Alice W—n, than that so passionate a love-adventure should be lost.[11]

This sense of the intensity of love and the pain of its subsequent loss are explored in much of Lamb's work during the period 1795–1802 and the theme of melancholia is central to this. Indeed, his correspondence with Coleridge in the summer of 1796 provides a poignant glimpse of the devastating and debilitating melancholy that Lamb experienced at this time. The letter of 8-10 June 1796 perhaps expresses Lamb's grief in the most unequivocal manner. He repeatedly dwells on his isolation and loneliness:

> Thank you for your frequent letters, you are the only correspondent & I might add the only friend I have in the world. I go nowhere & have no acquaintance. Slow of speech, and reserved of manners, no one seeks or cares for my society & I am left alone … in your absence, the tide of melancholy rushd in again, & did its worst mischief by overwhelming my Reason…[12]

This personal agony and Lamb's own melancholic emotions find expression in *John Woodvil*, the early sonnets and in Lamb's imitations of Robert Burton. John Woodvil, like Lovelace in the opera, is a melancholic man of fortune who is soothed and reprimanded by Margaret for indulging this humour:

> O sir, sir, sir, you are too melancholy,
> And I must call it caprice. I am somewhat bold
> Perhaps in this. But you are now my patient,
> (You know you gave me leave to call you so,)
> And I must chide these pestilent humours from you.[13]

John's melancholy is the consequence of his intense love and previously neglectful attitude towards Margaret as well as his role in his father's death. He is only able to appreciate fully Margaret's love once she has left him to seek her guardian, Sir Walter, in Sherwood Forest. This process of the gradual diminution of love, followed by a severance and a happy reunion whereby both partners realise the value of true love is precisely that which forms the basis of the main plot of the comic opera and in these works Lamb explores themes with strong autobiographical undercurrents. Furthermore, in 1802 Lamb published in the same volume as *John Woodvil* some imitations which he

[11] E.V. Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903) II 28. (Hereafter: *Works*).
[12] Marrs, I 17-8.
[13] *Works*, V 173.

named 'Curious Fragments extracted from a common-book, which belonged to Robert Burton, the famous author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*'. In the first fragment he describes another 'Pyramus' whose melancholy is the result of unrequited love. The man is described as,

> a lover, an *enamorato*, a Pyramus, a Romeo; he walks seven years disconsolate, moping, because he cannot enjoy his miss, *insanus amor* is his melancholy, the man is mad … in conclusion she is wedded to his rival, a boore, a *Corydon*, a rustic, *omnino ignarus, he can scarce construe Corderius*, yet haughty, fantastic, *opiniâtre*. The lover travels, goes into foreign parts, peregrinates, *amoris ergo*, sees manners, customs, not English … seven years are expired, gone by, time is he should return, he taketh ship for Britaine, much desired of his friends … *those jokers his friends that were wont to tipple with him at alehouses*…[14]

The description of this 'Romeo' bears distinct resemblance to the characterisation of Lovelace in the comic opera. The lover's 'disconsolate' wanderings to foreign lands mirror Lovelace's experiences in Gibraltar. Violeta's proud neglect of Lovelace causes him to enlist in the army disguised as an ordinary soldier (perhaps Lamb had in mind Coleridge's ill-fated enlistment in the 15th Light Dragoons in December 1793) whilst in *John Woodvil* the eponymous character's neglect of Margaret leads to her disguising as a boy and going in search of Sir Walter. Indeed, it is an odd coincidence that the letter she leaves John at the beginning of Act Two, complaining that 'Love grows cold, and has usurped upon old esteem' [15] is distinctly similar to that which Violeta reads from Lovelace at the end of Act One in the opera. Both Margaret and Lovelace accuse their lovers of a tragic cooling of their original feelings towards them and this is the cause of the latter's melancholy. Lovelace's letter is more melodramatic and self indulgent than Margaret's, in keeping with his role as the stock melancholic figure:

> False, cruel, perjured Violeta, –
> With suffering constancy I bore your cruelty, your neglect, your cold distain, but now I've conquer'd, and have torn your image from my heart. am this moment embarking as a private soldier for Gibraltar, where I hope some kind bullet will possess that heart once designed for you. Farewell eternally! – LOVELACE.[16]

Lovelace's role as a melancholic can be traced back to Shakespeare and the convention of the Elizabethan melancholic, Malvolio, in *Twelfth Night* or Jacques in *As You Like It*. Yet the true source of Lamb's interest in the idea of melancholy was far more autobiographical. Much of his work of this period focuses on the representation of melancholic figures and in doing so Lamb seems to be exploring his own raw and grief-stricken emotions so evident in his letters to Coleridge. The centrality of this theme in the

[14] *Works*, I 31-2.
[15] *Works*, V 141.
[16] Kent, 178.

comic opera is one area of consanguinity between all of these works and supports the suggestion that Lamb was its author.[17]

Intricately linked with Lamb's exploration of melancholic emotions is the theme of suicide. The melancholy of Lovelace not only foreshadows that of the penitent John Woodvil in Act Five of the tragedy, but also bears similarities to the stance of the speaker of the early sonnets, particularly those published in Cottle's 1796 edition of *Poems on Various Subjects*. In these poems the speaker expresses a sense of his grief as a result of the loss of his sweetheart Anna and they are widely regarded to be based on Lamb's own relationship with Ann Simmons. 'Was it some sweet device of Faëry' is interesting for its melodramatic references to 'the murdering knife' and the suicidal impulse at its core:

> …methought they spake the while
> Soft soothing things, which might enforce despair
> To drop the murdering knife, and let go by
> His foul resolve. And does this lonely glade
> Still court the footsteps of the fair-hair'd maid?
> Still in her locks the gales of summer sigh?
> While I forlorn do wander, reckless where,
> And 'mid my wanderings meet no Anna there.[18]

The dominant tone of melodrama indicated by such phrases as 'enforce despair' and 'foul resolve' combined with the aimless wandering of the protagonist ('I forlorn do wander') is strikingly similar to the grief-stricken effusions of Lovelace. In Act Three of the opera Lovelace embraces his imminent death ('Life has long been a burden to me') after his desperate attack on his military superior, Violeta. Indeed, Lovelace's meeting with Sergeant Halbert at the opening of Act Three, is felicitous in the context of this sonnet in its expression of suicidal impulses. Lovelace begins by lamenting,

> Despair and grief must end my hated life. What have I left for the false, disdainful Violeta? Fortune, friends, and everything that made life pleasing and society endearing. Oh! Could conscience admit a thought of suicide I would hasten death …Ah! Violeta, thou must reign my sharp tormentor.[19]

The overwhelming emotion of 'despair' is at the heart of both pieces and the melodrama of the sonnet is echoed in Lovelace's reference to his 'hated life' and 'a thought of suicide'. Indeed, Violeta's status as Lovelace's 'sharp tormentor' is paralleled in the sonnet by the role of Anna: the loss of Anna's love in the sonnets and of Violeta's in the opera both inspire suicidal thoughts in their bereaved partners and, as a result of the strongly autobiographical nature of Lamb's writings at this time, are disturbingly suggestive of the reasons for Lamb's residence in the Hoxton asylum.

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[17] A poem by Lamb of 1795 recently published for the first time, 'Sweet is thy sunny hair', sheds further light on this theme. It describes a 'love-sick youth, that sighs his soul away' and whose experiences again bear resemblance to that of Lovelace in the comic opera. See Felicity James, '"Sweet is thy sunny hair": An Unpublished Charles Lamb Poem', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 127 (2004) 54-6.
[18] *Works*, V 3.
[19] Kent, 188.

The plot of the opera is very closely linked to that of *John Woodvil* by the manner in which both pieces are structured around the theme of 'Pride's Cure' (Lamb's original title for the tragedy). John Woodvil's pride in mistreating and neglecting Margaret is cured through a cathartic process of penitence and humility following his determination to pursue Margaret to Sherwood Forest, and so too Violeta's pride in rejecting Lovelace is cured through her traumatic experiences in Gibraltar and touching reunion with her melancholic lover in the final scene of the opera. Violeta's process of penitence and atonement for past sins is expressed passionately towards the end of Act One:

> Alas! Dear generous Lovelace, what have I suffered for thee? – tedious journeys, tempestuous seas, and every other distress that even men might shrink at. May not this atone for my neglect and usage of thee?[20]

She is, however, rewarded for her penitent and remorseful attitude by a final understanding of the value of true love and friendship in the reunion scene with Lovelace. The melancholy of John Woodvil and Lovelace is assuaged and cured through female companionship and the renunciation of self indulgent passions. The pride of John and Violeta is duly punished and then replaced with an understanding of the virtue of lasting love and fidelity to their respective partners. Thus the theme of 'Pride's Cure' is played out in the opera and the tragedy and forms a crucial structural dynamic that operates through both.

Yet this theme is clearly evident elsewhere in Lamb's work of the mid-1790s. 'Methinks how dainty sweet it were', published by Cottle in 1796, gives further insights into the experience of the scorned lover that looks forward to the despair of Lovelace and the more stoical response of Margaret in *John Woodvil*. The speaker is recalling with sadness and despair his conversations with Anna about stories of neglected lovers:

> Or we might sit and tell some tender tale
> Of faithful vows repaid by cruel scorn,
> A tale of true love, or of friend forgot;
> And I would teach thee, lady, how to rail
> In gentle sort, on those who practise not
> Or love or pity, though of woman born.[21]

The reader can immediately sense the telling paranoia of the speaker's effusions and the imminence of lost love. The phrase 'cruel scorn' here echoes the 'cold disdain' that Lovelace suffered at the hands of Violeta, whilst the reference to 'friend forgot' is reminiscent of the sense of isolation and loneliness expressed in Lamb's letters and also of Lovelace's above reference to 'Fortune, friends, and everything that made life pleasing'. Indeed, the concept of being scorned and disdained by a lover is alluded to by Lamb in his letter to Coleridge of 14 June 1796. Although Lamb does not refer to his relationship with Simmons, the similarities are suggestive. He is discussing his reading of Philip Massinger's play of 1634, *A Very Woman*, and recommending it to Coleridge:

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[20] Kent, 177.
[21] *Works*, V 4.

> Are you acquainted with Massinger? At a hazard I will trouble you with a passage from a play of his called 'A Very Woman'. The lines are spoken by a lover (disguised) to his faithless mistress… 'This beauty … and all the broken sighs my sick heart *lend me*, I sued and served; long did I serve this *lady*, long was my travail, long my trade to *win her* … she could not *love me*; she would not love, she hated, – more, she *scorn'd me*; and in so poor and base a way *abused me* for all my services, for all my *bounties*, so bold neglects flung on me' – 'What out of love, and worthy love, *I gave her* (shame to her most unworthy mind,) to fools, to girls, to fiddlers and her boys she flung, all in disdain of me.'[22]

One can see why Lamb would have been so attracted by this passage, particularly since he quotes it to Coleridge only three days after he explains that he was 'sore galled by disappointed hope' and 'cut off at once and the same time from the two most dear to me (presumably referring to Coleridge and Ann Simmons)'.[23] The underlying similarity to Lovelace's affronted letter to Violeta, quoted above, is striking. Massinger's disguised lover accusing his 'faithless mistress' of 'disdain' is paralleled in the opera by Lovelace, Lamb's disguised lover, complaining of Violeta's 'cruelty', 'neglect' and 'cold disdain'. The rich tapestry of potential inspirations for Lamb's work becomes clearer: perhaps the most significant is the melancholia he experienced following his relationship with Simmons; another is his reading of Shakespeare and his use of characters such as Viola, Rosalind, Malvolio and Jacques for his own dramatic creations; and, finally, it is possible that his reading of Massinger's play provided particularly appropriate material from which he could work. Lamb, like Lovelace, the speaker of the sonnets, and Massinger's disguised lover, was battling with similar feelings of grief, sadness, melancholy, rejection, and pain throughout 1796. These emotions find expression throughout his work and correspondence of this period and the comic opera shares these distinctive characteristics.

The opera's thematic link to the body of Lamb's writing is further highlighted by the detailed analysis of the pleasures and dangers of alcohol. Lamb's troubled relationship with alcohol finds expression throughout his work, most famously in Elia's 'Confessions of a Drunkard' of 1822, but also in *John Woodvil*. This theme forms a further connection between the tragedy and the comic opera. The drunken carousing of the grooms and John's gentlemanly companions at Woodvil Hall is not dissimilar to those of Violeta, Sergeant Halbert, Major Aptjones and Captain Lothian in the mess room of the regiment at Gibraltar. In Act Three of the tragedy, John, in the company of Grey and Lovel, soliloquizes on the joys and dangers of alcohol:

> We have here the unchecked virtues of the grape. How the vapours curl upwards! It were a life of gods to dwell in such an element: to see, and hear and talk brave things. Now fie upon these casual potations! – that a man's most exalted reason should depend upon the ignoble fermenting of a fruit, which sparrows pluck at as well as we![24]

[22] Marrs, I 30-1.
[23] Marrs, I 18.
[24] *Works*, V 158.

The rich, sensual appreciation of the joys of alcohol and then the fierce denunciation of its concomitant dangers is characteristic of Lamb's complex attitude to drinking. Indeed, it is a great irony that Elia's 'Confessions' were originally composed, following the request of Basil Montagu, as one of a collection of tracts designed to further the cause of temperance. In the comic opera these ideas are developed through the character of Halbert who attempts to remedy Lovelace's melancholy by the medicine of wine and women ('Won't Spanish wine and new beauties enliven thee?'[25]) and it is his song in Act Two that seems pertinent to both the sonnets and the later tragedy:

> While the vine's balmy juice my troubles destroy,
> O Bacchus, thy bounty dispense!
> But ne'er, mighty God, let the liquor of joy,
> Like Lethe's, deprive us of sense.
>
> When love's tender passion my bosom alarms,
> Grant, Venus, some beautiful fair;
> But O, never make me a slave to her charms,
> Nor poison my pleasure with care!
>
> These cordials of Heaven by fools are abused,
> And turned to the fountains of strife;
> 'Tis by wise men alone that, when rightly they're used,
> Love and wine are the blessings of life.[26]

Again, there is the sensual reverie in the celestial pleasures of alcohol followed quickly by the expression of its potential dangers: Halbert's 'cordials of Heaven' echo Woodvil's 'life of Gods', whilst Halbert's 'fountains of strife' foreshadow Woodvil's 'ignoble fermenting'. The fear of slavery to alcohol and women is something that haunted Lamb's life in the years following the separation from Ann Simmons. It is a pertinent coincidence that Anna's fair hair, described as 'the fair-haired maid' in 'Was it some sweet device of Faëry', Margaret's blonde hair in the tragedy and Halbert's reference to 'some beautiful fair' in the comic opera, all suggest an ultimate source in Ann Simmons: the autobiographical impulse behind so much of Lamb's work of this period is highly suggestive.

Although there are many similarities between Margaret, Sir Walter's orphan ward in *John Woodvil*, and Violeta of the comic opera, the former is the more rounded, developed character by far. Yet again, a close reading supports the possibility that Lamb used the earlier heroine as a template for Margaret. Winifred Courtney describes the character of Margaret in *John Woodvil* as 'strong, pure and compassionate, a true Shakespearean heroine' [27] and this is equally true of Violeta. Both women leave home, disguise themselves as men (or rather as a boy in Margaret's case), and show great courage and determination throughout their experiences in the strange and dangerous new environments in which they must live, Sherwood Forest and Gibraltar respectively.

[25] Kent, 188.
[26] Kent, 186.
[27] Courtney, 218.

Margaret's character is loosely based on that of Rosalind of *As You Like It*, whilst Violeta clearly takes her source from Viola of *Twelfth Night*. Both are indeed 'true Shakespearean heroine[s]' as Margaret demonstrates in declaring her intentions to Sandford:

> Sand: O lady, have a care
> Of these indefinite and spleen-bred resolves.
> You know not half the dangers that attend
> Upon a life of wandering…
> You know not what it is to leave the roof that shelters you.
> Marg: I have thought on every possible event,
> The dangers and discouragements you speak of,
> Even till my woman's heart hath ceased to fear them,
> And cowardice grows enamour'd of rare accidents…[28]

The assertive and fearless tone of Margaret and her heroic scorn of 'dangers and discouragements' are precisely the qualities which characterise Violeta's general behaviour in the opera. Indeed, Sandford's reference to 'spleen-bred resolves' is felicitous with regard to Violeta: like Margaret, she too becomes 'enamour'd of rare accidents' and embroils herself fully in the bawdy, violent and drunken life of the soldiers at the military garrison. Both women discard the supposed weaknesses and vulnerabilities of their sex and enter, in disguise, dangerous and masculine environments in which they reveal the true depth of their love, courage and resilience. The relationship of Sandford, Sir Walter's old steward, to Margaret corresponds to that of Jesse and Violeta. At the end of Act One Jesse, Violeta's servant, recollects her own attempts to prevent her mistresses 'spleen-bred resolves' in terms reminiscent of Sandford's efforts above:

> Jesse: Oh, dear madam, remember with how many tears and entreaties I begged you not to leave England – indeed now I blame myself for yielding to your solicitations, for nothing but misery and ruin stare us in the face.
> Viol: Then you had ever forfeited my esteem. All my care is now for what you may endure, my dear Jesse.
> Jesse: Oh, dearest mistress, fear not for me! if you can bear up under the difficulties that threaten us, I will support them with pleasure.
> Viol: Come on! ... Now I will shake all female weakness from my heart, assume the airs of a real male maccaroni [sic.], and make every coxcomb in the army stand clear of me.[29]

Violeta's emphatic exclamation 'Come on' is indicative of her commanding and assertive character, whilst the powerful deictic 'now', combined with the fearless taunt to all other army personnel ('stand clear of me'), conveys the dauntless courage that is personified in the noble behaviour of Margaret in the later tragedy. The touching pathos of this close attachment between Violeta and Jesse is poignant amidst the farcical humour that

[28] *Works*, V 139-40.
[29] Kent, 178.

dominates the opera. Indeed, Violeta indulges so fully in her new role as 'a real male maccaroni' that her bold behaviour staggers even the most hot-headed and experienced military officers such as Aptjones. These comical scenes (the finest is perhaps that in Act Two when Violeta converses with Bloomer and then becomes embroiled in an altercation with Pottifar the 'Judean scoundrel') highlight the underlying discrepancy in tone and form between the two plays. One is a farcical comic opera, the other a serious tragedy of which Lamb felt highly enough to publish after its rejection by Kemble in 1799. Yet, such are the structural and thematic links between the two that a close reading reveals that it is possible that Lamb used the opera to explore and develop ideas and emotions that he would later draw upon more fully in *John Woodvil*: the two pieces appear to be inextricably linked.

Thus, there will always be elements of doubt in the actual attribution of this comic opera to Charles Lamb's youthful pen. Successive editors and scholars have failed to unravel the mysteries surrounding the handwriting and early history of the manuscript. More compelling, however, than the arguments of Patmore, Kent, Lucas or Marrs is perhaps the 'internal evidence' of the piece itself. Such are the affinities between this work and much of Lamb's writing between the years 1795 and 1798 that there is a strong possibility that this neglected comic opera is indeed Lamb's first play.

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Lamb Roasts Kyd: Charles Lamb's Reaction to Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* in *Specimens*.

By REBEKAH OWENS

In his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* of 1808, Charles Lamb was unimpressed by Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Quoting extensively from the famous 'Painter' additions, he referred in a note to the original play in dismissive parentheses: *The Spanish Tragedy*, he said, 'is but a *caput mortuum*, such another piece of flatness as Locrine'.[1]

It is a damning statement. Frankly, insulting, given the meaning of the Latin 'caput mortuum'. Deriving from alchemy, the phrase refers to the residue remaining in the crucible after the chemical experiment. In other words, Lamb suggests, *The Spanish Tragedy* is, quite literally, the dregs.

Why should Lamb offer such an unflattering opinion of Kyd's work? Quite simply, because there had always been a tradition of disparagement of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Tracing the reputation of Kyd in the response to his play through the eighteenth-century reveals a culture of derision and mockery toward Kyd's work. Eighteenth-century scholars had dismissed Kyd's play as a risible example of early drama. It was acknowledged by them to be an artistic failure.

How significant Lamb's approach to Kyd was can be demonstrated by reiterating and reassessing some of the work that discusses Lamb's debt to the previous scholarship. Whereas Lamb's work has been seen by some to enhance the reputations of previously unknown or disregarded Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, in this case Kyd's reputation actually diminishes. Lamb's evaluation of his work as a 'caput mortuum' becomes a passive critical truism accorded to Kyd well into the twentieth-century.

That Lamb owed a debt to his predecessors is a given in contemporary scholarship, although the exact nature of the debt has been subject to debate. As Gillian Russell wrote, since:

> …the 1930s [Earl Reeves] Wasserman[2] and [Robert D.] Williams[3] challenged the view that Lamb had single-handedly discovered previous scholarship in the eighteenth century…[4]

A feat thought necessary by those critics in response to the effusive praise bestowed upon Lamb's work as innovative: flattery endorsed by Lamb himself.[5] James Shokoff pointed out that any of Lamb's contemporaries 'Bryan Waller Proctor (Barry

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[1] Charles Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets about the Time of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1808), 12.

[2] Earl Reeves Wasserman, 'The Scholarly Origin of the Elizabethan Revival', *English Literary History* (1937), 213-43.

[3] Robert D. Williams, 'Antiquarian Interest in Elizabethan Drama Before Lamb', *PMLA* 53 (1938), 434-5.

[4] Gillian Russell, 'Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*: The Publishing Context and the Principles of Selection', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 65 (1989), 2.

[5] See the *New Monthly Magazine* XLIII (1st Part, 1835), 499. See also Williams, 434 and James Shokoff, 'Charles Lamb and the Elizabethan Dramatists: a Reassessment', *The Wordsworth Circle* 4 (1973), 3.

Cornwall), William Hazlitt, Henry Weber, and even his rival William Gifford attested to Lamb's importance in the rediscovery of the Elizabethan playwrights'. Shokoff further noted Lamb's importance later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as 'Algernon Charles Swinburne, James Russell Lowell, and T.S. Eliot all began their appreciative criticisms of the old dramatists with recognition of Lamb's achievement'. Walter Pater referred to Lamb as 'almost the discoverer of the old English drama', whose notes on the plays were 'the very quintessence of criticism'.[6]

In exploring the nature of Lamb's debt to his eighteenth-century predecessors, critics have argued for a more measured, less effusive assessment of the scholarship before Lamb. Earl Reeves Wasserman wanted the eighteenth-century editors credited for their contribution. He focused on their development of editing techniques, exploring the growth of the 'historical methods of scholarship' used in editions of Shakespeare – 'that is, the use of the works of an author's contemporaries for the explanation of meaning, manners, and temper'.[7] He documented the development of scholarly interest in those dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare before Lamb's *Specimens*. Shokoff modified Wasserman's argument by observing that such eighteenth-century interest was primarily focused on those playwrights 'who were never neglected, Shakespeare, Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher'[8] and that those authors who were outside this list, tended to be disregarded – incidentally, including Kyd. More recently, Russell modifies these arguments to emphasise the emerging drift toward the creation of texts for the reader rather than for performance and the expansion of the commercial market for such texts. She does this by placing Lamb's work in the context of contemporary, or near-contemporary publications such as Robert Dodsley's *Select Collection of Old Plays* (1744)[9] and Thomas Hawkins's *The Origin of English Drama* (1773)[10], both of which Lamb acknowledges assisted him in the collation of his own work.[11]

However, despite all the modifications, the essential fact of the influence of previous scholarship on Lamb's work is never seriously denied. The disparagement of Kyd begins with the one issue upon which all critics agree. Russell discusses the debt Lamb's *Specimens* owed to 'its affinity with another significant tradition in eighteenth-century published drama',[12] best expressed here in Lamb's letter to Thomas Manning:

> Specimens are becoming fashionable. We have 'Specimens of Ancient English Poets,' 'Specimens of Modern English Poets,' 'Specimens of Ancient English Prose Writers,' without end.

He goes on to say:

> They used to be called 'Beauties.' You have seen 'Beauties of Shakspeare': so have many people that never saw any beauties in Shakspeare.[13]

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[6] Shokoff, 3.
[7] Wasserman, op. cit., 216-7.
[8] Shokoff, op. cit., 6.
[9] Robert Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old English Plays* (London, 1744).
[10] *The Origins of the English Drama Illustrated in its various species viz., Mystery, Morality, Tragedy and Comedy, by Specimens from our earliest writers*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1773).
[11] Lamb, op. cit., v.
[12] Russell, op. cit., 3.
[13] *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, Everyman edition, 2 vols (London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1909), reprinted 1935, I, 277.

Whatever disagreements may have occurred, all critics concur in this: that the key objective of such works was 'for any light which they might throw on the far superior works of Shakespeare'.[14] That, as Jonathan Bate wrote:

> Lamb's method in the evaluative notes to his *Specimens* is to judge each dramatist against the idea of Shakespeare. The lesser dramatists illuminate Shakespeare; Shakespeare illuminates the lesser dramatists.[15]

Kyd was one of those 'lesser dramatists' – what Shokoff called 'minor dramatists'– whose importance was only peripheral to the burgeoning interest in Shakespeare's contemporaries. In the eighteenth-century,

> …writers like Webster, Middleton and Ford were considered wild and loose craftsmen who occasionally touched poetic chords, but whose real value lay in their contemporaneity with Shakespeare. If the study of their works was recommended at all, it was aimed at knowing Shakespeare better by understanding the rudeness of the times in which he wrote.[16]

Thus, it was in the context of Shakespeare that an early critical idiom for Kyd was defined: and it was such comparative studies which found Kyd wanting, culminating in Lamb's damning commentary.

Eighteenth-century editors were forthright in their usage of contemporary works to define Shakespeare's superiority. Wasserman explored the development of the way Shakespeare was edited in the eighteenth-century in order to establish this. He focused on the work of Lewis Theobald who established an editorial method for Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Previously the contemporary drama was only a way of illustrating orthographical curiosities in Shakespeare's work. Theobald changed all this when he established the principle that the work of Shakespeare's contemporaries should be seen in its historical context. Wasserman observed that Theobald's use of the historical context of such works introduced a relativist methodology to criticism; that is, a way of comparing them to Shakespeare's works by considering them in the context of their own time. In other words, he established: 'the criticism of a work by the time for which, and the contentions by which, it was written, the realization of the relativity of taste'.[17] Such a method was influential. As Wasserman noted, Thomas Warton had also considered that

> When a scholar discovers a source or recognises an outmoded literary convention, he must eventually come to the conclusion that this literature is not to be judged entirely by personal tastes and certainly not by canons designed by a different race or age.[18]

So, when it came to discussing a context for Shakespeare's work, early critics used references to contemporary drama to illustrate the origin of Shakespeare's artistry. They took Theobald's principle out of the field of editing and applied it to their critical appreciations of Shakespeare, such as the enquiries into Shakespeare's

[14] Russell, op. cit., 4.
[15] 'Lamb on Shakespeare', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 51 (1985), 79.
[16] Shokoff, op. cit., 6.
[17] Wasserman, op. cit., 223.
[18] Ibid., 235.

learning. In discussing Shakespeare's education, the historical context allowed the author to show Shakespeare had surpassed his predecessors.

It would seem, at this point, that Kyd was already on a 'losing streak'. It was inevitable that judgement of his well-known play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, would be negative. His work was already bound to be viewed as subservient to Shakespeare's. However, there was one additional quirk of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Unlike many other Elizabethan dramas, references to Kyd's work appeared throughout the subsequent drama. Plays, not just by Shakespeare, but by Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher, were littered with parodies of the play's speeches. The tone of the allusions was mocking. Critics found that *The Spanish Tragedy* was frequently 'sneered [at] by a Quotation of some Lines from it'. As Peter Whalley further observed, Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* contains a direct reference to the old play and mocks Hieronimo's speech from Act 3 as containing 'the most jejeune and unnatural Turns upon the Word'.[19] For the eighteenth-century scholar, *The Spanish Tragedy* was as a subject of mockery. So they felt they were justified in offering a similar view. To the then anonymous author of *The Spanish Tragedy* Whalley offered the unequivocal:

> The Author has had the Happiness to be at this Time unknown, the Remembrance of him having perished with himself; yet though his Name is saved, his Work will continue to suffer Life with perpetual Infamy.[20]

Contemporaries could only agree with Whalley that *The Spanish Tragedy* '…richly Merits every Lash that is bestowed upon it'. This response to Kyd as the 'common Butt of the more judicious writers'[21] is the earliest aesthetic evaluation we have of Kyd and remained a constant throughout the eighteenth-century. John Upton paused in his *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* only to observe that *The Spanish Tragedy* (1748) 'was the constant object of ridicule in Shakespeare's time'.[22] For Richard Farmer, in his *An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767) the play was 'the common Butt of our Author and the Wits of the time'.[23] When Isaac Reed produced the second edition of Baker's *Biographica Dramatica* in 1782, he noted that Kyd's play 'was the constant object of ridicule amongst his contemporaries and immediate successors'.[24] It was 'fustian old play' to Theobald and 'the common butt of raillery to all the poets in Shakspeare's time'.[25]

Such evidence was also used to indicate the debased taste of an Elizabethan audience. Critics knew that the play was popular – 'how so undeserving a Piece could possibly succeed in the public Favour' was a mystery – but that was due to 'the Capriciousness of public Taste than from the real Merit of the Work'.[26] That *The Spanish Tragedy* was also an artistic failure came about when the reasons for the

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[19] Peter Whalley, *Enquiry Into the Learning of Shakespeare* (London: T. Whaller, 1748), 46.
[20] Ibid. 48.
[21] Ibid. 46.
[22] (London: G. Hawkins, 1748), 2nd ed. 'with alterations and additions', 248n.
[23] *An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare addressed to Joseph Craddock Esq.,* (Cambridge: Archdeacon, 1767), 28.
[24] David Erskine Baker, *Biographica Dramatica, or, A Companion to the Playhouse*, 2nd edition, ed. Isaac Reed, 2 vols. (London: T. Becket et al, 1782), 276.
[25] *The Plays of William Shakespeare in Ten Volumes with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators; to which are added notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens*, ed. Edmond Malone (London: C. Bathurst et al.), 3rd ed. 1785, ed. Isaac Reed, III, 419, n7.
[26] David Erskine Baker, *Biographia Dramatica, or, A Companion to the Playhouse*, [published anonymously] 1764, 2 vols. [no page number given].

ridicule were proposed. Wasserman noted that eighteenth-century aestheticism was opposed to

> Pedantry and over-intellectualism, conceits and puns; frequent prosodic irregularity – that is, the use of run-over lines, complex rhyme schemes, variations of metre … and employment of vague, bombastic, over-connotative, or ill-bred diction.[27]

All of which they saw in Kyd. The eighteenth-century editors observed in the parodies some mock-heroic versions of Kyd's speeches and catchphrases. They saw in the original play archaisms, drumming metre, Latin, Spanish and Italian quotation: what we might now call 'grandstanding'. Everything, in fact, such critics found reprehensible in art. Whalley dismissed *The Spanish Tragedy* as 'little else but a continued String of Quibbles and Conceits, even in the most passionate and affecting Parts'[28] only liable to find favour with 'Admirers of Jingle and Conceit'.[29] Edward Capell thought that Kyd:

> …is one of those many who are the worse for their learning: for his play is bespatter'd all over, with scraps of *Spanish*, and *French*, and *Italian*, and *Latin* in great abundance; insomuch that in one part of it, no less that thirteen hexameters are thrown out together.[30]

Even Hawkins, much quoted in modern Kyd scholarship for his appreciation of the 'fine spirit' of Kyd's work, described him as 'not entirely free from affectation and pedantry'.[31]

It seems hardly surprising, therefore, that Lamb should have looked to his predecessors for an appreciation of Kyd. *The Spanish Tragedy* had been viewed as a play that was ridiculed and was thus the object of their derision. What Lamb did, however, was to take such derision one step further since his approach was a more personal one. Russell has observed that, previous to Lamb, the scholarship of Shakespeare's predecessors was very much considered within an 'antiquarian and scholarly tradition',[32] works that could be used to throw light on the curious tastes of the past. As Shokoff observed, while 'the anthologies of Dodsley and Hawkins are instances of positive scholarly attention to the minor drama' they are also 'singular instances, not altogether removed from the tendency to view the plays as historical curiosities'. As such, 'judgement about the [non-Shakespearean] plays's literary merits yielded to their historical interests'.[33]

Lamb was 'like Dodsley' in that he was 'a populariser of old plays', creating a book 'aimed at a literate middle ground rather than a scholarly élite'; but, as Russell further observes, Lamb's *Specimens*

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[27] Wasserman, op. cit., 214, n4.
[28] Whalley, op. cit., 48.
[29] Ibid. 46.
[30] *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Hughes, 1783), III, 530.
[31] Hawkins, op. cit., I, p. x. This works was, incidentally, the fruit of Hawkins's research in updating the 1770-1 ed. of Thomas Hanmer's Shakespeare. See Robert D. Williams, op. cit., 441.
[32] Russell, op. cit., 2.
[33] Shokoff, op. cit., 7.

> …represent[s] a personal reading of the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods; the editor's presence is a constant factor in this book.[34]

It is a personal view of the drama that Lamb makes clear in the Preface. He allows himself freedom in the aesthetic interpretation: 'I have expunged without ceremony all that which the writers had better never had written'[35] even to the point of:

> Where a line was more obscure … I have had no hesitation in leaving the line or passage out … Where I have met with a superfluous character … I have ventured to dismiss it altogether.[36]

In other words, the criteria for inclusion in the book will involve Lamb's view of what is suitable or not: and selection is according to his:

> …leading design … to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors … how much of Shakespeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind.[37]

The extracts were designed to be a demonstration of the 'power of the imagination' of the dramatists, in their representations of strife, love, joy and grief.

This makes Lamb's choice for Kyd rather curious. In the case of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Lamb achieves his aim by concentrating on the so-called additions to the play. These are five additional passages that first appeared in the 1602 edition of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Lamb would have encountered these and a discussion of their origins in one of his source books, Hawkins's *Origin of English Drama*. Since Lamb acknowledged his use of Hawkins, he would have been aware that the additions were not Kyd's text. Indeed, he observed that Hawkins 'in his republication of this tragedy, has thrust' the additions 'out of the text and into the notes'. Lamb even pointed out that Hawkins thought them to have been '*foisted in by the players*'. Further, Lamb knew that the additions were not Kyd's words since he makes a passing reference to the debate as to whether they were by Jonson: he 'suspect[s] the agency of some "more potent spirit"' and surmises that 'Webster might have furnished them' since they 'are full of that wild solemn preternatural cast of grief' to be found in *The Duchess of Malfi*.[38]

However, by choosing the additions, Lamb was also adhering to his own agenda of what he called in the Preface 'the moral sense of our ancestors'.[39] Such concerns were portrayed in *Specimens* by Lamb's specific choice of the so-called 'Painter' addition. This is the title given to the fourth addition, noted for its amplification of Hieronimo's madness in the presence of the painter, Bazardo. What Bate calls Lamb's 'emotional and intellectual profundity'[40] that dictates his choices in *Specimens* is realised here. As Russell remarks, the 'Painter' addition 'is a moment of stasis, a

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[34] Russell, op. cit., 3.
[35] Lamb, *Specimens*, vi.
[36] Ibid. v.
[37] Ibid. vi.
[38] Ibid. 12.
[39] Ibid. vi.
[40] *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 132.

contemplation of an action which is also a contemplation on the metaphysical impossibility of all action'. There is, as she says, no dramatic action here, that having been summarized before the quotation; and so, 'the dramatic action itself is suspended and questioned'.[41] This is entirely in keeping, of course, with Lamb's famous complaint about theatre in 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation'; but Lamb does not choose this addition because he feels it could not be adequately expressed on a contemporary stage. He chooses it because, for him, it is 'the very salt of the old play'; that is, it represents an imaginative depth, an 'emotional and intellectual profundity' to the writing that, for Lamb, is not present in Kyd's text. Or, to put it another way, he chooses to quote from one of the additions because *he does not like the play itself*.

The 'Painter' addition is not Kyd's work. In one fell swoop, Lamb lived up to his conviction that all obscurity and superfluity will be omitted from his extracts by simply dismissing Kyd's own work altogether. This is the ultimate disparagement. Lamb's title in his book, above the quoted passages labels the piece as being from Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*; following a summary of the incident preceding the extract, Lamb then proceeds to quote what he *knows* to be someone else's work. To confound all this, he even acknowledges that he has done so in his notes by adding another derogatory comment. Kyd's own play, he says is worthless – 'a caput mortuum' – and undramatic – 'a piece of flatness'. Like his eighteenth-century predecessors, he thought the language of Kyd's play unworthy, but he goes a step further: where his eighteenth-century predecessors had seen Kyd's work as being subject *to* mockery, Lamb changes it to being the subject *of* mockery.

How important this became is evident in the subsequent responses to Kyd's play. At the time of *Specimens* the social turmoil precipitated by the French Revolution in 1789 initiated a reaction against the eighteenth-century editors and 'The English Romantics displaced their revolutionary fervour away from politics onto literature'.[42] This meant that Shakespeare was still 'part of the very constitution of Romantic life (and its political and social texts)',[43] but that there was a reassessment of previously under-appreciated figures in the canon. Normally, it indicates an enhancement of the reputation of a previously unknown or disregarded playwright; Lamb's *Specimens* is placed firmly as a strong contributor to such a renascence. For example, the early nineteenth-century is where Marlowe's improving reputation has its first realization. Initially repudiated for impiety and coarseness in his life and drama, Marlowe's reputation throughout the eighteenth-century began to improve, as Thomas Dabbs has demonstrated in *Reforming Marlowe*: *the Nineteenth-Century Canonization of a Renaissance Dramatist*.[44] Warton offered cautious praise for Marlowe's poetry in 1774; Isaac Reed and Edmond Malone sought out editions of his plays[45] but it was in *Specimens* an author once considered to be immoral and depraved could, by 1808 be 'arranged and glossed' by Lamb 'in a way that lent artistic credence to dramas that many prior critics had found unrefined'.[46] According to Tom Lockwood, recently assessing the influence of Ben Jonson on the Romantics, the selections from

[41] Russell, op. cit., 5.
[42] Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1989), reprinted in Vintage edition 1991, 151.
[43] Tom Lockwood, *Ben Jonson in the Romantic Age* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 1.
[44] (London: Associated UP, 1991).
[45] Dabbs, op. cit., 28-9.
[46] Ibid. 31.

Specimens 'were part of a more continued advocacy on Lamb's part'[47] of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Equally important is Lamb's own influence on the resurrection and study of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Lockwood credits Lamb's *Specimens* as largely responsible for such appreciation. The new texts that were published about Jonson

> …can clearly be seen as a commercial recognition of the climate of appreciation to which Lamb's work had given rise. This tide, turning (for once) in Jonson's favour, led to an increased interest in, and positive estimation of, his works.[48]

No one can deny that, while *Specimens* may have drawn on existing literary traditions regarding Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, '…without influence it certainly was not'.[49]

Kyd, however, had no such investment made in his work. *The Spanish Tragedy* was not appropriated as offering a kind of political manifesto for revolutionary politics; nor was it subject to any kind of theatrical revival. If anything, Kyd's reputation as a result of Lamb's commentary underwent a reversal.

Specimens had a direct influence on his colleagues, two of whom, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Hazlitt, relied on Lamb to assist them in similar work. Jonathan Bate had observed 'Lamb's great strength was his capacity to sow seeds, to provoke ideas in others'.[50] Lockwood observes that 'Hazlitt relied upon Lamb for texts and stimulus in the preparation of his "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth"';[51] just as Bate had noted that such a series of lectures 'would not have been conceived of had it not been for Lamb's *Specimens*'.[52] What did Hazlitt write?

> The First Part of *Jeronymo* is an indifferent piece of work, and the Second, or the *Spanish Tragedy* by Kyd, is like unto it, except the interpolations idly said to have been added by Ben Jonson, relating to Jeronymo's phrensy, 'which have all the melancholy madness of poetry, if not the inspiration'.[53]

Two aspects of this are significant: firstly, Hazlitt's mention of *The First Part of Jeronymo* and his ready acquaintance of it with *The Spanish Tragedy*. It was known to be anonymous and not equated with Kyd, other than having a thematic link. Nevertheless, Hazlitt introduces and criticises a work that is *not by Kyd.* Secondly, his singling out of 'the interpolations', or the additions, as the only part of the play worth any creative merit. In this, of course, he was directly influenced by Lamb. As was Coleridge, who seemed to be particularly struck by Lamb's notes in the *Specimens*, telling Robert Southey in a letter of February 1808 that 'the notes, that I have seen… are delicious'[54] and in *Biographia Literaria* he described the notes as 'full of just and

[47] Lockwood, op. cit., 85.
[48] Ibid. 86.
[49] Ibid. 85.
[50] Bate, 'Lamb on Shakespeare', 77.
[51] Lockwood, op. cit., 85.
[52] Bate, 'Lamb on Shakespeare', 79.
[53] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth; and Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1817), reprinted 1870, 171.
[54] *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), III, 675.

original criticism, expressed with all the freshness of originality'.[55] The result being that his only comment on Kyd was expressed in his *Table Talk* of 1817 that 'The parts pointed out in *Hieronimo* as Ben Jonson's bear no traces of his style'. They were, he thought 'very like Shakespeare's'.[56] He makes no mention of Kyd's own work, only the additions.

So two of the most critically respected figureheads of the Romantic Movement had very little to say about Kyd, other than what their friend had suggested; and for Kyd's reputation, nothing changed. Not without cause did William Gifford refer to *The Spanish Tragedy* as 'the poor persecuted play of old *Jeronimo*'.[57] In fact, it was not until John Payne Collier in 1831[58] that Kyd's work was to find a defender. Even then, Collier acknowledged what he saw as Kyd's lack of 'taste' and glossed over it with adjectives such as 'spirit'.[59] His use of the word 'spirit' recalls Lamb's use of alchemy to describe *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Just as Lamb went elsewhere to find what he considered artistic credibility in the play, later critics ignored any commentary on the artistic merits of *The Spanish Tragedy* in favour of observations on Kyd's technical prowess. This was achieved by allying the historical importance of Kyd recognised in the eighteenth-century with an important aspect of Lamb's commentary. By sidelining Kyd's own work, by ignoring *The Spanish Tragedy* as a single, autonomous work of art and regarding it as a component of the history of drama, Kyd came to be seen as making a contribution to the technical processes of drama. That is, his work provided the 'apparatus' for future dramatists to use. The result was that any artistic consideration of his work was neglected, in favour of seeing *The Spanish Tragedy* as the crude technical basis from which Shakespeare spun dramatic gold. Lamb's 'dregs' became the 'crude' substance of technical innovation.

So, John Addington Symonds in 1884 described 'Shakespere's alchemy – the touch of nature by which he turned the coldest mechanisms of the stage to spiritual use'.[60] Those 'mechanisms' were provided by Kyd. Frederick Samuel Boas in his seminal Clarendon edition of *The Works of Thomas Kyd* in 1901, referred to *The Spanish Tragedy* as 'a tale of elemental human passion'.[61] C. F. Tucker Brooke in *The Tudor Drama* of 1911 designated Kyd's characters as 'crude'.[62] As late as 1964, T. B. Tomlinson in *A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy* subconsciously recalls Lamb in his remarks on the play's 'limitations and crudenesses'.[63]

Such a reductive approach, a view of *The Spanish Tragedy* as elemental, had repercussions for the reception of the play in the early twentieth-century. The most notorious realization of this is the ascription of a genre to the play: as the forerunner of so-called 'Revenge' tragedies. Critics began to look at the content of the play itself,

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[55] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969-) vol. 7, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, II, 79.
[56] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk and Omniana* (London: Oxford UP, 1917), 221.
[57] *The Works of Ben Jonson in 9 vols with notes critical and explanatory and a Biographical Memoir* (London: G. W. Nicol et al., 1816), II, 456n.
[58] John Payne Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare; and, Annals of the Stage to the Restoration*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1831).
[59] Ibid. II, 207.
[60] John Addington Symonds, *Shakespere's Predecessors in the English Drama* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1884), new edition 1900, 192-3.
[61] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), reprinted 1962, xxxii.
[62] *The Tudor Drama: A History of English National Drama to the Retirement of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1911), 210.
[63] (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1964), 75-6.

to distil from it those specific aspects that constituted its technical achievement. This was the method used by Fredson Bowers in his influential history of *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* of 1940. He listed various features of Kyd's play that constituted the 'elements' of Revenge tragedy and he called the sum of these constituents 'the Kyd formula'. [64] The idea was continued by Moody Prior in *The Language of Tragedy* who discussed 'the revenge-play formula, which was introduced by Kyd'.[65]

That Lamb's approach to Kyd was important since it became an indicator of how Kyd was treated critically during the next two centuries. In assessing Lamb's debt to his predecessors, Kyd's reputation can be seen to have diminished. Whereas eighteenth-century critics considered *The Spanish Tragedy* to have historical importance, they readily accepted as derogatory the judgement of subsequent dramatists and formed a similar opinion of Kyd's artistry. Lamb took this one step further and in *Specimens* ignored Kyd's own work in favour of the additions, known to have a different author. He dismissed Kyd's original work, applying the alchemical term 'caput mortuum'. The initial result was a focus by Lamb's contemporaries solely on the additions to Kyd's play. The long term result was that Lamb's alchemical analogy was used as a critical idiom for *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Stratford-upon-Avon

[64] Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1940), 62-3.
[65] Moody Prior, *The Language of Tragedy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1947), 136.

‘Dream Children: A Reverie’ Reworked

By D. E. WICKHAM

The ‘Stella’ (women’s) section of Britain’s *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper of 26 November 2006 contained a fascinating essay by Lynne Nugent which, surely coincidentally, explored the theme of Charles Lamb’s ‘Dream Children’ from a modern (American?) woman’s point of view.

Missing out the bits you could not tell Aunt Edna, she and her boyfriend were in their early thirties when he asked if she wanted children some day. She claimed not to know. He thought they would be good parents.

Three years later they are married and she tries to pin him down by saying that she does not want children. He agrees. She bursts into tears. She has been reading pregnancy blogs and listing favourite names, ‘but my imagined children were ghostly, abstract, an intellectual exercise!’

A year into her marriage she sees a family album, which includes a sepia-honed photograph of her husband ‘as a three-year-old wearing a dirty T-shirt and shorts … he looks up at the camera tentatively, his brown eyes wide, his cheeks round, his mouth a serious little bow’. She downloads the picture onto her laptop and makes it the background image, which may be what the British call a ‘screen saver’. ‘Now, every time I turn on my computer, I see this little boy, this small version of my husband … I have grown to like him more and more. I never felt this sentimental about baby pictures of me, or about any babies’. Previously she had convinced herself that babies were a liability and she never wanted babies until her mid-thirties, when biology was turning ‘not now’ into ‘maybe never’.

She will not accept her husband’s offer merely to give her a baby if it will make her happy. He clearly does not look forward to nappies or not being able to eat out at favourite restaurants – though the childish screams during luncheon the day I was copying out this item, the mewling infants shouting at large expensive exhibitions in London’s public art galleries, and frequent letters printed in newspapers asking for recommendations of airlines and hotels that would welcome babies-in-arms in Thailand suggest that many new parents would not regard this as a problem.

Her male hairdresser assures her that both parents will happily give up their ‘untethered lives’ when they see their baby. The husband has confirmed his lack of enthusiasm; the wife has stopped visiting pregnancy blogs and she may now stop listing names. She wonders about removing the boyish picture from her computer.

‘Still looking closely at my little boy, I wonder if I can really let him go, now that we have met’.

‘As we read elsewhere’ … immediately waking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor armchair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side – but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever!

Belvedere, Kent

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The annual Birthday Celebration Luncheon was attended by 50 members and guests and took place, as usual, at 14 Prince's Gate, on 9 February. The feared move away from that building seems, for the time being, not to be taking place – The Royal College has accepted a booking for the luncheon to be held in February 2009! Our guest of honour this year was Professor Jon Cook of the University of East Anglia, whose talk after lunch was greatly enjoyed by all.

The Society sends it affectionate greetings and congratulations to Charles Branchini who celebrates his 100th birthday on St George's Day, 23 April. The chairman and his wife visited Charles recently and found him full of good humour as usual. He told us that he had been born prematurely (in Claridge's Hotel in Mayfair, a rare distinction) and was pronounced such a weakly infant that he was given just a few days to live. Lamb would certainly have enjoyed that! Charles has been presented with a card signed by his Elian friends, a small booklet on Dante (members may recall Charles lecturing on the translator, Cary, some decades ago) and a bottle of champagne!

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2008

It is unclear how it happened, but the yellow subscription request sent out with the last *Bulletin* reprinted details from last year's request, and thus was headed 2007 rather than 2008. Most members have realised the error and have paid their subscriptions on the correct basis – that it was the 2008 year's subscriptions that were due. A few members were in doubt and asked for guidance. Some members have simply ignored the request.

We must apologise for the confusion, but now emphasise that subscriptions for the calendar year 2008 became due for payment on 1 January 2008. Any member who has failed to pay so far is asked to put this right as quickly as possible. The rates and payment details appear on the back cover of each *Bulletin*.

Editor's Note: Regrettably, I have been required to change my e-mail address. Henceforth, it will be British_Romanticism@comcast.net.