# The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

April 2009 New Series No. 146

*Articles*



*Reviews*



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# Elia, Epistles and Elegy: Lamb and his Readers

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Delivered as the Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture to the Charles Lamb Society,
11 October 2008

ADDRESSING THE SOCIETY, I REALISE THAT I AM TAKING MY PLACE amongst a number of distinguished Glasgow scholars who have done so: Duncan Wu, John Gardner, Nicky Trott and Seamus Perry, to name a few, if a few who have all moved on from Glasgow. Lamb, famously, had his objections to North-British ways, and I hope I will not seem in this instance to be simply reinforcing Hazlitt's attack on the Caledonian clan mentality that provoked his complaint that 'the Scotch nation are a body-corporate. They hang together like a swarm of bees'.[1] But I will begin nonetheless by quoting from one of my predecessors, Seamus Perry, who remarked in his 1993 address to the Society that '"Elia," to my ear at least, carries the echo of "elegist."'[2] I will return to elegy and its significance towards the end, but I will begin by considering Elia, and Dr Perry's ear. Lamb as we know, 'had no ear',[3] but one thing we do not know for sure is how he heard the name of his creation, Elia. Seamus Perry's ear, at least, must hear the first syllable 'ell' to carry the 'elegist' echo. But at a Lamb conference in 2006, I was roundly shamed for my eccentric pronunciation of 'Elia': Jane Aaron preceded me on the panel, and noted the difference between an older school, who pronounced it 'ell-ee-ah' and a younger generation who preferred 'ee-lee-a'. As I took to the lectern I nervously mouthed over to myself 'ell-ee-ah', 'ee-lee-a', but it was too late to shake humble 'ell-eye-ah'. I was aghast to find myself such a heterogeneous element, cut off from both herds. But I stuck resolutely to my own strangely accented version; and I will continue to do so, if only from a spirit of dogged perversity.

The debate, of course, has a history going back at least as far as 1822. In a letter Lamb notes that he took the name from an Italian South-Sea clerk, remarking to John Taylor, 'Call him Ellia'. Alfred Ainger comments 'It is doubtful if the name has ever been generally pronounced as Lamb intended',[4] but it's not quite clear what that might be. William Hone wrote a poem in praise of Lamb which rhymed 'Elia' with 'aspire', a decision E. V. Lucas described as 'regrettable' more for its Cockneyism than for placing the wrong stress on the 'E': 'modern usage', he notes, 'has Elia rhyming with Celia, but the true stress will probably never return'.[5] Lucas made note of a letter in the Huntington Library from John Taylor to Sir Charles Elton which 'contains this sentence: "We think Mr Lamb pronounces the word Elià"' (*LL* 2: 302). The debate rattled on in *Notes and Queries* and elsewhere for some time, until George L. Barnett stepped in to correct an error of transcription in Lucas's edition, and to pronounce what he, and everyone else, hoped would be the last word:

> It would seem then, to settle the question of the pronunciation of 'Elia', that Lamb himself pronounced the name with the short *e*; his statement 'call him Ellia' now assumes the added force of a direct reply to a query, not a casual comment. According to Taylor's testimony, Lamb accented the *i*, certainly not the *a* as Lucas transcribed it. At the same time,

[1] *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1930-4): 17: 100.
[2] 'Charles Lamb and the Cost of Seriousness', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* n.s. 83 (July 1993): 78-89 (86).
[3] *London Magazine* 3 (March 1821): 263. Subsequent references to the *London Magazine* will be abbreviated to *LM* and inserted into the text.
[4] *Charles Lamb* (London: Macmillan Co., 1888): 101.
[5] *The Letters of Charles Lamb, to which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 3 vols. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1935): 3: 14. Subsequent references to Lamb's letters will be abbreviated to *LL* and inserted into the text.

> it seems clear that Hone had heard it given the Cockney rhyme to the extent that he had no hesitation about rhyming it with 'aspire'. On the other hand, Elton felt public usage sanctioned his accentuation on the first syllable even after being informed of Lamb's preference.[6]

Barnett proposes a solution, but accepts a variety of pronunciations: which is perhaps another way of saying that it doesn't particularly matter. So, I may be wrong about Elia, but Seamus Perry needn't get his ears checked. 'Elia' *can* carry the echo of 'elegist'. All this need not detain us, and you will be glad to know I do not intend to discuss it any further. What I do want to consider, however, is why this problem of pronunciation has a special significance for Lamb and Elia, and what it might tell us about Lamb's conception of his literary work.

I'll begin by considering what reading Elia entails. Our confusion about Elia/Ellia/Eelya is a product of silent reading: we can quite happily mispronounce it, or even not really pronounce it at all, when our eyes are gliding across the printed page. Lamb suggests a certain sociability to his readers – in Lucas's perceptive words 'every one thinks that he knows Lamb a little more intimately, and appreciates him a little more subtly, than any one else'[7] – but that sociability is a product of a relationship mediated by the printed page. Barry Cornwall captures the uncertainty well: 'his looks and movements are transfigured, and communicated to me by the poor art of the printer. His voice, so sincere and earnest, rings in my ear again'.[8] The situation is of course different for Cornwall than it is for us – he knew Lamb well, so even 32 years after Lamb's death it is possible for 'Elia' to echo in *his* ear – but he raises an important issue nonetheless. Lamb offers a connection with his readers, but that connection is communicated not simply by Lamb, but also by the 'poor art of the printer'. It is this three-way relationship between Lamb, print and readers that I want to discuss here, but it is a complex one, particularly when we consider the types of reader that Lamb addressed. Those, like Bryan Waller Procter, who knew Lamb, are a tiny minority: most of Lamb's readers would have no access to Lamb's 'looks and movements' or to the sound of his voice. Looks, sounds and movements are by nature ephemeral – they are available to be enjoyed by one audience alone – but print seems to offer a kind of permanence. The printer's art, allied to the binder's art, the advertiser's art, the bookseller's art, the distributer's art, and the arts of many others, allowed Lamb to access readers in the burgeoning print economy that began to take its modern shape in the early nineteenth century. But all this talk of advertising, binding, printing and selling suggests a problem. Writing that is connected to the sordid commercial world of 'getting and spending' and the inky grubbiness of the publisher's shop is designed to sell to what Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth were amongst the first to condemn as the 'reading public'. Writing for these sorts of readers might ultimately accord the text the same ephemerality as other objects sold in the marketplace, used and thrown away like any other commodity. Instead, such writers proposed that the true artist should write for an audience of readers in posterity, thus transcending what is troubling in the print medium. Reading print, in this context, becomes a rather more dubious activity. Where, then, might Lamb fit in? Felicity James has proposed one model of reading that Lamb adopts in the 1790s, one which 'retains faith in the sustained power of sympathy between writer(s) and reader'.[9] The case, I think, is altered by the time we get to the 1820s, but Lamb is by no means as negative as the Lake Poets. His response, I will argue, is less certain, but that uncertainty is both productive and telling. If Lamb doesn't quite fit, that might be because he is the more perceptive reader of these cultural conditions.

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[6] 'The Pronunciation of *Elia*', *Studies in Romanticism* 5.1 (Autumn 1965): 51-5 (54-5). See also W. S. Jackson, '"Elia": its Pronunciation', *Notes and Queries* 169 (5 October 1931): 244.

[7] *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen and Co., 1905): 2: 50.

[8] Bryan Waller Procter [Barry Cornwall], *Charles Lamb: A Memoir* (London: Edward Moxon and Co., 1866): 169.

[9] Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 71.

**Types of Reading**

For Lamb, reading was often, though not always, connected with sight. The first intimation of this comes in 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', in which he describes the case of 'poor Tobin, who latterly fell blind'. Tobin 'did not regret it so much for the weightier kinds of reading – the "Paradise Lost" or "Comus" he could have *read* to him – but he missed the pleasure of skimming over with his own eye a magazine or light pamphlet' (*LM* 6 [July 1822]: 35).

He repeated the idea in a letter to Wordsworth in 1824. Wordsworth had been struggling with his eyesight, and Lamb sympathised: 'I have suffer'd sadly from one lately. How do you manage about *reading* in that case? There are books, which are as good to read out, or hear read, as to read by oneself; but the lighter offal, Mags, Newspapers, etc. it is indispensible to glance over per se. I cannot be the auditor of a paragraph' (*LL* 2: 431).

In 1830 condolences for Wordsworth's 'decaying sight' again occasion thoughts on types of reading: 'any thing high may, nay must, be read out – you read it to yourself with an imaginary auditor – but the light paragraphs must be glid over by the proper eye, mouthing mumbles their gossamer substance' (*LL* 3: 242). A certain kind of writing demands a certain kind of reading; 'lighter offal' belongs in print, but higher works (Wordsworth's *Prelude*, perhaps) ought to remain in MS. The ideal mode of reception for such works wholly avoids Grub Street: instead, one should, as with the auditors of Coleridge's *Christabel* or Wordsworth's *Prelude*, hear the poem read out by its author. Their contemporaries' reading habits were often seen as part of the problem. For Wordsworth, 'these people in the senseless hurry of their idle lives do not *read* books, they merely snatch a glance at them that they may talk about them'.[10] Surfeited with an endless supply of reading materials, readers read speedily, glancing at the surface rather than delving into the depths.

In 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading' Lamb argues of Shakespeare and Milton: 'These two poets you cannot avoid reading aloud – to yourself, or (as it chances) to some single person listening', but 'Books of quick interest, that hurry on for incidents, are for the eye to glide over solely. It will not do to read them out. I could never listen to even the better kind of modern novels without extreme irksomeness' (*LM* 6 [July 1822]: 35). Lamb seems to side with Wordsworth here, as one disappointed by the growth of a reading public which he views as degraded. For Lamb, however, things are not that simple. Lucy Newlyn's discussion of this essay has pointed out how Lamb undermines the apparent certainty of canon-making judgements: a copy of *Tom Jones* becomes valuable precisely insofar as it has been bashed and dog-eared by multiple readers.[11] Similarly, the difference Lamb notes between the gliding eye and the appreciating ear does not necessarily contain a value judgement. He is 'irked' by listening to novels, we think, not because he is irked by novels: rather, reading them aloud spoils them. His earnest question to Wordsworth in the letter – 'How do you manage about *reading* in that case?' – would of course not be an issue if one were satisfied by 'high' works. Lamb would clearly miss the chance to glance at the 'gossamer substance' of a paragraph or two.

He seems most Wordsworthian in a piece for the *New Times* in 1825, in which he complains that for

> the good old reading of Addison or Fielding's days is substituted that never-ending flow of thin novelties which are kept up like a ball, leaving no possible time for better things, and threatening in the issue to bury or sweep away from the earth the memory of their nobler predecessors. We read to say that we have read.[12]

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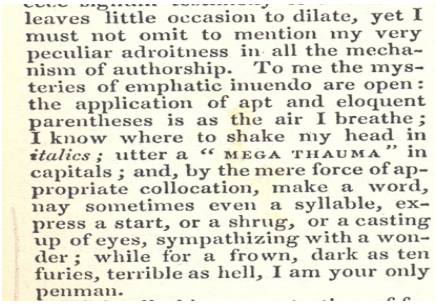
[10] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, the Middle Years*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd. edn. rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969): 1: 150.

[11] See *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000): 208-15.

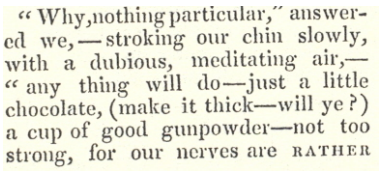
[12] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903): 1: 273. Subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated to *Works* and inserted into the text.

But even here Lamb is mainly sorry for the poor individuals, who, because reading is fashionable, must read: rather than blame them for their desultory habits, he longs for a time when they could spend their leisure hours doing something they enjoyed. Lamb doesn't have any particular problem with the new mode of reading, but he does recognise differences. Not everybody reads alike, and not every type of book demands the same kind of reading.

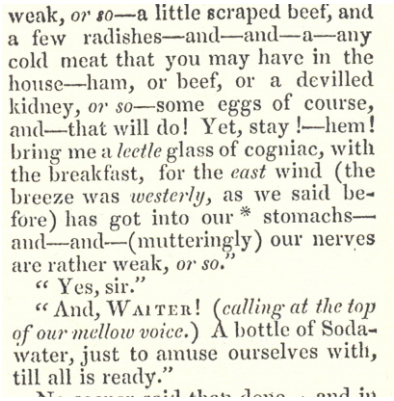
Peter Simonsen and Andrew Bennett have both in the past year published books which argue against the myth that Wordsworth was a poet who composed poetry aloud, and preferred to keep his poetry vocal, arguing that, as Simonsen puts it, the physical appearance of the poem on the page became for Wordsworth 'an integral part of a poem's total effect'.[13] It is a convincing reading of the poet's work, but if one needs to work to make Wordsworth a visual poet, other writers in the period were much more comfortable with the idea of print. Pierce Egan, for example, the author of *Life in London* and *Boxiana*, served an apprenticeship in the printing trade, becoming a skilled compositor, and he made liberal use of asterisks, italics, typefaces and font sizes in texts that demand to be seen as well as read. Magazines were full of such typographical innovation: *Blackwood's* complained in 1822 that the *London* and the *New Monthly* 'think they can rival us by copying the very tricks of our Printer's Devils – the peculiarities of our semi-colons – the exact angle of our marks of admiration'.[14] T. G. Wainewright seemed to do precisely that in the first number of the *London*, offering his services as one who could 'shake my head in *italics*; utter a "MEGA THAUMA" in capitals; and, by the mere force of appropriate collocation, make a word, nay sometimes even a syllable, express a start, or a shrug, or a casting up of eyes, sympathizing with a wonder; while for a frown, dark as ten furies, terrible as hell, I am your only penman' (*LM* 1 [January 1820] 23).


leaves little occasion to dilate, yet I must not omit to mention my very peculiar adroitness in all the mechanism of authorship. To me the mysteries of emphatic inuendo are open: the application of apt and eloquent parentheses is as the air I breathe; I know where to shake my head in *italics*; utter a "MEGA THAUMA" in capitals; and, by the mere force of appropriate collocation, make a word, nay sometimes even a syllable, express a start, or a shrug, or a casting up of eyes, sympathizing with a wonder; while for a frown, dark as ten furies, terrible as hell, I am your only penman.

This is another example of Wainewright's print-based dandification (*LM* 1 [June 1820] 628):


"Why, nothing particular," answered we,—stroking our chin slowly, with a dubious, meditating air,—"any thing will do—just a little chocolate, (make it thick—will ye?) a cup of good gunpowder—not too strong, for our nerves are RATHER

[13] Peter Simonsen, *Wordsworth and Word-Preserving Arts: Typographic Inscription, Ekphrasis and Posterity in the Later Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007): 59. See also Andrew Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[14] *Blackwood's* 11 (June 1822): 751.


weak, *or so*—a little scraped beef, and a few radishes—and—and—a—any cold meat that you may have in the house—ham, or beef, or a devilled kidney, *or so*—some eggs of course, and—that will do! Yet, stay !—hem! bring me a *leetle* glass of cogniac, with the breakfast, for the *east* wind (the breeze was *westerly*, as we said before) has got into our * stomachs—and—and—(mutteringly) our nerves are rather weak, *or so*."

"Yes, sir."

"And, WAITER! (*calling at the top of our mellow voice.*) A bottle of Soda-water, just to amuse ourselves with, till all is ready."

It's interesting to note just how effective the technique is – it reads like the speech of a louche dilettante – but magazines actively foreground their physicality, so such visual reading becomes material for self-conscious joking. Wainewright creates the effect of off-the-cuff speech, but his meditation on the artful printing necessary undermines any spontaneity. We are invited to become intimate with an author who draws attention to the fact that we only know him through a medium (print) that denies the possibility of a physical connection. If we seem to 'hear' Wainewright's 'voice', we do so in full recognition of the material, printed reality of the effect. Such physicality is pivotal: it makes texts permanent in some respects (it allows them to survive in a way that the spoken word does not), but there is a playfulness to such writing that undermines the apparent stability. Wainewright's paragraph is tied to the inky pages of the *London Magazine*: it belongs, as the *Blackwood's* comment suggests, to a world of Printer's Devils and compositors. This scene of production links it to the print market, and to the endless succession of 'novelties' that Wordsworth was anxiously distinguishing his own poetry from. The reader must scan such a text: it actively cultivates the 'glancing' style of reading that Wordsworth condemned. Yet Wainewright's sense of spoken immediacy seems appropriate too. His dazzling, effusive style is like the champagne he boasted of quaffing: effervescent and enjoyable, but insubstantial, unwholesome, and tending to induce forgetfulness, if not indeed something of a sore head. Wainewright's style has at once the ephemerality of speech and the ephemerality of cheap print.

Lamb, like Wainewright, was certainly interested in typography. When correcting the proofs of Wordsworth's *Letter to a Friend of Burns* and his *Thanksgiving Ode* in 1816, he wrote to Wordsworth, updating him on his progress. The proofs were in good order, but 'battered' had been substituted for 'battened' at one point. Lamb tells Wordsworth he had written a note for the correction in the margin of the proof text, because 'I know how such a blunder would "batter at your Peace"' (*LL* 2: 190). Or rather, he writes it would 'batten at your Peace', then appends a note on the margin of the letter, altering 'batten' to 'batter'. Lamb was clearly enjoying the process of being a 'Reader', and went on to worry about Coleridge's projected publication of 'Kubla Khan',

> which said vision he repeats so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and Elysian powers into my parlour while he sings or says it, but there is an observation 'Never tell thy dreams', and I am almost afraid that Kubla Khan is an owl that won't bear day light, I fear lest it should be discovered by the lantern of typography and clear reducting to letters, no better than nonsense or no sense.
>
> (*LL* 2: 190)

The 'lantern of typography' changes the way we see; things read differently in print. Lamb recognises two different modes of reading: 'The Poems I endeavoured not to understand', Lamb tells Wordsworth, 'but to read them with my eye alone, and I think I succeeded. (Some people will do that when they come out, you'll say.)' (*LL* 2: 190). Wordsworth and Coleridge both seemed to

prefer to keep their work in manuscript. When De Quincey assisted Wordsworth's Convention of Cintra pamphlet through the press, the proofs came back from the Lakes so covered in corrections and additions that the compositor had to break up the type and start again, while *Christabel* and 'Kubla Khan' had been recited by Coleridge to friends from manuscript copies for nearly two decades before their 1816 publication.[15] When words are reduced to a succession of printed letters, writers lose control over the type of reading their works are subjected to. Wordsworth fears the unthinking reading public's misunderstandings, and Coleridge's preface, accounting for the poem as a 'psychological curiosity', suggests a deeper anxiety: that the words might prove meaningless without the assistance of his melodious voice. Yet Lamb finds the process interesting rather than bewildering, actively enjoying the different types of reading that different forms permit.

Lamb's most famous engagement with print is in 'Oxford in the Vacation'. Elia exclaims in a footnote:

> There is something to me repugnant, at any time, in written hand. The text never seems determinate. Print settles it. I had thought of the Lycidas as of a full-grown beauty – as springing up with all its parts absolute – till, in evil hour, I was shown the original written copy of it...in the Library of Trinity.... How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure!... I will never go into the work-shop of any great artist again….
>
> (*LM* 2 [October 1820] 367)

This has often been taken alongside Lamb's account of Shakespearean tragedies as 'reading plays' as an example of his typically Romantic sense of the primacy of the word over the image. Art is the immaculate conception of the genius's mind in full flame, connecting the inspired artist with the inspired reader. Acting a 'reading' play is worrying because of the necessity of interpretation supplied by actors, while an 'interlined' manuscript suggests a connection with work that sullies the purity of the aesthetic. I won't discuss his account of Shakespeare, but Lamb in both cases is rather more subtle. The footnote is perhaps surprising: he makes this supposedly 'Romantic' declaration in a paragraph which declares a 'repugnance' to the written hand in favour of the security of print. 'Print settles it' because print is not, like handwriting, 'mortal' or 'alterable': print, it seems, is the route to immortality. Yet it was the printed medium that proved so anxious to many in this period, precisely because it seemed to suggest a vision of the 'great artist' in his 'work-shop', surrounded by printer's devils demanding copy.

Lamb offers a defence of print that seems paradoxical because it offers itself in the same terms in which critics typically denounced print in favour of either the spoken word or the coterie culture that manuscript circulation provides. Peter Simonsen reads the passage as 'typically Romantic and ultimately Wordsworthian', but he does note the potential for a 'certain amount of irony' in the fact that it is published as 'a footnote in an ephemeral magazine'.[16] Simonsen points to the right detail – the passage's textual position – but he underplays the irony. Lamb removed the footnote from the 1823 edition of the *Essays of Elia*, and appropriately so, in part at least. The note is intrinsically comic: it is a joke with itself as the subject. The note is in the position in which one would usually find corrections to an author's text by the editor, after all: it presents itself as precisely the sort of after-thought that Lamb claims to find 'repugnant'. Print, the footnote argues, offers a route to immortality, but Lamb makes the claim in a form that self-consciously advertises itself as printed,

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[15] For a discussion of the *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet, see Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1981). Lindop's discussion of Wordsworth's attitudes is telling: 'the poet was concerned about his pamphlet to the exclusion of all else, and his concerns were contradictory. The work must appear as fast as possible to have its proper impact; yet it must be as well written as possible and fit to stand a monument for the admiration of posterity' (167-8).

[16] Simonsen: 53-4.

and acknowledges that that printed status threatens the possibility of its posthumous reputation. The note is circumstantial. It takes its meaning from its marginality, on the edge of a text that is itself on the edge of a wider literary culture. But just as Lamb sees a value in the types of reading that cheap novels induce, so he does not dismiss this marginality. Of Elia he remarks:

> His Essays found some favourers, as they appeared separately; they shuffled their way in the crowd well enough singly; how they will *read*, now they are brought together, is a question for the publishers, who have thus ventured to draw out into one piece his 'weaved-up follies'.
>
> (*LM* 7 [January 1823] 21)

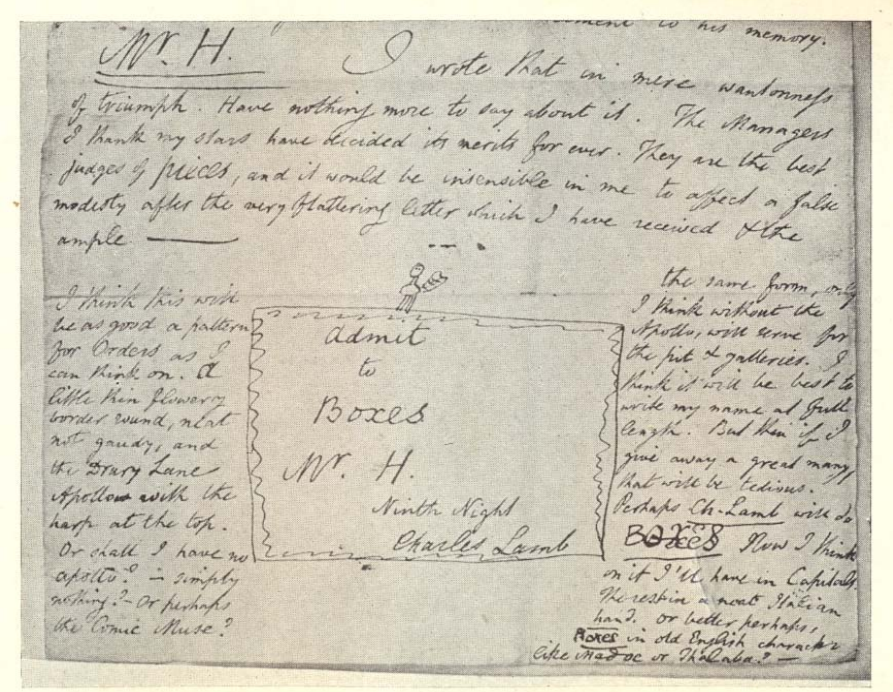
Reading is thrown into doubt, not confirmed, by the medium of the printed magazine. Yet the worry works both ways. Will they '*read*' well in a volume, or is the pleasure they provide determined by their circumstances, as pieces that are read as Lamb reads novels, as texts whose pleasure consists in their ephemerality?

**Types of ephemerality**

I will discuss now Lamb's reflections on the types of reading that different forms of writing require, beginning with a form that Lamb excelled in, the letter. J. E. Morpurgo has argued of Lamb that 'himself, his letters and his essays are his greatness'.[17] He's right of course, but it's an odd claim in a way. Lamb's life is something we encounter only through written accounts; and even though the letters survive, our connection to them is always strained. Letters, as Lamb knew, are inherently circumstantial. Receiving a letter from a friend is particularly pleasurable because the type of writing we receive partakes of the nature of a secret code; the references and the jokes make sense only in the given context of that friendship, and for all that others can *read* such a letter, they can never fully understand each reference to shared jokes and past events in common. They are also temporal, as Lamb knew to his cost. When writing to friends in far flung places, such as Thomas Manning in China or Barron Field in Australia, he often reflects on the fact that the familiarity the letter offers is of a strained nature. As he puts it in the letter to Barron Field which provides the germ of his essay 'Distant Correspondents', 'your now is not my now; and again, your then is not my then; but my now may be your then, and *vice versâ*' (*LL* 2: 210). What is news for Lamb writing in August may prove, disconcertingly, to be a lie when Field receives the letter in February. Lamb's letters can become reflections on how they will be read, on the problems of the textual transmission of thought that writing introduces, and that letters bring into focus.

At a time when writers like Wordsworth and Byron were becoming increasingly conscious that their letters would be republished after their death in printed 'Lives and Letters', Lamb's letters reflect what is lost when writing leaves its immediate context. His letters often foreground their physical nature, making them peculiarly difficult to represent in modern editions. We might think of several examples: that to William Evans regarding a portrait of Joseph Cottle which offers Lamb's wonderfully comic 'portrait…from memory' of Cottle (*LL* 2: 262); the letter to Manning full of praise for the Lakes and Coleridge, but which has on its reverse Lamb's true opinion: 'Hills, woods, Lakes and mountains, to the Eternal Devil' (*LL* 1: 223); or, his letter to Wordsworth written with each line alternating between black and red ink, and culminating in the final paragraph with each word in a different colour. Just as good is his letter to Wordsworth, written in exultation after having his farce 'Mr H-' accepted at Drury Lane:

[17] *Charles Lamb and Elia*, ed. J. E. Morpurgo (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948): 18.




REDUCED FACSIMILE OF LETTER FROM LAMB TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

FROM THE ORIGINAL IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. GORDON WORDSWORTH

This is an intriguing indication of Lamb's awareness of the importance of how writing looks. On the play's acceptance he remarks, 'the managers I thank my stars have decided its merits for ever. They are the best judges of *pieces*'. 'Pieces' is here written slightly larger than elsewhere and the word slants less than others, indicating that the word is a quotation of a technical stage term, but also suggesting a layer of irony. Earlier in the letter Lamb recounts a conversation with Tobin on pieces: 'different sorts of pieces – what is the best way of offering a piece – how far the caprice of managers is an obstacle in the way of a piece – how to judge of the merits of a piece … and my piece – and your piece – and my poor brother's piece' (*LL* 2: 13). Lamb is writing 'in mere wantonness of triumph', but he is always self-aware. 'My piece' might be rather different from 'your piece', particularly when one is writing to Wordsworth. '*Pieces*' like 'Mr H-' might be thought rather small and insignificant next to the *Lyrical Ballads*, after all. Lamb is at once triumphant and yet crestfallen: sincerely joyous to have the farce accepted, but aware that he should not, as we put it in the North, be 'getting above himself': it's only a two-act farce after all. (It's a mood that continued, incidentally, in Lamb's reaction to the play's performance, in which he gleefully joined in with those who hissed it, and insisted that the Managers withdraw it after its first performance, despite many positive voices in the audience.) The grand ticket in the centre of the letter is topped with a picture of Apollo (or perhaps the Comic Muse) that is comically, and self-consciously, inept. He wonders whether '*BOXES*' should be capitalised and in italics on the second column, or whether a gothic script, as Southey had employed in *Madoc* and *Thalaba the Destroyer* might be better. But if Southey concluded his *History of Brazil* with the words 'thus have I finished one of those great and lasting works, to which, in the full vigour of manhood, I looked forward as the objects of a life of literature',[18] Lamb is somewhat more diffident, and his use of gothic script is part of his joke about the status of his 'pieces'.

Two things arise from my reading of this letter. The first is Lamb's awareness of his own position, moving between the ephemeral and the epic, a topic I'll return to. The second is the sense that the letter is necessarily circumstantial. This letter actively resists the possibility of canonisation,

[18] *History of Brazil*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810-19): 3: 312.

even as it meditates on literary status and the modes of transmitting a literary work to the public. In the letter Lamb considers the placement of 'pieces' like 'Mr H-', but his own letter is self-consciously *not* written for an audience in posterity. Lamb figures his reader in the act of writing: to understand the letter, we must first understand it as a letter to Wordsworth. If Lamb is at once embarrassed *and* triumphant about his 'piece', that is partly *because* he is writing to Wordsworth. The letter is ephemeral because it is circumstantial: it makes full sense only in a given time and place (then 26 June 1806) and only to a given audience (William, and perhaps Dorothy, Wordsworth). And like 'Kubla Khan', we cannot reduce this letter to typography without losing part of its meaning.

This process was not confined to letter-writing. In 'Newspapers Thirty-Five Years Ago', published in the *Englishman's Magazine* in 1831, Lamb offers a merrily self-mocking account of his days as a getter-up of newspaper puns. He hit a rich vein of humour around 1802, he tells us, when the ladies of the town adopted a fashion for red stockings: 'But the fashion of jokes, with all other things, passes away; as did the transient mode which had so favoured us' (*Works* 1: 221). The joke was funny on the day it came out, but the fashion, like his joke, proved mutable. The 'transient mode', the newspaper paragraph, is transient because circumstantial. So, too, was the pun, another form Lamb excelled in. In his 'Popular Fallacies' column in the *New Monthly*, he questioned whether 'the worst puns are the best', quoting as an example one noted by Swift: 'An Oxford scholar, meeting a porter who was carrying a hare through the streets, accosts him with the extraordinary question: "Prithee, friend, is that thy own hare, or a wig?"'. 'The quibble in itself is not considerable', he notes, 'It is only a new turn given, by a little false pronunciation, to a very common, though not very courteous inquiry' (*Works* 1: 258). Yet it is a good pun, though why it is so may escape us. To understand it fully, he argues, 'We must take in the totality of time, place, and person; the pert look of the inquiring scholar, the desponding look of the puzzled porter; the one stopping at leisure, the other hurrying on with his burthen; the place – a public street, not favourable to frivolous investigations', not to mention many others, which Lamb goes on to enumerate. Yet the 'puns which are most entertaining are those which will least bear an analysis' (*Works* 1: 258), he argues; 'the impression, to be forcible, must be simultaneous and undivided' (*Works* 1: 259). Analysis is impossible in a pun, yet that is exactly what Lamb offers. The essay performs what it acknowledges to be impossible. We would not expect Lamb to miss such irony, and he doesn't. The essay does not try to revive an old pun; it offers an account of punning as an ephemeral art. The pun is personal: it is only funny in its own time and place, and only funny to those who hear it. Transcribing the pun only draws attention to the fact that it will not survive; it is ephemeral.

**Magazine Status**

Puns, newspaper columns and letters: all become ephemeral because they take their effect from their circumstances. They are designed for a specific readership (or group of auditors), and only make sense in a specific time and place. These forms don't need to worry about lasting to posterity, but what about magazine essays? A piece in the *London* for July 1821 told the story of a gentleman who saved a baronet from horse-trampling, and was rewarded by being taken back to the baronet's home. There he discovered treasures not held by the British Museum: a collection of 'literary fragments gathered in certain districts, hitherto deemed barren of instruction and amusement' (*LM* 4 [July 1821]: 50), rescued from barbers who had used them to curl hair, poulterers and cheesemongers who wrapped their products in them, and trunkmakers who lined their cases with them (*LM* 4 [July 1821]: 51). As William St Clair notes, being made into trunk lining was a fate that Shelley's poetry met,[19] but Shelley was not alone, as our narrator informs us: 'O reader! what were my emotions when I descried the first-born of my youthful muse, looking me wistfully in the

[19] William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004): 320.

face' (*LM* 4 [July 1821]: 51). Recovering himself from the shock, the author, saddened that 'much curious information, amusement, and even knowledge, is annually consumed by cheesemongers, barbers, tobacconists', proposes 'a *Society for the Preservation of Literary Scraps*' (*LM* 4 [July 1821]: 56), a society which has not, regrettably, met with the same success as the Charles Lamb Society.

A magazine is an appropriate site for such an essay: the *London* was one of many dozens launched in this period, and given the mass of publications available, writers were newly conscious of their own uncertain status. This is, again, partly a concern about reading and audience. We have been encouraged in recent years to think of Lamb addressing an audience in his own age rather than producing a temporal art for posterity. This has been the case particularly in relation to Lamb's work at the *London*, but it's also true of his political poems at papers like the *Champion* and the *Albion*.[20] Lamb, it is argued, produces work that had a direct impact on contemporary events. Such readings have been unrepentant in the face of the notion that what a text gains in historical specificity it loses in literary merit: such criticism is explicitly *not* intended to turn Lamb into an artist, but to use Lamb to help understand the politics of his age. Yet the magazines of this period did offer a kind of 'literary' work: writers anxiously distinguished themselves from the temporal productions of the press such as daily newspapers and political pamphlets. A magazine essay or poem is accordingly difficult to place: it is in the magazine *for* June 1820, yet it is self-consciously 'literary', so is not of its age, but for all time. Magazines faced the added worry of consumption by the wrong type of reader. They were often the site of complaints about the rise of the 'reading public', but they needed, as the Westminster Review put it, 'immediate success, to secure so much as existence'.[21] A magazine addressed to posterity is a dubious commercial proposition. Magazines, it was worried, are not read so much as consumed, and essays risk becoming '*Literary Scraps*' because they are circumstantial in the same way as letters, or consumable in the same way as a nice brie.

The *London Magazine* was littered with similar musings on impermanence. Hazlitt's Table Talk essays are a good example. In 'On the Conversation of Authors' he looks up from his desk to see 'several poor women weeding the blue and red flowers from the corn': 'Is not this life as sweet as writing Ephemerides? But we put that which flutters the brain idly for a moment, and then is heard no more, in competition with nature, which exists every where, and lasts always' (*LM* 2 [September 1820]: 252). Hazlitt offers the essay as a type of conversation with the reader (they are, after all, 'Table Talk'), but the presentation is clearly a pose. He presents himself looking up from his desk and uttering what comes first in an essay that is a direct follow up to one explicitly focused on the necessary 'difference between writing and speaking'. 'There is a degree of finishing as well as of solid strength in writing, which is not to be got at every day, and we can wait for perfection' (*LM* 2 [July 1820]: 31) he argues in that essay. Speech is of the moment: writing lasts. The next month's essay continues the theme, this time shifting to Parliamentary orators: 'The one thing needful in public speaking is not to say what is best, but the best that can be said in a given time, place, and circumstance' (*LM* 2 [October 1820] 381). Hazlitt's essays are written with a kind of melancholy resignation partly in recognition of their own uncertain place. His essays, or 'Ephemerides', move between writing and speaking, denied the familiar contact of the one, but lacking the permanence of the other.

Lamb focuses on the same issues. Throughout the essays Lamb discusses what he knows to be impermanent and untranslatable: the cry of the fruitereresses in 'My First Play', 'Chase some oranges, chase some numparels, chase a bill of the play' (*LM* 4 [December 1821] 604), or in 'Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago' a companion's laugh: 'Nor shalt thou, their compeer,

[20] For example, Mark Schoenfield, 'Voices Together: Lamb, Hazlitt and the *London*', *Studies in Romanticism* 29.2 (Summer 1990): 257-72 and Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000): 30-58.

[21] *Westminster Review* 1 (January 1824): 207.

be quickly forgotten, Allen, with the cordial smile, and still more cordial laugh, with which thou wert wont to make the old Cloisters shake'(*LM* 2 [November 1820]: 490). Allen's laugh may not be quickly forgotten; but it will be forgotten. His accounts of the Old Actors are similar. Munden's endlessly shifting faces are celebrated, but these are descriptions of 'the actors who flourished in my time – a melancholy phrase if taken aright, reader' (*LM* 5 [February 1822]: 174). The phrase is melancholy because decay necessarily succeeds flourishing. Less well known is his poem 'The Ape', which is advertised in the *London* for October 1820 as 'an endeavour to express that perplexity, which one feels at any alteration, even supposed for the better, in a beloved object; with a little oblique grudging at TIME; who cannot bestow new graves without taking away some portion of the older ones, which we can ill miss' (*LM* 2 [October 1820] 402). The poem's sprightly rhythm reinforces rather than denies the melancholy tone found so frequently in Lamb's essays and in the *London* more widely. The poem, written about Lamb's acquaintance Laura Martin, whom he had known as a sportive child, mirrors his accounts of Munden in remarking the uncapturable facial expressions of the child: 'This beast, this Ape, it had a face – / If face it might be styl'd – / Sometimes it was a staring Ape, / Sometimes a beauteous child' (402). And yet it ends in undisguised, if amused, melancholy: 'And fair to sight is she – and still / Each day doth slightlier grow, / Upon the ruins of the Ape, / My ancient play-fellow!' (403). Most plangent is his account in 'My Relations' of human frailty, the 'OBLIVION' that an old man realises has affected the memory of those he knew, and will affect him too (*LM* 3 [June 1821]: 611). The mutability Elia recognises in the world around him is reflected back on himself. But it also reflects, I want to suggest, on the medium for the discussion, the essay in the magazine.

Lamb's sense of the essay's ephemerality is connected with his idea of reading. Elia's career as a magazine essayist began with an address to a 'Reader', which supposes 'thou art a lean annuitant like myself' walking on 'thy passage from the Bank'. This is a remarkably concretised sense of audience, but it is a joke: Lamb clearly has no right to make such a supposition. He positions his reader in the essay, but that positioning is always of a dubious nature. In 'Oxford in the Vacation' he begins:

> Casting a preparatory glance at the bottom of this article – as the wary connoisseur in prints, with cursory eye (which, while it reads, seems as though it reads not,) never fails to consult the *quis sculpsit* in the corner, before he pronounces some rare piece to be a Vivares, or a Woolet – methinks I hear you exclaim, Reader, *Who is Elia*?
>
> (*LM* 2 [October 1820]: 365)

The reader reads with 'cursory eye', recalling Wordsworth's condemnation of the unthinking reading audience. Yet Elia again imagines a personal connection: he 'hear[s]' the reader 'exclaim' '*Who is Elia*?' But Lamb juxtaposes his reader's spoken comment with an assertion of the reader's status *as reader* ('methinks I hear you exclaim, Reader'), that is, as someone separated from him by the print medium, and unable to speak. The two are incompatible: Lamb places himself in the modern literary marketplace, subject to the reading of an audience he cannot access, yet at the same time he imagines forming a personal connection that transcends what Barry Cornwall calls the 'poor art of the printer'.

The best meditation on this issue is Lamb's 'Distant Correspondents', an essay which reworks the 1817 letter to Barron Field at Sydney, published in the *London Magazine* in March 1822. Lamb divides 'epistolary matter' into three topics, news, sentiment and puns. All of them are affected by the delay that letter-writing induces. '*My Now*' is not '*your Now*': 'news from me must become history to you' (*LM* 5 [March 1822]: 283). Puns, also, suffer in the transmission: 'A pun has a hearty kind of present ear-kissing smack with it; you can no more transmit it in its pristine flavour, than you can send a kiss' (284). The problem is, again, circumstantiality:

> …puns and small jests are, I apprehend, extremely circumscribed in their sphere of action. They are so far from a capacity of being packed up and sent beyond sea, they will scarce endure to be transported by hand from this room to the next. Their vigour is as the instant of their birth. The nutriment for their brief existence is the intellectual atmosphere of the by-standers.
>
> (283-4)

But 'Distant Correspondents' is not written to Field, but to the *London Magazine*'s readership. 'This confusion of tenses, this grand solecism of *two presents*, is in a degree common to all postage' (282), he recognises, but it is also common to all writing: the reader is always in the second 'now', detached from the writer. The essay opens with a complaint: 'the weary world of waters between us oppresses the imagination. It is difficult to conceive how a scrawl of mine should ever stretch across it. It is a sort of presumption to expect that one's thoughts should live so far. It is like writing for posterity' (282). The essay is necessarily written for a reader who reads Lamb's essay after Lamb writes it. Yet the intimacy he often affects in these essays seems appropriate too, because he writes in a magazine: rather than a distant posterity, he writes for readers who read the current magazine in the month that it is published. But then again, the magazine form's self-conscious acknowledgement of its own part in a massive, anonymous print market undoes the attempt at intimacy: it may have the ephemerality of a pun, but it cannot have the personal connection, the 'ear-kissing smack' a pun offers. The essay, it seems, is uncertainly placed. Writing for posterity always, Lamb realises, depends upon a 'presumption' of a connection between writer and reader that is always dubious. As Hazlitt noted, 'The public now are the posterity of Milton and Shakespear. Our posterity will be the living public of a future generation'.[22] Magazine writers like Wainewright often mocked the attempt to evade the contemporary world for a future audience. Yet Lamb's assumption of intimacy does not *simply* offer this kind of mockery. Lamb's essays *are* written with a future reader in mind, but his understanding of his relationship with that reader is never assumed. Rather, he recognises that his writing is subject to a multiplicity of types of reading.

Lamb imagines Elia existing between categories: he is read, but he is also glanced at; he knows his readers, but he also writes for a vast, modern print marketplace. He is also both author and scrivener, just like

> Henry Man, the wit, the polished man of letters, the *author*, of the South Sea House … Thy gibes and thy jokes are now extinct, or survive but in two forgotten volumes, which I had the good fortune to rescue from a stall in the Barbican, not three days ago, and found thee terse, fresh, epigrammatic, as alive. Thy wit is a little gone by in these fastidious days – thy topics are staled by the 'new-born gauds' of the time.
>
> (*LM* 2 [August 1820] 145)

He writes elsewhere of the advantages of being both clerk and author:

> it sends you home with such increased appetite to your books * * * * * not to say, that your outside sheets, and waste wrappers of foolscap, do receive into them, most kindly and naturally, the impressions of sonnets, epigrams, *essays* – so that the very parings of a counting-house are, in some sort, the settings up of an author .... So that you see, upon the whole, the literary dignity of *Elia* is very little, if at all, compromised in the condescension.
>
> (*LM* 2 [October 1820]: 365)

[22] Hazlitt, *Complete Works* 8: 100.

The italicised '*essays*' suggests a self-conscious nudge in the reader's ribs: the essay you are reading, reader, was penned in an idle hour on a waste wrapper of foolscap at the India House. But if essays can start life as scrap paper, they might well return to the same condition. Henry Man's literary career has also been compromised by time: he seems 'as alive' to Elia, but his wit, nonetheless, is 'a little gone by', while his jokes are 'extinct'. What, then, of the essays of Elia: is his literary dignity as secure as he assumes? Or will his fate be to be found, forgotten, on a book stall in the Barbican?

I will return once more to that pseudonym. Lamb took it from a fellow clerk in the Sea House because 'ELIA, the real' 'himself added the function of an author to that of a scrivener, like myself' (*LL* 2: 302). David Chandler has recently uncovered a wealth of information about Felix Elia (or 'Ellia'), including the (rather lurid) novels he penned.[23] Chandler makes the intriguing suggestion that critics' earlier indifference to him, despite the vast scholarly apparatus surrounding Lamb, is indicative of a tendency in Lamb studies to 'aggrandise' Lamb's works through connection with canonical writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge at the expense of '"failed" and forgotten authors like [Felix] Ellia' (682) and others like Bernard Barton and Henry Man. Chandler's piece is particularly important in directing attention towards the quotidian cultural context of the ephemeral, the marginal, the failed that Lamb inhabited. But to ignore Lamb's connections with his canonical friends would simply make the same mistake, substituting one set of friends and one set of interests for another. Rather, Lamb places himself in a culture that includes both the epic and the ephemeral, and that understands the two as existing in a complex relationship with each other. Lamb's account of the 'gossamer substance' of the 'lighter offal', but also his account of the 'higher' works which may be read aloud, is directly connected to his own writing. Types of reading become, for Lamb, ways of understanding the uncertain place of his own writing, a place that combines the qualities of the low (such as Felix Ellia) and the high (such as William Wordsworth).

Magazine essays are at once literary and topical, personal and yet self-consciously part of a vast print market. But this uncertainty was an issue that Lamb was clearly aware of. In 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', Lamb notes that good binding

> is not to be lavished upon all kinds of books indiscriminately. I would not dress a set of Magazines, for instance, in full suit. The dishabille, or half-binding (with Russia backs ever) is *our* costume.
>
> (*LM* 6 [July 1822]: 34)

It's a key phrase. Magazines are an appropriate site for such reflections. Like Lamb, they stand between permanence and ephemerality, incorporating elements of both. Lamb criticised Scotsmen in the same terms as he criticised 'this our age of seriousness' where 'we must love or hate, acquit or condemn – censure or pity – exert our detestable coxcombery of moral judgement on every thing' (*LM* 5 [April 1822]: 308). Elia makes a plea for the pleasures of a fictionality that revels in uncertainty, and much of the power of his essays results from their delighting in the 'border-land' between 'the affirmative and the negative' (*LM* 4 [August 1821]: 153), and also between permanence and ephemerality. In the 'Character of the Late Elia' the narrator is shown to Elia's desk at the India House, and asks to see any remaining writings: the clerk 'showed me ponderous tomes of figures, in his own remarkably neat hand, which, more properly than his few printed tracts, might be called his "Works"' (*LM* 7 [January 1823]: 21). The possibility that there might be no substantive difference between the *Essays of Elia* and Lamb's double-entry book-keeping does not haunt the essays. Rather, by acknowledging the possibility, Lamb forms a fuller understanding of what it means to write for unknown readers. The very qualities that scholars have recently argued pertain to the relationship between magazines and their articles – the circumstances of publication,

[23] '"Elia, the real": The Original of Lamb's *Nom de Plume*', *Review of English Studies* 58 (November 2007): 669-83.

the need to read them 'in context' to recover the full meaning – were the same qualities, Lamb recognised, which made that work impermanent. Peter Manning argues of Lamb that he in fact 'detaches' himself from his *London Magazine* context under the 'phantom cloud' of Elia's ghostly identity.[24] But Lamb I think does something rather more interesting than either reject or be bound by his context. As Hazlitt put it, Elia 'evades the present, he mocks the future': neither wholly bound by circumstance, nor wholly directed to posterity, Lamb offers a text that is the more beguiling insofar as it is more elusive. He is, like his characterisation of the magazine, 'half-bound'; his essays incorporate the moment of their own production while also projecting the scene of their reading into a dubious posterity. The essays are elegies for themselves, a recognition that they only survive into the future as fragments of the past; in Walter Pater's terms as 'things old indeed, but surviving as an actual part of the life of the present'.[25]

**Lamb's 'modernity'**

For all that Lamb is most at home with Sir Thomas Browne and the Elizabethan dramatists, it often seems appropriate to compare him with the modernists. Seamus Perry fruitfully compares him with W. H. Auden, and Felicity James's book on Lamb offers a series of significant connections with Woolf and Baudelaire. Lamb's interest in typography and the physicality of writing suggests another connection with the future, but it is with a different sense of modernity that I will conclude. Hazlitt argues in his *London Magazine* essay 'On Antiquity', 'Whatever is or has been, while it is passing, must be modern' (*LM* 3 [May 1821]: 527). Lamb of course exclaimed 'damn the age; I will write for antiquity!' (*LL* 3: 203) and it is a telling joke. He situates himself as modern, as part of the life of the present, but he also realises that this means he is necessarily 'passing'. His relationship with his reader is always strained: the reader is absent, not in his 'now'. His modernity consists specifically in his acceptance of the circumstances of the production of his text: he acknowledges that his text cannot abstract itself from the life of the present, but is conditioned by its circumstantiality. Lamb's essays are reflections on what it means to read them. Lamb places the reader in his essays, but he does so while reflecting on his inability to know that reader. He writes an essay about the impossibility of puns 'lasting', and his readers enjoy it while recognising the very distance between them and Lamb that Lamb is discussing in the essay. Yet if he is addressing posterity, he is addressing future readers not with the confidence of Wordsworth, but with an elegy appropriate given his recognition that he cannot 'reach' that audience in anything but a mediated way. If 'Elia' echoes in your ear he does so not in Lamb's voice, but in Elia's: that is, his voice, like the signature 'Elia', is a product of a relationship between print and eye, not between voice and ear. That Elia, Ellia, and even Eelya all contain the echo of 'elegy' is a product of Lamb's brilliant and complex understanding of what it means to read Elia.

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[24] Peter J. Manning, 'Detaching Lamb's Thoughts,' *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture*, ed. Kim Wheatley (London: Frank Cass, 2003): 137-46.
[25] *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1889): 118.

# What was cooking in the Lambs' Kitchen?

*By* Mary Balle

THOSE OF US, WHO ARE WELL ACQUAINTED WITH MARY AND CHARLES LAMB, are aware that both thoroughly enjoyed good food. Charles's *Dissertation upon Roast Pig* discusses at length the mythical origin of the roasted pig along with the joys of eating such a dish. We may recall Charles's assertion that the best way to cook a suckling pig was to slowly roast it over an open fire. Further, it should be served with a sauce made of 'few bread crums, done up with his liver and brains, and a dash of mild sage'.[1] After the publication of this Dissertation, the Lambs were inundated with suckling pigs of all varieties. In 1804, Thomas Manning sent Charles a gift of Cambridge Brawn, a delicacy made from boiled and pickled swine meat. In his letter of February 1805, Charles declared brawn to be 'of all hobbies the supreme in the eating way'.[2]

But what else was cooked and served in the Lambs' kitchen? What was their kitchen like? Whence came the ingredients?

The usual structure of meals in the Lambs' household was breakfast, dinner, the main meal of the day and a lighter meal, supper, was provided in the evening unless the Lambs happened to be entertaining friends.

Breakfast often consisted of cooked oat or barley cereal. The grain was added to boiling water containing salt and butter. The mixture was cooked for three or four minutes and then poured into a bowl with perhaps a bit of milk added. Fried eggs were occasionally served for breakfast.[3] Water straight from the pump was dangerous to drink as it could contain the organisms that cause cholera or typhoid. Because of this, small beer, a less alcoholic version of regular beer, was the drink of choice for the morning meal. Beer, unbeknown to its drinkers, supplied both calories and vitamins and helped to alleviate such common deficiency diseases as scurvy and rickets.

When breakfast was over, the washing up finished and a few of the other household chores done, Mary, often accompanied by the maid, started to the local market. Daily food shopping was necessitated by lack of food preservation and safe storage facilities. Arriving at the market, Mary was surrounded by all the sights, smells and noises of a bustling daily market. The cries of vendors selling all sorts of wares filled the air. The merchandise for sale included not only the usual fruit, vegetables and meat but also pea soup, sheep's trotters, curds and whey, boiled puddings, baked potatoes, and gingerbread to name but a few. Hawkers of services such as knife and scissors sharpening, pot mending and chimney sweeping vied for the shoppers' attention along with those selling spiced wine and ginger beer. Vendors sold such diverse items as cigars, rat poison, walking sticks, children's toys and eyeglasses.

Bread was delivered to the house by the baker or his assistant and paid for on a weekly base. The Lambs' maid Becky meticulously counted the numbers of loaves consumed by the

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[1] Charles Lamb, *Prose & Poetry with Essays by Hazlitt & De Quincey,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1930), 157.
[2] Charles Lamb to Thomas Manning, February 24, 1805, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb,* ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1975), 2:155.
[3] E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb,* 2 vols. (London: G. P. Putnam; New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1905), 1:495.

household and refused to allow the Lambs to pay the baker if, as was often the case, the bill was for more loafs than had been delivered.[4] About the beginning of the 18th century, bread began to be baked in loaf tins because it was more convenient for bakers, and produced a higher loaf. Such bread loafs could be easily sliced and toasted. With their toast the Lambs ate salted butter while probably cooking with the unsalted verity.[5]

Some cake, such as Christmas cake made with dried fruit, would have been bought at a bakery while other more humble sweets, such as seed cake, made with caraway seeds, sponge or plum cake, were made in the Lamb kitchen. Charles was particularly fond of macaroons served with afternoon tea. Stewed fruit was often encased in pastry shells and served as pie. Meat and vegetables likewise could be tucked into pastry shells to make pasties. Eggs were used liberally in omelettes, puddings and pastries. All the ingredients necessary for producing any of these editable items were available in the market.

Dinner was often served about one o'clock in the afternoon. The main course of this meal varied widely. From the wide variety of avian species available, Charles and Mary enjoyed and served, when available, pheasant, partridge, snipe (a game bird), chicken, turkey, quail, grouse and goose. These birds would have been roasted, baked with or without stuffing or boiled. When roasting a skewer would be threaded through the carcass, the skewer was then attached to a spit, placed over an open fire and turned slowly, by Mary or the maid, allowing the bird to cook through. Any grease that was produced would be collected in a pan placed beneath the turning meat. If the bird was to be served stuffed, its body cavity was filled with bread and herbs or onions, garlic, and shallots and baked, either in an oven to the side of the open fire or in a Dutch oven surrounded by the coals. Boiled fowl produced not only cooked meat but also a tasty and nourishing broth, which was served along with the meal. With the exception of frying of chops and sausage, most meat cooked in the Lamb kitchen was prepared in one of these three ways. Other meats served by the Lambs included beef, veal, lamb or mutton offered either hot or cold and ham and bacon, fresh when available, smoked or salted when not. Salted or smoked Beef was to be had year round and was generally boiled to make 'unning soup or pottage' which consisted of broth containing bits of meat, vegetable and herbs that were in season. Occasionally, hare and rabbit were added to their widely varied menu.

The Lambs also ate fish. After having dinner with Robert William Elliston, in 1806, Lamb wrote, 'he took his roasted mutton with us in the Temple, to which I had superadded a preliminary haddock'.[6] Fish was often grilled on a wooden skewer over a fire. Dried fish was used in soups in the same way as fresh fish. Charles was particularly fond of lobster salad and oysters with which he tried to lure Thomas Manning for a visit.[7] Charles was also partial to potted fish where shrimp and smaller fish such as trout were cooked with them, placed in a small container and covered with butter or other fat, mixed with spices. Fried or jellied eel was another dish that from time to time made its way to the Lambs' table. Other fish available and probably consumed by Charles and Mary included dace, gudgeon, perch, pike, salmon, tench, carp and chub.

Late in 1809, Charles and Mary initiated a regular evening 'at home' where they hoped their friends would feel free to drop in for cards, conversation and a cold supper. Originally these gatherings were held weekly on Wednesday; later the meeting night was changed to Thursday

[4] Ibid., 1:293.
[5] Ibid., 1:410.
[6] Ibid., 1:384.
[7] Charles Lamb to Thomas Manning, November 15, 1805, *Letters*, 2:192.

and the frequency altered to once a month.[8] Several descriptions of these gatherings have been written. In Talfourd's recollections, he recalled

> Becky [the maid] lays the cloth on the side-table, under the direction of the most quiet, sensible, and kind of women – who soon compels the younger and more hungry of the guests to partake largely of the cold roasted lamb or boiled beef, heaps of smoking roasted potatoes, and the vast jug of porter, often replenished from the foaming pots, which the best tap on Fleet-street supplies.[9]

Bryan Procter recalled:

> The supper of cold meat, on these occasions, was always on the side table; not very formal, as may be imagined; and every one might rise, when it suited him, and cut a slice or take a glass of porter, without reflecting on the abstinence of the rest of the company.[10]

Porter is dark brown ale made from malt that has been browned by drying at high temperatures. Strong beer, containing high alcohol content, was also offered.

Meat, the mainstay of the English diet, was always present for dinner but not necessarily for supper. This is confirmed by Mary Lamb's observations to Sarah Hazlitt following a visit to the Hazlitt home in November 1809. 'We have tried to eat meat suppers, but that would not do, for we left our appetites behind us, and the dry loaf, which offended you, now comes in at night unaccompanied'.[11]

The Lambs, almost certainly, cooked over an open fire, which burned coal. The fire was never allowed to go out but was banked each evening and stirred up in the morning by the maid as part of her early morning duties. Before this could be accomplished ashes from the previous days fire would have to be hauled away, coal fetched from a storage bin, and water hauled from the common pump in the street. With these chores done, the maid would put the kettle on to boil. Hot water was needed for cooking, morning ablution and shaving. The fireplace in the Lambs' kitchen was equipped with a grill over the open fire on which could be placed various frying pans and saucepans. These utensils were generally made from brass, copper and perhaps tin. Cooking with these pans could prove injurious to one's health. Acid foods reacted with the brass and copper to produce a patina, which was poisonous. In the fireplace itself, attached permanently either to the side or the back of the chimney's bricks, were iron hooks. These hooks, which were to some extent adjustable, could be swung out allowing large pots or cauldrons to be suspended over the fire. Soup, broth, vegetables and some meats were slow cooked in these containers.

There were an amazing number of vegetables available to the Lambs; however, they were only available during certain seasons. Shortly after moving to Colebrook Row, Islington, Charles wrote to a friend describing his new garden: 'A spacious garden, with vines (I assure you), pears,

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[8] Lucas, *Life*, 1:469. 'Crabb Robinson tells us that it was 1814 that Lamb's parties began to be held once a month instead of once a week'.
[9] Ibid., 1:514.
[10] Ibid., 1:515
[11] Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt, November 7, 1809, *Letters*, 3:30.

strawberries, parsnips, leeks, carrots, cabbage to delight the heart…'.[12] This observation took place in September when root vegetables were nearing the height of their growing season but were not yet ready to be picked and put away for the winter. Spring vegetables included asparagus, one of the Lambs' favourites, as well as new peas, mentioned in Charles's essay *Old China*, cos and bib lettuce, spring onions, watercress, rhubarb, radishes and French beans to name but a few. During the summer, kale, summer squash, celery, peppers, spinach, swiss chard, wax beans and runner beans were to be had in the market. Summer was also the season for fruit and berries. On offer were blackberries, gooseberries, elderberries, red currents, strawberries, and black currents. Most fruits and berries were served cooked as stewed fruit. Other fruits available from summer into fall included figs, pears, peaches, cherries, grapes, quince and grapes. Many of these fruits were chopped and combined with sugar to make jam and preserves. Some more exotic fruits, imported or grown in hot houses, such as pineapple, limes, lemons, and oranges were also obtainable in the markets. In late fall, root crops, such as turnips, potatoes, cabbage, swedes, parsnips and carrots were harvested and laid back for the coming winter season.

Herbs, for cooking and medicinal purposes, were attainable fresh during the summer and fall and dried for use during the rest of the year. Those herbs, which probably appeared in the Lamb kitchen, included sage, rosemary, thyme, marjoram, dill, chives, lovage, lemon balm and summer savoury.

The Lambs, who were prodigious walkers, often carried a picnic with then when they ventured into the county for a day of walking. Generally their modest repast consisted of cold meat and bread. They often stopped at a country pub or inn to buy something to drink. If the innkeeper was amenable, they would take their meal indoors. On other occasions when they met regularly with their friends the Novellos and the Hunts, the picnic consisted, by agreement, of bread, cheese, celery and beer.[13]

The Lambs valued their friends. They were kind, understanding and forgiving to all those they treasured. For the Lambs entertaining was an extension of their friendship. Friends were invited for their weekly soirée, for dinner parties, for after the theatre get-togethers, for afternoon tea, and for picnic rambles in the countryside. And always there was food of some description that bound the occasion together. It was therefore important for Charles and Mary and their friends to know 'what was cooking in the Lambs' kitchen'.

*Stockbridge, Massachusetts*

[12] Lucas, *Life*, 2:160.
[13] Lucas, *Life*, 1:549.

# In Defence of Mary Godwin

*By* Rebekah Owens

WHEN WILLIAM GODWIN MARRIED THE LADY KNOWN AS MRS CLAIRMONT in 1801 in secret, Charles Lamb's antipathy toward her was apparent. That 'very disgusting woman', was never going to have a favourable reception from the Lambs when compared to her predecessor, Mary Wollstonecraft. Such dislike went further than this, however, and Lamb's letters document the clashes between them. The second Mrs Godwin not only interfered in her husband's business affairs, resulting in a misunderstanding between Charles and William concerning the latter's *Life of Geoffrey* Chaucer;[1] on the domestic front she drove Charles to distraction and agitated an already fragile Mary Lamb by persistently visiting her when she wished to be alone.[2] Such was the level of bad feeling that Lamb's polemic ranged from the mock-sympathetic - the 'pitiful artificial wife'[3] – to the downright vitriolic - 'a damn'd infernal Bitch'.

The Lambs were not the only people to express their rancour toward William Godwin's new domestic arrangements. 'Disagreeable' seems to be the commonly applied adjective, not just by Lamb, but by Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, daughter of William and Mary Wollstonecraft.[4] Mary Jane Godwin's behaviour has drawn the attention of critics who have documented the responses of the Lambs and others. Emily Sunstein designated her as someone who 'opened people's mail, acted behind their backs, lied, pried and slandered'.[5] James Marshall described her as 'possessive, back-biting, irritable and scheming'.[6] More recently, Sarah Burton has noted that Mrs Godwin was 'widely disliked for her moodiness, glibness and insincerity'.[7] She certainly seems to have been unpopular with many, tactless in her handling of William's friends. During a discussion at dinner with Coleridge, she goaded both guest and husband.[8] Close friends like the Lambs 'and some more old CRONIES'[9] felt discouraged from visiting; on one occasion Mary Jane had fabricated an elaborate lie about Godwin scalding his foot and therefore being unable to receive visitors. This was news to Godwin himself, whom the Lambs met the following day, apparently unscathed.[10] Mary Jane also employed particular tactics for getting her own way. Behind her 'company manners' observed Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, were 'storms'.[11] Even her husband referred to her 'baby-sullenness',[12] suggestive of tantrums that may have also led to the Lamb's private nickname for Mary Jane as 'Bad Baby'. This is not to say that she has not had her defenders, especially amongst recent critics who recognise the difficulties of the domestic situation Mary Jane inherited. 'It is easy' said William St Clair, 'for a biographer to give undue weight to the opinions of the people who happen to have written things down'. On the domestic side, St Clair records that since the Lambs never severed relations with the Godwins altogether,

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[1] Sarah Burton, *A Double Life: A Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London: Penguin Books), 2003, pp. 210-11.
[2] Sarah Burton, p. 259.
[3] Marrs, Edwin W. Jr., ed, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* (Cornell UP), 3 vols, 1975-8, II, p. 70.
[4] Letters, Feb. 2, 1817, Vol 2, p. 161.
[5] Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP), 1989, p. 30.
[6] Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (London: Yale UP), 1984, p. 252.
[7] Sarah Burton, op. cit., p. 187.
[8] Peter H. Marshall, pp 259-60.
[9] Marrs (ed), II, p. 55.
[10] William St. Clair, p. 245.
[11] Emily Sunstein, p. 30.
[12] Quoted in Peter H. Marshall, p. 253.

'for every stormy occasion' recorded 'there must have been thirty'[13] that were amiable. The domestic situation Mary Jane entered into has elicited understanding from critics. Sarah Burton has attempted to present the situation in which Mary Jane found herself and the difficulties with which she had to contend.[14] Marriage to an impecunious logician and philosopher brought a financial burden. Though Mary Jane was not above reminding her husband that she had been, at one time, used to money, financial stability was a constant worry throughout their married life.

Solvency in family life also relieves other burdens, not least the ability to feed and clothe a growing family. 'Second mamma' brought with her two illegitimate children of her own. When 'Mrs Clairmont, widow' married William Godwin, (later legitimised it under her real name Mary Vial), she already had two children both from different fathers. Charles Gaulis and Clara Mary Jane (known as Jane later naming herself Claire), were added to a household that consisted not only of the young Mary, but Fanny Godwin, who was the result of a union between Mary Wollstonecraft and Gilbert Imlay. Not only did Mary Jane inherit two children along with her own, she gave birth to a son William Godwin, Jr.

In fact, it tends to be her contemporaries, rather than critics, who rate Mary Jane poorly, principally because they stood to lose by her presence. Much of the material regarding the family can be explained as the viewpoint of discontented stepsiblings: to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Mary Jane was the usurper who took the place of her own beloved mother and who intervened in a close relationship with her revered father. There is also no reason to suppose, as Miranda Seymour has argued, that any of the children's educations suffered, since both parents were diligent in their application of what they saw as appropriate methods of education. There is also evidence that Godwin was clearly very fond of his wife; they expressed their mutual affection in letters and remained together, despite Mary Jane's threats to leave, although he was not above remonstrating with her when he thought her behaviour unacceptable. The Lambs also felt they lost out by her presence, feeling that Mary Jane had reduced their philosopher friend to humdrum domesticity. The attitude of someone like Lamb was that it was Godwin who was subjugated to his wife – 'grown quite juvenile',[15] in fact.

Why, therefore, were the attitudes toward Mary Jane so unforgiving? For that one need look no further than Godwin's first wife. Both contemporaries and critics have commented on this adversely. Many of Godwin's circle who had known Mary Wollstonecraft found Mary Jane an unacceptable substitute. Comparison with Godwin's first wife was inevitable and, frankly, at times tactlessly observed. Mary Wollstonecraft's portrait hung in the parlour – 'taking such another home' was Robert Southey's remark, 'when the picture of *that first* hung up over his fireplace'.[16] James Marshall, a long time friend of Godwin, thought that Mary Jane lacked 'all the finer sensibilities',[17] a comment suggestive of her more homely, domestic outlook, compared to her predecessor's feminist and political aspirations. Critics have not been averse to judgement: '[Mary Jane] possessed few of the feminist aspirations of the woman she replaced',[18] 'Mary Jane Godwin was no Mary Wollstonecraft, either in talent or in charm'.[19] Intellectually, there were bound to be comparisons. Mary Jane's daughter, Claire

[13] William St. Clair, p. 246.
[14] Sarah Burton, pp. 187-88.
[15] Peter H. Marshall, p. 250.
[16] Quoted in Peter H. Marshall, p. 258.
[17] Quoted in William St. Clair, p. 245.
[18] Peter H. Marshall, p. 251.
[19] William St. Clair, p. 243.

Clairmont, later observed sarcastically that the emphasis of the Godwin household on works of originality went quite a way toward elevation of status in the household.[20] Mary Jane's contribution to literature has not since gone unnoticed, but was then considered secondary to the political writings and practices of Mary Wollstonecraft. This despite the fact that Mary Jane produced the first translation of *The Family Robinson Crusoe* (1814), as well as commissioning Mary Lamb to write summaries of Shakespeare's plays, thus bequeathing to the literary world *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807);[21] but chiefly, she was an accomplished linguist, translating notable works such as Piccini's *Thoughts, Remarks, and Observations by Voltaire* (1802). There is also the fact that Mary Jane ran a business – she was herself enraged at being treated as a mere shop girl by some customers[22] – which would have caused inevitable comparisons between the ideals of one wife and the more prosaic preoccupations of the other.

The link between the two Mrs Godwins does, however, provide another defence for Mary Jane. Whereas before she was unfairly compared in temperament and habits, it is those attributes that may be defended by recourse the most famous work of Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1792. It was a response to the announcement by the French minister of education that public education would be supported by the state in the case of men. This led Wollstonecraft to argue her reasons for the necessary education of women. Her thesis outlined that a state-endorsed system of education for women would necessarily create a more equitable society, since such an education would enable women to become better and more productive citizens. This would be because, far from simply acting on intuition or emotion, women would become more rational beings, capable of making informed moral decisions. In response to works such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* and his portrayal of the ideal woman, Wollstonecraft was able to point out the errors in the idea that women were creatures of grace and beauty and whose existence was dependent upon their being an adornment and support for their partners. If this was the case, she argued in the *Vindication*, the results of this can be extrapolated from the way in which women behaved in contemporary society. Forced to be dependent on men for financial security, they resorted to emotional dependence and 'a state of perpetual childhood'. 'From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the great number of female follies proceed'.[23] Anne K. Mellor outlines succinctly the conclusions Wollstonecraft drew about women's behaviour based on their treatment in contemporary society.

> Wollstonecraft concluded her *Vindication* with a list of common female follies: the belief in fortune-tellers and superstitions, the excessive fondness for romantic love stories, the obsessive concern with fashion and appearance, the selfish promotion of the members of her own family at the expense of others, the mismanaged households and mistreatment of servants, the overindulgence or neglect of children[24].

The subjugation of women to men, in Wollstonecraft's view, had a marked effect upon their behaviour and thus an effect upon their household and families. It is striking that some of the 'follies' outlined by Wollstonecraft are exactly those of which Mary Jane Godwin was accused. Domestic duties, which Wollstonecraft acknowledged were the domain of women, were also a prime area of criticism concerning Mary Jane. Contemporary accounts of her

[20] Miranda Seymour thinks this remark is hearsay, but it sounds to my ear like the sarcastic comment of step-sibling rivalry.
[21] Sarah Burton, p. 221.
[22] Miranda Seymour, p. 66.
[23] Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 326.
[24] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* (London: Routledge), 1993, p. 37.

behaviour match those of the subjugated woman in *A Vindication*, where denied access to reason and hence enlightened behaviour, the wife and mother are kept in 'a state of perpetual childhood' - 'a propensity to tyrannize … gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads [women] to play off those contemptible infantile airs'.[25] We have seen that the Lamb's nickname of 'Bad Baby' corresponds with childish behaviour – as Godwin's 'baby-sullenness': and in Mary Jane's case, was literally realised in her behaviour.

As for an 'excessive fondness for romantic love stories' there is certainly an element of the romantic love story in Mary Jane's self-realisation. She claimed on the birth certificate of her son, Charles Clairmont, that she was the daughter of one Andrew Peter Deveraux. Her 'gentrification' of herself in mentioning her Swiss connections - Charles was the son of one Karl Gaulis, whose sister was married to Robert Trefusis, Lord Clinton, - belied the fact that her eldest son was illegitimate. Of her choice of the name 'Clairmont', Mary Jane said it was an Anglicization of 'Karl Gaulis'. St. Clair suggested that 'it was invented' since: 'The fashionable novels of the day … were almost exclusively stocked by aristocrats of solid Anglo-Norman heritage'. While it is true that in the post-revolutionary era, any French connection might align one with the subversive politics of the Godwinian circle, it is also worth noting that Godwin himself records in his diary, walks with his wife to the library in Leadenhall Street, 'site of the Minerva Press Circulating Library which specialized in society romances and gothic thrillers'[26] indicative perhaps of Mary Jane's preferred taste.

That Mary Jane was concerned with fashion and appearance, though not obsessively so, does appear in anecdotal evidence – she complained that she was losing her looks,[27] for example. Sunstein notes the favouritism that Mary Jane bestowed upon her own children[28] and her expulsion of favourite servants.[29] In fact, Mary Jane, while not actually engaged in the 'mistreatment of servants' certainly ignored them, a practice anathema to Wollstonecraft. However, it is the treatment of the children of the household that produced the most comment – mainly from the siblings themselves. Mary Jane's step-grandson, Percy, and his wife, Jane, said that Mary Jane promoted her own children's education above the others[30] and she was certainly seen as inconsistent in the bestowing of affection on the children of the household. She approached the Charterhouse School to take her son Charles without William's knowledge, for which he had to apologise.[31] Like any step-mother she entered into an established family and was seen as an interloper by Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin in her close relationship with her father.[32] On the other hand, since the parentage of the latter was held in such high esteem – she was asked by visitors to stand under the portrait of her mother that comparisons might be made[33] - Mary Jane was understandably over-attentive to her own daughter, Jane, encouraging 'her to take pride in her Swiss connections' and 'the English peerage on her father's side'.[34] Mary Jane preferred that the two eldest children, Fanny and Mary, should take care of the household and her own children receive the benefits of education – she encouraged her daughter Jane to take music lessons. Mary Jane was also critical of Fanny Imlay, apparently informing her she was the 'laughing stock' of the newly married Mary and Percy Shelley.[35]

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[25] Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 84.
[26] William St. Clair, p. 253.
[27] William St. Clair, p. 243.
[28] Emily Sunstein, p. 30.
[29] Emily Sunstein., p. 32.
[30] Miranda Seymour, p. 53.
[31] Emily Sunstein, p. 31.
[32] Miranda Seymour, p. 49.
[33] Emily Sunstein, p. 37.
[34] Emily Sunstein, p. 40.
[35] Miranda Seymour, p. 152.

Wollstonecraft's list of 'follies' also indicates that Mary Jane was also undermined intellectually as well as domestically. Her gifts as a translator may have been undermined as being merely the expected accomplishments of the lack of a rational education that left middle-class women with only a limited understanding of French and German.

The implication is, therefore, that Mary Jane Godwin was a victim of the social mores outlined by Mary Wollstonecraft that meant since she was forced to obey her husband she 'in revenge' became one of the 'cruel, petty tyrants' to her children.[36] If Mary Jane's behaviour corresponds to the list of 'follies' of the subjugated woman of Wollstonecraft's society; that is, her 'faults', to paraphrase Wollstonecraft, being 'the natural consequence of [her] education and station in society',[37] then she could legitimately be regarded as what Wollstonecraft portrayed as the thwarted rational mind, forced to behave inappropriately. Mary Jane represents the difference between the exposition of an ideology and the real-life enactment of it: in other words the double standard. Since it is impossible to appeal to the past, then in the case of Mary Jane, we should appeal to the present and future critics and biographers when they consider the circle of William Godwin and ask, with Mary Wollstonecraft, 'be just then, o ye men of understanding!'[38]

*Stratford-upon-Avon*

[36] Anne K. Mellor, p. 37.
[37] Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 327.
[38] Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 328.

# Charles Lamb's 'Other' Fanny Kelly and Charles Macready

*By* Joseph Riehl

WHEN CHARLES AND MARY LAMB, ALONG WITH HER NURSE SARAH JAMES and the actress Fanny Kelly, visited Paris in August of 1822, Mary suffered an attack of her old illness. For some part of the visit, therefore, both Mary and Charles stayed with Mr. and Mrs. James Kenney. In spite of Mary's troubles, Charles seems to have enjoyed Paris, eating frog legs, exploring the gardens and cemeteries of Paris, haunting especially the bookstalls along the Seine. Upon their return to London, the Lambs began a correspondence with the Kenneys and with John Howard Payne, the American playwright and friend of the Kenneys. Payne had asked Lamb to act as an agent or go-between with the management of the London theatres, especially Drury Lane, with whom Payne had contracted to write three plays, and both Charles and Mary met with the managers in Payne's interest.

At some time in late 1822, Mrs. Kenney apparently wrote a note of enquiry about a new actress of whom she had heard, a second, coincidentally-named, Fanny Kelly. This Kelly, a young Irish actress, had recently drawn attention at her stage debut. Appended to Mary's letter responding to Mrs. Kenney is a note from the Lambs' friend, Fanny Kelly.

> The real old original Fanny Kelly takes this opportunity of assuring Mrs Kenny that she remembers with pleasure – Oh, how imperfect is expression, kind looks, and sayings, experience felt, understood and appreciated by the aforesaid real old original Fanny Kelly, who with sincere anxiety for another friendly squeeze of the hand hopes soon to tell Mrs Kenny that * * * * is respectfully & faithfully attached. (November 1822. Mary Lamb to Mrs. James Kenney, with a Letter from Charles Lamb to James Kenney and a Note from Fanny M. Kelly. Letter 440. Lucas, II, 349.)

Mrs. Kenney's question about Fanny Kelly was apparently prompted by news that a Miss Frances H. Kelly had debuted as Juliet with William Charles Macready in *Romeo and Juliet* on November 14, 1822. She seems to have been regularly referred to not as Fanny Kelly, but as Miss F. H. Kelly. There seems, however, to have been some confusion among theatre-goers of the time concerning the identity of this Miss Kelly and Lamb's friend Fanny Kelly, the more established and accomplished actress of the two.[1] So it is not surprising that Lamb's Fanny Kelly should jokingly refer to herself in her note to Mrs Kenney as the 'real old original Fanny Kelly'.

A month of so later, in early January of 1823, Charles wrote to Payne with further news of the 'other' Miss Kelly.

> Tell Mrs. Kenney, that the Miss F. H. (or H. F. Kelly) who has begun so splendidly in

[1]Basil Francis notes that there could have been considerable confusion over the names of the two actresses, since he has collected portraits of both actresses, each titled simply 'Miss Kelly' (Basil Francis, *Fanny Kelly of Drury Lane* (London: Rockliff, 1950), 118-121.

> Juliet, is the identical little Fanny Kelly who used to play upon the green before their great Lying-Inn Lodgings at Bayswater. Her career has stopt short by the injudicious bringing her out in a vile new Tragedy, and for a third Character in a stupid old one, The Earl of Essex. This is McCready's doing, who taught her. Her recitation &c. (*not her voice or person*) is masculine. It is so clever, it seemed a Male *Debut*. But cleverness is the bane of Female Tragedy especially, Passions uttered logically &c. It is bad enough in men-actors.
>
> (January, 1823. Charles Lamb to Howard Payne. Letter 449. Lucas, II, 359.)

The first sentence of this passage, about 'the little Fanny Kelly' of the London Bayswater district, remains a puzzle to me, but an examination of theatre reviews and publications of the period can provide some details of F. H. Kelly's career, which Lamb briefly discusses.

Miss F. H. Kelly debuted in London November 14, 1822, at Covent Garden in *Romeo and Juliet*.[2] She was billed as 'Miss F. H. Kelly from Dublin' (where, according to Genest, she had apparently debuted in 1821), and Charles Kemble took the part of Romeo. The play was a success, acted a total of sixteen times during the Fall theatre season. The *London Magazine* was generous in praise of her debut, calling her 'a powerful and original tragic actress' and complimenting Lamb's 'old original' Miss Kelly by noting 'there is magic in the name' of Miss Kelly. The reviewer also echoes Lamb's scepticism about Macready's part in her debut: 'Mr. Macready is said to have been her preceptor – and indeed, we fancy that we detect some of his fitful earnestness in her occasional manner', but despite such minor reservations, her triumph was complete, as 'the audience, at the termination of the tragedy, rose in one enthusiastic mass to cheer her success'. Though other critics would later criticize Kelly's intonation or diction, the *London Magazine* reviewer writes: 'Her voice is, without exception, the clearest and most unaffected we ever heard: – in this we cannot be deceived' (*London Magazine*, 6 [December 1822], 572-73). F. H. Kelly's next venture, *The Huguenot* (which Lamb refers to as a 'vile new play', by a 'Mr. Shiel') premiered December 11, 1822, again with Macready in the lead role. (The play marked the failure of the Irish Catholic playwright and jurist, Richard Lalor Shiel, [1791-1851], who later became an activist for Catholic emancipation.) Though the *Theatrical Observer* (Dec. 12, 1822) puffed that it had received 'the most distinguished approbation', and that Kelly 'most ably sustained the reputation she has earned by her JULIET', the play was soon withdrawn because of 'the objections formed on the first evening' (*Theatrical Observer,* Dec. 13, 1822[3]), at 'the insistence of the author' (*Theatrical Observer*, Dec. 19, 1822). The third play mentioned by Lamb, *The Earl of Essex* by Henry Jones, was an even greater disaster for Kelly. *Theatrical Observer*, always very kind to any play, wrote that *The Earl of Essex* seemed calculated, 'for no other reason than to show the town the two tragic heroines Miss LACY and Miss F. H. KELLY, together with Mr. MACREADY, exerting their united talents'. The reviewer implied that some of the actors did not even know their lines. Miss Kelly was gently chided on her delivery, the reviewer urging that 'some of her tones [be] regulated as to run in more *even harmony*', (*Theatrical Observer*, Dec. 31, 1822). The *Theatrical Observer* echoes the *London Magazine* reviewer who noted a 'fitful earnestness in her occasional manner'. In 'The Drama'

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[2]See John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, 10 vols. (London: T. Rodd, 1832), for the dates of the plays mentioned below.

[3]The *Theatrical Observer* was a single sheet circular containing brief reviews and advertisements for current play.

(*London Magazine*, 8 [July 1823], 101-102), an article which was probably written by Lamb, his earlier letter's criticism of Kelly's 'cleverness' is echoed: 'Miss F. H. Kelly played Belvidera for her benefit–cleverly–but not as she played Juliet. We rather fear she is a harp with but one string yet, in that string, there is much excellent music'.

Though *Romeo and Juliet* was revived to approbation on January 13, 1823, Lamb was right about the effect of the Macready plays on F. H. Kelly's career. On February 16, 1824, *Theatrical Observer* mentioned that Kelly had been unable to perform due to ill health, and that, therefore, her performance was uneven, and it repeated the criticism of her delivery 'we cannot but admit that there are *tones* in Miss KELLY's delivery that *must* be *modulated*. . .'. That criticism of her delivery was repeated in a *Theatrical Observer* review of her June benefit, which must have been a doubly severe blow, since the *Theatrical Observer* seldom had a negative word to say about any play or actor. While admitting her success in the character of Juliet, and praising her for choosing the difficult character of Belvidera from *Venice Preserved* for her benefit performance, the *Theatrical Observer* found her too young and inexperienced for such demanding roles, and blamed the management of Covent Garden, and by implication, Macready, for her failure.

> Certainly, Miss KELLY has faults–great faults, occasionally, in the management of her voice, which often mars the effect. But this, as it has evidently been caused by erroneous tuition, it is in her power to correct. She, also, is sometimes too unbridled in her energy and warmth, which, generally speaking, is in the character of *Belvidera* misplaced.
>
> (*Theatrical Observer*, June 9, 1823)

After the date of this review, she continued in smaller parts: Lady Percy in *Henry IV*, Lady Anne in *Richard III*. Late in the year she appeared in Felicia Hemans's *Vespers of Palermo*, which failed quickly, some blaming the play itself for excessive length and poor writing (*Theatrical Observer*, December 12, 1823, and February 20, 1824). In October 1824 she was still listed as a Principle Performer, and she appeared in *Henry IV* and *The Belle's Stratagem* (*Theatrical Observer*, January 31 and March 8, 1825). In spite of difficulties, she was always acknowledged to have had considerable talent. The reviewer for the *Examiner* of May 25, 1825, while noting that her performance was 'hysterical', blamed the failure at least partly on the play. 'Miss Kelly', he wrote, 'will never fail tamely' (p. 18). After a long hiatus, she resurfaced at the Haymarket where she acted in nine different plays between June 16 and August 21, 1828, a spectacular feat. At her October 7, 1828, benefit, she played Juliet for the first time in five years.

It is remarkable that most of the criticism of Miss F. H. Kelly's performances coincides with Lamb's original observations: Macready's bad influence on his protégées, the 'management' of her voice, and her overly-energetic, 'hysterical' style. This is apparently what Lamb meant by referring to Macready's influence as 'cleverness'. In 'On Some of the Old Actors' (1822) Lamb had called cleverness 'the bane of serious acting'(*Lucas, Works*, II, 133). What else Lamb might have meant by this term is best explained by a glance at Macready's career.

William Charles Macready (1793-1873) had first performed as Romeo in 1810. His style of acting is described by modern critics as restrained, cerebral, precise. By 1825 he had already begun to revolutionize the acting of Shakespeare's plays, and his reforms and sometimes haughty demeanour provoked strong antipathy from some, especially in America. In 1835 he would assume the management of Drury Lane, restoring Shakespeare's original texts, requiring period costumes and settings, and forcing his actors to attend regular rehearsals where they were required to submit to his direction. Lamb had met him in June of 1820 and he would have found

much to agree with Macready about, especially the restoring of authentic Shakespeare. (Lamb considered the meeting significant, since in 'Barbara S_____' Elia writes that 'I have been indulged with a classical conference with Macready'.) However, Lamb the theatre-goer was less interested in realistically enacted tragedies, Macready's specialty, than in the artificial, exuberant comic actors of his childhood. In 'On Some of the Old Actors' and 'On the Acting of Munden' he expresses a preference for 'Old Drury' (the theatre, rebuilt in 1794, which burned in 1809) as opposed to the present Drury Lane theatre under Macready's influence. He loved the farcical actor Dicky Suett (1755-1805) and the other-worldly Joseph Shepherd Munden (1758-1832) with 'his queer visnomy–his bewildering costume–all the strange things which he had raked together–his serpentine rod, swagging about in his pocket–Cleopatra's tear, and the rest of his relics'. Lamb's taste was for comic theatre, and the very title of 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century' places him in opposition to Macready's earnest realism. Though Lamb never criticized Macready directly, he associates Macready's new and realistic style of acting with the tendency of the stage to become a platform of 'creeping morality'. There were now no more actors like the 'highly artificial' John 'Plausible Jack' Palmer(1742-1798), the original Joseph Surface of *School for Scandal*:

> A player with Jack's talents, if we had one now, would not dare to do the part in the same manner. He would instinctively avoid every turn which might tend to unrealise, and so to make the character fascinating. He must take his cue from his spectators, who would expect a bad man and a good man as rigidly opposed to each other . . .

Lamb also championed the comic acting of John Philip Kemble (1823):

> I remember it was then the fashion to cry down John Kemble, who the part of Charles after [William] Smith;[4] but I thought, very unjustly … But, as far as I could judge, the weighty sense of Kemble made up for more personal incapacity than he had answer for. His harshest tones in this part came steeped and dulcified in good humour. He made his defects a grace. His exact declamatory manner, as he managed it, only served to convey the points of his dialogue with more precision.

Kemble had his faults, but 'They were, at worst, less painful than the eternal tormenting unappeasable vigilance, the "lidless dragon eyes", of present fashionable tragedy'. If Lamb's critique was directed against the moralizing temper of the theatre of his day, it was no less a critique of the style of acting which Macready was making fashionable. Perhaps that is what Lamb meant when he wrote, 'But cleverness is the bane of Female Tragedy especially, Passions uttered logically &c. It is bad enough in men-actors'.

What Lamb desired in the work of an actress was not the precision and calculation of Macready, but a kind of naturalness, a disappearance of the actor into the role. In 'Barbara S_____' he defined the great actress (modelled on his friend the 'original' Fanny Kelly) with the anecdote about Barbara playing in a production with Mrs. Porter, who cried real tears in the course of the play. Elsewhere, in the review 'Miss Kelly at Bath', he makes clear what is called for in great acting. The actress must submerge her own character into the part. He remarks that Kelly does not succeed well in 'what are called fine lady parts', since to be a 'fine lady' one must

[4] William 'Gentleman' Smith (1730-1819) was the first Charles Surface in the original production of 1777. He played the part until 1798.

always be 'haunted by a perpetual self-reference: she must be always thinking of herself, and how she looks and how she deports herself in the eyes of spectators. . .'. This sort of calculation, which Lamb later called 'cleverness', spoils the effect of the character. Lamb finds aesthetic pleasure rather in

> their chief power, to elude the personal notice of an audience, to escape into their parts, and hide themselves under the hood of their assumed character. Their most graceful self-possession is in fact a self-forgetfulness; an oblivion alike of self and of audience.

Lamb's theory of acting resembles Keats's 'negative capability' and to the later Method of Konstantin Stanislavsky– and perhaps explains some of Lamb's success with his own character of Elia, hiding himself under the 'hood' of his own assumed character. It stands in opposition to what Lamb takes to be Macready's newly introduced style.

It is somewhat difficult to find a reliable description of Macready's acting. On one hand, he is the advocate of 'realism', said to have cried real tears as Macbeth, just as Barbara S_____ recounts the tears of Lamb's ideal actress, Mrs. Porter, and most historians of the stage view him as the originator of 'natural' acting,[5] a term which seems also to fit the description which Lamb provides of Fanny Kelly's acting, a less-studied, self-effacing style. However, Alan Downer points out that his contemporaries criticized Macready's delivery as jerky, and unmodulated, sometimes quite affected (544), a fault which critics pointed out in F. H. Kelly as well. He seems to have employed abrupt and marked changes in the tone, volume and cadence of his voice, a technique designed to convey rapid shifts in emotion, but which probably struck some among his audience as over-wrought or artificial. Moreover, Downer remarks that few of Macready's protégées were successful in overcoming the limitations of his declamatory style (546). Realism and 'natural' acting are apparently largely in the eye of the beholder, and Macready's audience may have found his style overly-energetic and uneven. Though Lamb refers mostly to comedy in his discussion of the new versus the old style of acting, his remarks about F. H. Kelly's 'cleverness' in her performance as Shakespeare's Juliet indicates that he prefers the older style, pre-Macready, in tragedy as well. He apparently found Macready's new 'realistic' style to be 'clever' and unnatural. That is, it was perhaps too studied, too eager to hammer home the emotional tone of the play.

Macready, of course, survived the failures in which F. H. Kelly was involved and became the manager of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, where he changed the style of English acting for generations. Sadly, F. H. Kelly's theatrical career lasted only about three years, and after 1824, I find no reference to her at all in Lamb's work or in Genest. Possibly the anonymous reviewer for the February 16, 1824, *Theatrical Observer* was correct in observing that 'we cannot but admit that there are *tones* in Miss KELLY's delivery that *must* be *modulated*. . .'.

*Southern Illinois University, Carbondale*

[5] See Alan S. Downer, 'Players and the Painted Stage, Nineteenth Century Acting', *PMLA* 61:2 (Jun., 1946), 522-576 for helpful descriptions of the acting styles of Macready and others.

# The 2009 Elian Birthday Toast

*By* J. R. Watson

The 2009 Elian Birthday Lunch was held on 7 February 2009 at the Royal College of General Practitioners, South Kensington, London

MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY WILL REMEMBER THAT ONE OF OUR FORMER Presidents, Ian Jack, died during the course of last year. I paid tribute to him, and shared some recollections of our few meetings, in the *Bulletin* that appeared last October. Today I do not propose to repeat what I said there; but standing here in his place almost thirty years after he ceased to be President, I am moved to think about a particular virtue, much prized by the ancient Romans, the virtue of Pietas. Pietas meant, first of all, 'dutiful conduct towards the Gods; but after that, dutifulness to one's parents, relatives, country, benefactors, etc.; duty, affection, love, loyalty, patriotism, gratitude, etc.'; and, in a secondary sense, found in some authors, 'gentleness, kindness, tenderness, pity, compassion'.

It is hard to think of a single modern word that can encompass so much. It is hard to think of a modern word that so neatly fits with what I feel about my predecessors in this place. For Ian Jack I have a special regard, as I recalled in the *Bulletin*, for his encouragement and kindness. If I were to forget these things I ought to exclaim as Lamb did when he contemplated the obituary of Captain Jackson: 'Alack, how good men, and the good turns they do us, slide out of memory, and are recalled but by the surprise of some such sad memento as that which now lies before us!'

So that a good man should not slide out of memory, let me spend a little time today in remembering what Ian said about Lamb in the *Oxford History of English Literature*. First, here he is on Lamb's letters:

> The paragraphs never have the air of being composed. They seem to consist of vivid phrases following one another almost at haphazard. There is no evolution of argument: seldom indeed an argument to evolve. They are unmethodical letters, fanciful, ironical, courageous, punning, mischievous, aptly phrased, human.

What we notice about this string of adjectives is that each one adds to our understanding of the secret of Lamb's art as a letter-writer. One adjective is complicated by the next, and then the next, and the next, until we end up with the word 'human', the most complex adjective of all, the one that embraces the variety of the individual self. It is this fine tolerance that emerges at the end of the process: for Jack began, you will remember, with the description of the letters as 'unmethodical'. There spoke the critic, looking for method; by the end of the sentence the critic has given way to the human being. Or as Samuel Johnson said of Shakespeare, his practice was 'contrary to the rules of criticism'; but, he added, 'there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature'.

It is in the letters, Jack notes, that we find the best of Lamb's critical judgment. He loved to draw attention to writers who were neglected, such as George Wither, who had 'a hearty homeliness of manner, and a plain moral speaking'. Of writers of his own time, he thought Blake 'one of the most extraordinary persons of the age'. Jack reminds us of these, and also of Lamb's dislikes: 'masques, and Arcadian pastorals,

with their train of abstractions, unimpassioned deities, passionate mortals, Claius, and Medorus, and Amintas, and Amarillis'. And when he comes to the essays, Jack reminds us that 'In nothing is Lamb more characteristic of his age than in the way in which he seeks inspiration in his past life, and particularly in his memories of childhood'. He remained, as he admitted, 'too much of the boy-man'; but in another passage he becomes almost defiant about this: 'While childhood, and while dreams, reducing childhood, shall be left, imagination shall not have spread her holy wings totally to fly the earth'.

The apparent contradiction that is implied in these two passages is part of the complexity that endears us to Lamb, and that only a good critic can comprehend. 'Do I contradict myself?', said Walt Whitman; 'Very well, then, I contradict myself; (I am large - I contain multitudes)'.

It is not surprising, I think, that Ian Jack should have spent so much of his later career on Browning. In the poetry of Browning he found what he found in the letters of Lamb: not method, but humanity, in all its ordinariness and untidiness. And Browning, like Lamb, had a fondness for neglected writers and artists, as we see in *Parleyings with certain people of importance in their day*. I have always treasured the lines from 'Fra Lippo Lippi':

> For, don't you mark? We're made so that we love
> First when we see them painted, things we have passed
> Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;

Lamb's essays and letters make us do that. They take subjects that are often unregarded or in some way neglected, or at least unexpected: Oxford in the vacation, grace before meat, manners, food, actors, old china; and the letters fasten on the oddest things. There seems to be no method, no centre to it all, and yet, of course, there is. As Ian Jack saw instinctively, the centre is Lamb himself. 'The Superannuated Man', Jack concluded, 'stands as a fitting epilogue to an incomparable series of essays which have always, as their deepest and truest theme, the character of Elia himself'. Through a fine critical understanding such as this we see Lamb as he sees the world: to quote 'Fra Lippo Lippi' again:

> This world's no blot for us
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good;
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

For Lamb, in spite of all his problems and difficulties, the world meant intensely and meant good; and in all his writing he sought, in his own way, to find its meaning. Ian Jack's chapter in the *Oxford History* made me see that, and it is this kind of respectful understanding which is valued by those of us who love the writings of Elia; in this spirit, and in the spirit of Pietas towards a past President, I invite you to rise and drink the toast to THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB.

# Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon

THE CHARLES LAMB BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON TOOK PLACE ON SATURDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2009, at the Royal College of General Practitioners in South Kensington. Diners were addressed by the President of the Society, Professor J. R. Watson, who delivered a typically persuasive and thought-provoking toast, and then by the visiting lecturer, Professor Paul F. Betz of Georgetown University, Washington, DC. Professor Betz, who possesses the largest collection of Romantic-era relics and manuscripts in private hands in the world, spoke about the many eccentric dealers he had known, and conducted his audience through some of his Lamb-related items. It was a memorable lecture, and was relished by all those who heard it. This was an exceptionally successful occasion, and members lingered over their after-lecture tea into the early evening.

All photographs by Duncan Wu

Mrs. Mary Wedd, Dr. John Gardner, and Professor Paul F. Betz on the terrace of the Royal College of General Practitioners prior to the luncheon.

Professor Paul F. Betz and the President of the Society,
Professor J. R. Watson, during the lecture


Felicity James, D. E. Wickham, Elia's French translator M.
Michel Jolibois, and Professor Paul F. Betz in the famous
Hall of Mirrors at the Royal College of General Practitioners

# Reviews

*The Excursion* by William Wordsworth, Edited by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye with the assistance of David Garcia, Cornell UP, 2007, Pp. xxix & 1226. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4653-5. £50.95

If Wordsworth's *The Excursion* lingers at all in the popular mind, it may be through Byron's ridicule in *Don Juan* (Canto III, 94):

> Wordsworth's last quarto, by the way, is bigger
> Than any since the birthday of typography;
> A drowsy frouzy poem, call'd the 'Excursion',
> Writ in a manner which is my aversion.

Admirers of the bard of the Lakes might prefer to recall Keats's letter to B.R. Haydon:

> I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age – The Excursion, Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste.

Lamb celebrated it as 'the noblest conversational poem I ever read. A day in heaven'. The Victorians generally continued to value the poem, but it has since been replaced in the esteem of readers by Wordsworth's autobiographical *The Prelude*, which is popular as well in university classrooms. While the publication of this substantial volume is unlikely to change popular perceptions, it is the definitive edition of an epic central to Wordsworth's poetic ambitions and should have a significant impact on future scholarship.

The reading text, the heart of all volumes in the series, is here 'the corrected second issue of *The Excursion* as first published…in 1814' (33), and is probably the first place to which most readers will turn. From the point of view of Romantic Period scholars, at whom particularly this book is aimed, the exhaustive, painstaking facsimile transcripts of all the manuscripts will be impressive and useful. Also worthy of particular notice are the lucid introduction (3-24), and a manuscript history which includes a summary of 'Eight Stages of *Excursion* Composition' (423-77).

One strength of The Cornell Wordsworth has been its combination of a constant editorial policy with a flexible ability to adapt to the particular challenge of each text being edited. In the case of *The Excursion*, this has resulted in unusually extensive 'Editors' Notes'. Most of these are quite useful, although a few may be unnecessary or even incorrect. Does anyone likely to read this book need to be told the source of 'fit audience let me find though few!' (375)? The opening note (373) would have it that Sir James Lowther died in 1804 (it was 1802) and, perhaps ambiguously, that in reference to 'The grounds of Lowther Castle' Wordsworth 'As a child…probably visited it with his father' (who died in 1783). If 'it' refers to the Castle, that structure was not built until 1808 and after. The grounds were present, of course, surrounding the partial ruin of the earlier Lowther Hall, burnt in 1725.

One might have wished for two volumes instead of one, although no doubt the exigencies of academic publishing today, particularly the pressure of costs, were a factor. One result of the single volume format is that compared to most previous volumes, photographs of the manuscripts have been somewhat limited. This is less a problem than it would be were not many

of the manuscripts basically very readable transcripts by the women of the poet's household. When manuscripts are difficult to read, the necessary photographs are present.

I was a graduate student at Cornell when Mike Abrams, George Healey, Steve Parrish, John Finch, Jonathan Wordsworth and others were in the early stages of discussing this formidable project, which aims to present all manuscript and printed variants to Wordsworth's poetry. The first volume, *The Salisbury Plains Poems* edited by Stephen Gill, appeared in 1975; *The Excursion* is the twenty-first title in the series. I have had the privilege of editing one of the volumes (*Benjamin the Waggoner*, 1981), and the pleasure of joining in on many occasions when groups of Cornell editors working at the Wordsworth Library in Grasmere argued about some of the more difficult manuscript readings. Mary Wedd mentions such an experience in the January 2007 *Lamb Bulletin*.

In March of this year, most of the Cornell editors met in Ithaca to celebrate the conclusion of the series, and to salute the extraordinary work of the General Editor Stephen M. Parrish. M.H. Abrams, Advisory Editor, and Jared Curtis, Coordinating Editor, both spoke eloquently about the history of the series and the lovable quirks and brilliant editorial strategies of Steve Parrish, who seemed amused by their praise. Steve has been a marvelous general editor: good natured, but relentless when necessary, always willing to assist the individual editors with problems at any level, calm when others were not always so, flexible but still ready with a restraining hand when editors proposed extravagant, page-consuming departures from the standard editorial policies of the series. Would that there were more like him.

The Cornell *Excursion* is an extraordinary achievement of editorial scholarship. Jim Butler (who saw this book through its final stages) and his colleagues deserve the highest praise. Jeffrey, who reviewed this poem in the *Edinburgh* when it appeared in 1814, declared memorably: 'This will never do'. Those wondering why they might profit from reading this definitive edition should consider instead Ted Hughes's comments about a different volume in the series, which are just as relevant here:

> The whole thing is like a Wordsworth prism – whichever way you look into it, at whatever page, it opens new lights & perspectives away in every direction.
>
> For me – and I'm sure I'm not so peculiar – this sort of treatment of a text makes it endlessly alive. You're no longer surveying a work of art – you've sunk through the skin and are wandering about in Wordsworth's nervous system.

For potential readers still hesitating to take on the challenge, Jonathan Wordsworth's brief essay on the poem in *Visionary Gleam*, 111-8, provides an excellent introduction.

Paul F. Betz

# Society Notes and News from Members

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I SHALL BE VERY GRATEFUL IF MEMBERS WHO HAVE NOT YET PAID the subscription for 2009 would send payment without delay. If you are in any doubt whether you have paid, please get in touch with me. There has, on the whole, been a very positive response to the new subscription rates, but some members are behindhand in paying. I am sure this is just an oversight.

Lamb's birthday was marked, as usual, by a celebration luncheon held at 14 Prince's Gate, which was attended by around 50 members and guests. The guest of honour this year was Professor Paul Betz from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. who has kindly flown the Atlantic for the occasion. He gave us an entertaining account of his history of collecting Romantic-era items including Eliana. A novel feature of this year's luncheon was the attendance of a remarkable young Elian, the eight-month old daughter of the new owners of Lamb's Cottage, Edmonton, whom we were delighted to have with us.

The 'Charles Lamb Institute' is the name of the 'baronial' building opposite the Parish Church of All Saints at Edmonton (see D.E.Wickham's *Charles Lamb's London*, Elian Booklet No. 2). The building, originally used as the church hall, has lately been the subject of a planning application for conversion from its current use as a gymnasium to use for religious purposes by a local church serving the Afro-West Indian community, the New Covenant Church. It was gratifying that the local planning authority thought it proper to consult the Society for its views on the application, possibly because we had expressed objections a few years ago to a proposed development nearer to Lamb's Cottage which might have had a detrimental effect on that property. In the case of the Charles Lamb Institute, after consulting the incumbent of the Parish Church, we concluded that it would not be appropriate for the Society to express any view on the planning application. On 5 January, the application was approved and alterations to the building will presumably now commence, to introduce two levels of seating, new windows and an altar.

Dr Matthew Grenby lectured to the Society on 4 April and gave us a lively and fascinating account of the development of children's literature in England and the use of children's books by their readers. Dr Grenby was forced to climb onto the stage at Swedenborg Hall frequently in the course of his talk to elucidate some point in one of his slides, so that his lecture turned into quite an athletic feat!

## NOTE *from* RODNEY STENNING EDGECOMBE

An '*Obscure*' *Reference in a Thomas Hood Letter Explained*

In a letter to John Wright despatched in September 1836, Thomas Hood reports that 'Tom is very well, and talks of Mr. Light and Jim Co' (330), a pronouncement that his editor, Peter Morgan, calls 'obscure'. It seems clear to me, however, that, at two years, Thomas Hood *fils* hasn't yet mastered his /r/ sounds, and that his father is offering his correspondent two examples of his lisping diction. Clearly the little boy, after being told whom the letter was for, had repeated, 'Mr Light', and since a song called 'Jim Crow' had become popular at the Surrey Theatre in London in 1836, he must have heard his parents discussing or singing it (if, that is, the music had crossed the Channel at this point), and produced his own R-less version of the title.[1]

[1] Thomas Hood, *The Letters of Thomas Hood*. Ed. Peter F. Morgan (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973).