

## THE HISTORY OF CHARLES LAMB'S REPUTATION

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At the bicentennial of Charles Lamb's birth it is appropriate to review the history of his reputation and to consider his place in literature as defined by changing evaluations of his merits since the date of his first publications. Such a review reveals that certain qualities have been more valued by one age than by another; the judgment of one generation does not speak for all. Transcending temporal attitudes is the personality of the reader-critic: a non-Elia temperament always militates against a favorable opinion. But time levels extremes, and two hundred years of reading and scholarship have established an accuracy of response to the man and his writing that is unlikely to be altered. We have come to see that, as an active member of a large literary acquaintance, Lamb played an important role - with his conversation, his correspondence, and his literary work - in directing and informing the spirit of the age. As a pioneer romantic, attracted by the past, by the world of dream, by childhood, and by the individuality of character - together with his own pervasive self-revelation - he exhibited an innovative importance in prose comparable to that of Wordsworth in poetry.

"Damn the age," Lamb exclaimed in a letter to Procter, when the *Gem* rejected his sonnet "The Gypsy's Malison" on the grounds "that it would *shock all mothers*." "I will write for Antiquity!" Yet in spite of momentary pique and frequent disappointment, Lamb wrote for his own age - if we accept the testimony of numerous contemporaries. To the extent that these commentaries were unpublished or were circulated primarily in London, a city of about one and one-half million in 1830, Lamb's reputation was, at first, limited, but with the book publication of his essays, the appearance of American editions, and the wider circulation of biographical data after his death, his name and work did not remain so circumscribed.

In 1823, when *Elia* appeared, Richard Phillips, author and publisher, included Lamb in his *Public Characters of All Nations*: "He is now connected with the London Magazine, to which he has contributed various articles of great originality. Though he cannot, perhaps, be classed among men of eminent genius, he is undoubtedly very far above mediocrity, whether we consider him as a poet, an essayist, or a critic." Although some contemporary comments indulge in superlatives and a few are derogatory, the majority express a judgment similar to that of Phillips.

Lamb's acquaintances made ample comments on him and his work in their diaries, autobiographies, letters, essays, poetical tributes, obituaries, reminiscences, biographies, and reviews. Many of these were not intended for publication, and many ignore his writing in their concern for the man. Yet, as a whole, they are valuable because they include opinions by people whose judgment was respected. Among them are Henry Crabb Robinson, who devoted many pages of his famous Diary to Lamb; Benjamin Robert Haydon, who testifies especially to Lamb's humor in his Autobiography; and Coleridge, Shelley, and Southey, whose correspondence included expressions of their opinions of Lamb. The last named, Poet Laureate of England, represented the generally high esteem felt by these writers and artists when he advised The Right Hon. C W W Wynn, MP in a letter of 25 January 1823: "Read 'Elia,' if the book has not fallen in your way. It is by my old friend, Charles Lamb. There are some things in it which will offend, and some which will pain you, as they do me; but you will find in it a rich vein of pure gold."

More lengthy comments were published by admirers during and immediately after Lamb's lifetime. Thomas Noon Talfourd, who had admired his poetical talent in an article published in the *Pamphleteer* for May, 1815, again expressed his enthusiasm in the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1 August 1820. Although not ostensibly a review, his "Remarks" discusses much of the contents of the *Works* of 1818. "John Woodvil" is praised, *Rosamund Gray* is "that sweetest of mournful stories," and "Mr Lamb's sonnets are perhaps the daintiest pieces of pure beauty which have ever adorned their class of poems." Lamb possesses originality in the whole cast of his fancy, reflection, humour, and feeling"; he is the "inheritor of the old Shakespearian sweetness." "The Miscellaneous Poems of our author are not only instinct with bright fantasy and original thought, but are, in their mere numbers, full of the choicest /*sic.*/ music." The one peculiarity of the essays that "distinguishes him from most popular writers of the present time...is the exceeding genuineness of all that he has written." However, in his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," he "extended his theory too far." Lamb, wrote Talfourd, was at last "beginning to enjoy a wide fame," as evidence imitations of his notice of the elder dramatists, and because of his "breathing a spirit of good-will and kindness into criticism."

William Hazlitt, in "Elia, and Geoffrey Crayon," published in his *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) acknowledged that Irving enjoyed greater popularity probably because of Lamb's pervading antiquarianism which appeals to a smaller number of more discriminating readers. Lamb is credited with "picturesque quaintness," "vivid obscurity," and "smiling pathos"; "the style of the Essays of Elia is liable to the charge of a certain mannerism." "His worst fault is an over-eagerness of enthusiasm..." But Hazlitt is generally complimentary and regards Lamb as "a good judge of prints and pictures" and states that he "excels in familiar conversation."

In the year following Lamb's death, the *New Monthly Magazine* printed two commentaries on Lamb. One, published in February, did not observe its titular limitation, "Charles Lamb. His Last Words on Coleridge," but ranged widely in biography and in enumeration of his literary work. The man, his conversation, and his writing are lauded highly in this unsigned, elegiac article. The other, published in April, also unsigned but attributed to John Forster, printed Lamb's "Autobiographical Sketch" and added general praise.

Throughout his life, and after, Lamb was the subject of verse tributes by friends and readers who often commented on his works in their effusions, many of which appeared in the periodical press. Coleridge, Hunt, Clare, Charles Lloyd, and lesser known poets produced sonnets, quatrains, and "lines" extolling Lamb's mind, wit, humor, conversation, and other attributes.

Neither Cary nor Wordsworth exhausted his muse on the epitaphs each wrote for Lamb's tombstone although the latter's was so long it was rejected as impractical for the purpose, and Cary was requested to produce something more suitable. Wordsworth concentrated on biography and personality: "O, he was good, if e'er a good Man lived!" Cary's inscription memorialized Lamb's "harmless mirth," his sympathy, and his charity. Both these poets, and Landor as well, penned additional verses of tribute. Based on these generally informal testimonials and commentary in prose and verse, the conclusion must be that among his wide circle of acquaintance in the literary world, Lamb was admired for himself and praised for his literary efforts.

Following Lamb's death in 1834, several obituaries appeared in the periodicals of 1835; for the most part, they were composed by people who knew him well although some were anonymous. George Dyer, writing for both the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Christian Reformer* emphasized his wit and humor, literary taste, quaint style, and benevolence. Procter, writing anonymously in the *Athenaeum*, recalled the man and especially his ability to understand old English literature and his unaffected combination of humor and pathos: "The fine-hearted Elia - the masterly critic - the quaint, touching, subtle humourist has left us." Barron Field, in the *Annual Biography*, stressed Lamb's humanity, his generosity, his critical ability in poetry; he waxed superlative over *Rosamund Gray* and "Mr H---" as a play to be read, not acted; he noted his tendency to compress thought by happy word choice: "We never knew a man so sensible of the magnanimity of suppression in writing." Edward Moxon, Lamb's publisher who married his adopted daughter, Emma Isola, in a privately printed Memoir, reprinted in Hunt's *London Journal*, praised Lamb's literary conversation, letters, essays, criticism, as well as recalled his personal idiosyncrasies.

Reminiscences and recollections of Lamb had begun to appear in print before his death and continued for more than half a century thereafter. Considerable space is devoted to Lamb in the book-length reminiscences of Hood, Hunt, N P Willis, Eliza Cook, Patmore, John Payne Collier, Samuel Hall, and Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke - to name a few! Shorter essays were devoted exclusively to Lamb; among the authors are Sarah Flower Adams, De Quincey, Thomas Westwood, and lesser known and anonymous writers. The tendency of reminiscence is to recall characteristics of the man - his appearance, his stammer, his genteel manner, his generosity, his punning. First meetings, anecdotes, and Lamb's fondness for the old authors are the usual subjects. Only slight mention is made of literary work, but when it is, it is of the essays. Lamb as a poet, dramatist, and narrative writer seems to be neglected in retrospect.

Biographies of Lamb necessarily listed and sometimes commented on his work. Talfourd's "Sketch of Lamb's Life" (1837) is essentially accurate and sympathetic. Procter's *Charles Lamb: A Memoir* (1866) is, as the title suggests, leisurely and informal, as is Percy Fitzgerald's book in the same year. Alfred Ainger included some sound critical commentary in his volume in 1882 for the English Men of Letters series. W C Hazlitt added some data in *The Lambs* (1897). A discriminating biography in French by Jules Derocquigny appeared in 1904. The following year saw the publication of *The Life of Charles Lamb* by E V Lucas - still regarded as the standard biography although numerous book-length studies have since been written.

But biography does little to suggest reputation or critical regard, except insofar as the attraction to biographers of writing a man's life indicates something of an author's continuing enchantment. Poetical tributes are generally written by those moved to praise; obituaries, by their nature, are laudatory; reminiscences tend to be written by those who contract some of the fame of the objects of commendation. There are exceptions, of course, as witness Carlyle's depreciation, both in his journal after meeting Lamb and in his *Reminiscences*, but they are notably few in Lamb's case. More informative, and more reliable, as indicators of his contemporary reputation, as well as less concerned with the character and personal idiosyncrasies of the author, than any of these notices we have been surveying are the critical reviews of Lamb's literary works.

Unfortunately, such critical reviews of Lamb's work are limited in number and usually concerned with those publications which make up his less valued writing. For his essays - both personal and critical - were published in periodicals, where they were unnoticed in print by the professional critics, as well as by many casual readers, until they appeared in book form. Furthermore, Lamb's unconcern in his writings for political matters, the absence of morally offensive aspects, and the noncontroversial nature of his work - like that of Crabbe and Moore - did not encourage the attention of reviewers yet, for the most part, ensured him a favorable judgment.

Of course, there was the unjust attack by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1798 on Lamb and Lloyd when their association with Coleridge and Southey damned them in the general criticism of the Lake School. And William Gifford, who became editor of the famous *Quarterly Review* in 1809, similarly went out of his way in December, 1811, in reviewing Henry Weber's edition of *The Dramatic Works of John Ford* to describe Lamb's comments on Ford in his *Specimens* as "the blasphemies of a maniac." When the same editor mutilated his review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, printed in the *Quarterly* under date of October, 1814, Lamb's indignation was accompanied by regret that Wordsworth had been deprived of a more satisfactory review. When some two years later he learned that Gifford had persuaded Murray against publishing a projected two-volume edition of Lamb's essays, Lamb called down "the malediction of my eternal antipathy" on Gifford's soul. After the publication of his *Works* in two volumes by the Olliers in 1818, Lamb continued the literary feud by penning a sonnet "St. Crispin to Mr. Gifford" for the *Examiner* of 3 October 1819, which suggested that the critic's abilities were more suited to a cobbler, to which trade Gifford had once been apprenticed. Finally, the *Quarterly* carried a review in the April, 1822, number, in which Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard" was categorically alleged to be a true description of its author.

Small wonder that Lamb, discouraging a dedication to himself of William Harrison Ainsworth's contemplated edition of the works of Cyril Tourneur, complained: "The Reviewers, who are no friends of mine - the two big ones especially who make a point of taking no notice of anything I bring out - may take occasion by it to decry us both."

Even so, reviews of his books were more favorable than most authors received. True, the *Monthly Magazine* for July, 1798, denounced him in a one-sentence review: "The childish sorrows of MR. CHARLES LLOYD and MR. CHARLES LAMB, in their volume of 'Blank Verse' are truly ludicrous." This sentiment was anticipated in the May, 1798, number of the *Analytical Review*, which in the general "sepulchral gloom" and "unvaried murmur," found only one "favourable specimen" to quote: "Composed at Midnight." "We may be very deficient in taste," wrote the anonymous reviewer, "but the whining monotonous melancholy of these pages is to us extremely tiresome." And *John Woodvil* (1802) was universally condemned for its stylistic deficiencies - lack of unity in structure, lack of harmony in versification, and for vulgarity and quaintness. Thomas Brown's facetious review in the *Edinburgh Review* of April, 1803, denigrated it as "a complete specimen of the drama in its state of pristine rudeness," and attacked the sentiments as mawkish and stilted. It appears that the reviewer was irked by Lamb's admiration of Coleridge in the Preface to the second edition of *Poems* by Coleridge, "whose verses he deems so worthy of all honour, as to fix his direst anathema on the presumptuous critics who shall venture to express their disapprobation..." The *Monthly Review* for the same month also regarded *John*

*Woodvil* as "a strange performance," "in which there is neither verse nor prose, nor reason nor nature," and labeled it "as mawkish a composition as ever critic was compelled to digest..."

On the other hand, *Rosamund Gray*, a prose tale published somewhat earlier, 1798, touched the hearts of the reviewers without exception. The diction employed by the critic for the *Analytical Review* of February, 1799, is typical: "simplicity," "delicacy," "tenderness," "pure benevolence," "unassuming goodness," "amiable piety," "modesty," "gentleness," "sweetness - and so on.

Lamb's children's books similarly received general approbation, excepting *The Adventures of Ulysses*, which incurred that objection so often raised against his style - its antique quaintness. Approval of these juvenile work stemmed largely from a universal endorsement of his objection to the didactic nature of contemporary children's books.

*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1808) sold slowly in spite of general approval. The *Monthly Review* of April, 1809, expressed its gratitude, approved the scheme, and thought Lamb showed "great judgment in the execution of his plan." Yet it objected to several editorial opinions, regretted a disposition "to cavil with the taste of the present age, in a tone of much asperity," would have preferred the inclusion of some biographical data, disagreed with the "unqualified and exaggerated admiration of the Duchess of Malfy," and found the notes "formally abrupt, and elaborately quaint." As for the desire for biographical data, it may clarify Lamb's purpose to read the last lines in his letter of 27 January 1827, offering his subsequent Extracts from the Garrick Plays to Hone for his Table Book: "I read without order of time; I am a poor hand at dates; and for any biography of the Dramatists, I must refer to writers who are more skilful in such matters. My business is with their poetry only."

Although the May, 1810, number of the *Critical Review*, the *Monthly's* rival, thought "that Mr. Lambe /sic./ would have shown more judgment by extracting such passages as would have required no omissions, then such as contained any thing that ought to be thrown away," it too applauded the editor's design and formed a high opinion of his criticism: "As to his few observations at the end of each extract, they are the great ornament of the work, written with that force and spirit, that distinguish the critic of nature and genius, from a mere verbalist and grammarian."

Most reviewers of Moxon's second edition of the *Specimens* in 1835 noticed the work only briefly but still with laudatory phrases, such as John Mitford's "well-selected and entertaining," in the September number of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. An exception to brevity but not to laud was the review in the *Athenaeum* of 8 August 1835, which referred to the work as "well-known," elevated Lamb above other critics for his "Powers of discrimination," and judged that "the great charm, if not chief merit, of these annotations, is the perfect unison of their style with that of the subject-matter." The author of the review, probably C W Dilke, the editor, enlarges his scope by affirming that Lamb's works in general are not to be underrated on the score of utility: "We doubt much whether Charles Lamb will not have done, in a hundred years, more for the real Diffusion of Knowledge, than the most pragmatistical member of the Society."

The publication in two volumes of Lamb's *Works* in the summer of 1818 brought to the attention of reviewers in book form not only "John Woodvil," *Rosamund Gray*, Mr. H---," and poems previously published in *Blank Verse* -

which had already attracted their notice, but also poems and essays that had appeared in the *Reflector* and other periodicals, where they had not come to their professional attention. Opinions of "John Woodvil" and *Rosamund Gray* were unchanged. Talfourd, characteristically indiscriminating, included both in his general praise in the *Champion* for 16 May 1819. Earlier, in February, the *British Critic*, deploring the collection as detracting from the charm of the impromptu, had regarded "John Woodvil" as a curiosity. Earlier still, in August, 1818, John Wilson, reviewing in *Blackwood's Magazine* had found "John Woodvil" a delicate imitation but deficient in vigour; he urged Lamb to write a domestic tragedy, aiming for less imitation, more force, and a wider range of action and character. Leigh Hunt, who was responsible for the collection and publication of the *Works*, reviewed it in his *Examiner*, 28 March 1819; he thought "John Woodvil too over-antique in style but touched with pleasantry and pathos, the best passages being the pathetic ones. *Rosamund Gray* was "one of the most painful yet delightful /stories/ in the world." In November, 1819, the *Monthly Review* called *Rosamund* a "tale of great tenderness." The same review thought "Mr. H---" "very laughable," but Hunt's opinion that expectation is disappointed because the name is no worse recalls Lamb's own analysis of its weakness; and Wilson, in *Blackwood's*, thought the prologue worth the farce ten times over and considered it unwise to include the play.

The poetry in the *Works* received, at best, qualified praise - preference being given to the prose essays. One consideration guiding a reviewer's judgment was Lamb's association with the Lake School. Concluding that "his poems and plays, we think, are decidedly bad," and predicting that they will always be considered so, the *British Critic* explained that they reflect Wordsworth's manner without his genius, his peculiarities without his mysticism, and have "the air of serious, but awkward and unsuccessful imitations of the lyrical ballads."

John Wilson, in *Blackwood's*, had considered Lamb's poetical talent more judiciously and had properly rejected the notion that he was one of the Lake School of Poets. Altho deficient in imagination and far from being a great poet, Lamb's more delicate taste, warm heart, and fine perception made him a true poet.

Ignoring this opinion, the *Monthly Review* insisted that "Mr. Lamb is known to be a sort of ex-member of the Lake School" and derided his poetry, terming "Lines, on the Celebrated Picture by Leonardo Da Vinci, called the Virgin of the Rocks" (actually written by Mary Lamb!) "silly" and "the fac-simile of many effusions of Mr. Wordsworth." George Dyer, Lamb's friend, reviewing *Works* for the *Gentleman's Magazine* of July and August, 1819, found "great merit" in "A Farewell to Tobacco" but tempered his praise for the poems as a group, "all of which, if we do not much admire, we admire most *very* much." Hunt called his poetry "touching" and "witty," but too antiquated; it was not so striking as the criticism.

It was Lamb's criticism that elicited most admiration. Hunt found it eloquent, original, and informative. *Blackwood's*, the *British Critic*, and the *Monthly Review*, agreeing that the essays were the best part of the book - much superior to the poetry, were largely drawn to the critical essays. Of these, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare," called "best" by the *British Critic*, provoked conflicting opinions. The *Critic* agreed with Lamb's thesis, as did Dyer in the *Gentleman's*, and Hunt expressed a "firm conviction, that to /that essay/ and the little notice of his contemporaries originally published in the well-known *Specimens of the Old English*

*Dramatists*, the public are originally indebted for that keener perception and more poetical apprehension of the genius of those illustrious men, which has become so distinguishing a feature among the literary opinions of the day." But the *Monthly Review* and *Blackwood's* thought Lamb's thesis in the essay too extreme and his admiration for Shakespeare and the old dramatists too extravagant. And the *British Critic* thought his "Characters of Dramatic Writers Contemporary with Shakespeare" (as the condensation of *Specimens* was entitled in the *Works*) "very good" though written in a tone of exaggerated praise." The same reviewer praised the essay "On the Genius and Character of Hogarth," which the *Monthly Review* termed a successful vindication of the man from the charge of being merely a humorous painter and of a low order. *Blackwood's* also found this piece admirable although it dissented from Lamb's claim of a sense of beauty for Hogarth and from his alleged injustice to Reynolds.

Except for "Recollections of Christ's Hospital," which the *Monthly Review* especially noted as doing its author honor, the few familiar essays reprinted largely from the *Reflector* were not discussed by name but served as the subject of distinguishing qualities. Thus Dyer wrote: "Some of Mr. Lamb's Essays are whimsical enough, and made us laugh." But Wilson, conceding that some were lively and elegant, thought the humor forced and unnatural. He went on to term the style "easy, simple, graceful, and concise," although sometimes affected. Hunt characterized the style as sincere, unpedantic, and familiar. But the *Monthly* considered that the style was a "perversion and misapplication of acknowledged principles of composition."

So the *Works* of 1818 received considerable attention although it was not all favorable and not all in agreement. Friends were apt to be blinded to all faults, and objective observers were prejudiced by literary associations. The plays and poetry came off least well. But Lamb's critical ability was acknowledged - "sound and discriminating criticism," said the *British Critic*, which credited him with "considerable general good taste." As a familiar essayist, he was, to Hunt, a deep and charitable observer and, to Wilson, "a rare union of originality of mind with delicacy of feeling and tenderness of heart." Wilson recognized a truth confirmed by time when he wrote that Lamb "never has been, and we are afraid never will be, a very popular writer." Still, the *Works* were "delightful and instructive," or, in the words of the *Monthly Review*, "an entertaining little miscellany," and the production of one, according to the *British Critic*, "for whose character and abilities, when properly directed, we entertain an unfeigned respect."

If we may consider *Elia: Essays Which Have Appeared under That Signature in the London Magazine* (1823) the product of Lamb's abilities, when properly directed," then the three reviews of that volume are disappointing. The *Monthly Magazine*, in a one-paragraph review in February, 1823, condemned the style for its "disagreeable quaintness and affectation" and the subjects for "their revolting indelicacy" and "ridiculous puerility" although some essays, it was admitted, "will delight the reader by the originality of his subjects, and his pleasant manner of treating them..."

The *British Critic*, in a much longer review for July, believing the author to be Mr Charles Lamb, found most pleasure in the humor, happy expression, and grace of the Essays proper, as distinguished from the Reminiscences and Extravaganzas. "He may be considered as perhaps the only writer since Sterne, who has fully entered into his spirit, and hit his peculiar vein;

and this without either his tedious digression, his obscurity, or his indelicacy." But the reviewer's limitations appear in his estimate of "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig" as "good fun," "All Fool's Day" as "a tame piece of tomfoolery," and "Dream Children" as "one of the prettiest gems in the volume."

The *Monthly Review*, a month earlier, had distinguished many moods in the volume: pathetic and eloquent, lively and humorous, atrabilious and eccentric; but identified its author as Charles Lamb from "this flow of original thought, this depth of feeling, this wise and playful humanity, this vein of mixed humor and melancholy, running through every line." The anonymous reviewer attempted to explain the dual appeal to emotion and to intellect by describing both an irresistible fund of amusing drollery and a more contemplative mood meriting our serious regard. Lamb's similarity to Charles Lloyd was seen in his kind and candid judgment, warm and quick feelings, extravagant and somewhat eccentric views of life, and a loose, unconnected flow of thoughts and sensations. "A Chapter on Ears," "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig," and "Dream Children" had too much of "peculiarities and excesses," "egotism and quaintness" for the reviewer's taste.

The last of Lamb's books published during his lifetime was *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833). The *Monthly Repository* limited its notice under "New Publications" to these few lines: "Beautiful and touching, playful and profound; a book to make one enjoy, feel, and think; but not to be disposed of in a summary criticism." H N Coleridge, reviewing the book anonymously for the *Quarterly Review* in July, 1835, after Lamb's death - Gifford having died in 1826, set the precedent for subsequent identification of the man with his work: "His poems, his criticism, his essays - call them his *Elias*, to distinguish them from anything else in the world, - these were not merely written *by* Lamb, - they *were* and *are* Lamb, - just the gentle, fantastic, subtle creature himself printed off." This reviewer's estimate of Lamb's abilities in the three genres encompassing his major efforts may stand as a summary of the prevailing tone of contemporary opinion. The antique phrase, the compound nature of his humor, and his love of life in general and of London in particular are all mentioned. The originality and profundity of his criticism and the felicitous rhythm, meter, and diction of his poetry are argued. Contemporary tendency to overlook his criticism and to forget his poetry was, in the reviewer's opinion, a result of the more general popularity of his familiar essays. Here it is "by bringing out the otherwise evanescent lines of the character than by charging the strong ones, that he contrives to present such beautiful quaint excerpts from the common mass of humanity." By the end of Lamb's life, contemporary opinion had decided his relative position in literature. In H N Coleridge's words: "Charles Lamb was not the greatest, nor equal to the greatest, among his famous contemporaries, either in splendour or in depth; but he was, perhaps, the most singular and individual."

When Lamb wrote his essay "Distant Correspondents," one of the experiences he had in mind was the incomprehensible change in tenses wrought by the passage of time on his letters to Barron Field in New South Wales. "It is like writing for posterity," he exclaimed in his opening paragraph. As it happened, not only these and other of his letters but his published work as well have come to be read by Lamb's posterity. Its judgment has adjusted his relative position among his contemporaries; thus, less popular than Moore and Crabbe in their own time, Lamb is more read today than either.

Even so, the prophetic suggestion of the *British Critic* and *Blackwood's* in their reviews of Lamb's *Works* has been validated: he would never be popular because his peculiarities offend or, at least, perplex the ordinary reader and because the congenial peculiarities of sympathy and feeling - needed to appreciate his merits - are possessed by too few readers.

Anthologies continue to reprint the same few poems preferred by his contemporaries, but Lamb is now categorized as a familiar essayist, in which genre he ranks among the best. Selections to be read by students tend to perpetuate the same essays admired when they appeared, although they are esteemed more now for their beauty of style and ingenuity in immortalizing segments of common humanity than for their humor and moral instruction. The association of the man and his work has become a permanent identification, so that criticism of one without the other is rare. His criticisms of Shakespeare's tragedies and of Restoration drama have been among the essays usually reprinted, but even though he is accorded a place among eminent critics, his work in that area was, with these and a few exceptions, fragmentary and scattered; it has not been fully recognized for its inherent worth.

In the hundred years following the publication of *Elia*, more than a hundred different editions appeared, testifying to the appeal Lamb continued to hold for the gentle reader, who has, since the end of this period, passed into antiquity along with gentle manners, gentle conversation, and the gentleman himself. The Victorians and their immediate successors acknowledged the subtle spell of *Elia* by penning verse tributes, like those produced in Lamb's lifetime, and by writing essays of appreciation for the prose blossoms, whose delicacy they feared to shatter by any scholarly analysis of their components, growth, or organization.

The verses, often in the form of sonnets, were composed by Lamb's surviving friends, editors, bona fide poets, and anonymous Elians. Some of the better known names are: Edward Moxon, Charles Le Grice, Percy Fitzgerald, A C Swinburne, Lionel Johnson, and E V Lucas. Although generally undistinguished as poetry, the steady production of verses from many kinds of readers on numerous facets of Lamb suggests that he was secured a permanent place in our literature.

The same conclusion is reached from noting the innumerable books, chapters, and essays written on Lamb since his death. Typically, such writing has concerned itself with appreciation - for the qualities of the author expressed in his work: sweetness, humaneness, charitableness, loveableness, gentleness. Notable, frequently quoted, and influencing Lamb's editor and biographer E V Lucas, is Walter Pater's eulogy of Lamb's depth and vision in his essay in *Appreciations* (1889).

Varying reactions to his personality have produced varying critical opinions. Thus, among his detractors are some who see Lamb seeking escape from life in his persona *Elia* and his literary work, but this minority view is overshadowed by those who recognize a complex figure with a humanizing moral effect or a philosophical quality. Some who admire his criticism fail to appreciate his whimsy. Until recently, historical and analytical criticism has been rare; along with his individuality, versatility, and depth of mind, his reading, his style, his influence, and his development as an essayist have dominated Lamb studies. Aside from formal criticism, appreciation and admiration for Lamb and his writings have been expressed by such notables as Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Browning,

and Swinburne in England; and James Russell Lowell, Melville, Hawthorne, and Emerson in America - to mention some names of more than passing interest.

After Mary's death in 1847, Edward Moxon claimed his inheritance of Lamb's library and selected sixty volumes to be sold at auction in the following year at New York. Passing first into the collections of individuals, many of these books have, together with letters and manuscripts, come to rest in university libraries, such as Princeton and Harvard; in public libraries, such as the New York Public Library (the Henry W and Albert A Berg Collection); and in private libraries now open to the public, such as the Henry E Huntington Library and the Pierpont Morgan Library. The quest by collectors for Lamb books, manuscripts, and autograph letters has been marked by increasing prices paid since the ridiculously low sums realized from the 1848 auction, which made a total of less than five hundred dollars. One hundred years after "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig" appeared in the *London Magazine*, J P Morgan paid \$12,600 for the manuscript. Subsequent sales of manuscripts and letters have seen enormously increased values. The American collector has obviously placed a high premium on Lamb items, and the result has been to give most of his letters and many of his manuscripts an American home. Lamb would not have objected. In his *Commonplace* book he transcribed, with apparent agreement, a passage from Cowper's *Letters*: "I consider England and America at once one country. They were so in respect of interest, intercourse, and affinity."

Not financial value nor collector's zeal alone marks the esteem in which America has held Lamb and his works. Long before his death, it gave his farce "Mr. H---" a far more favorable reception than it received on 10 December 1806 at Drury Lane. It was produced in New York on 16 March 1807 and during subsequent years and also in Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans, and Boston. It met with extraordinary success. Perhaps Brander Matthews was right when he whimsically wrote: "Americans take a peculiar delight in the humor of Charles Lamb, for he is one of the foremost of American humorists."

Lamb's reputation in America up to 1866 has been thoroughly studied by Wallace Nethery. Several of his books were reprinted: *Mrs. Leicester's School* in George Town (1811), *Poetry for Children* in Boston (1812), *Tales from Shakespeare* and "Mr. H---" in Philadelphia (1813). But none bore the name of Lamb or of his sister, and Lamb was little known in America before 1820. Beginning in 1821, American metropolitan periodicals reprinted the *Elia* essays - some many times, but brief notices comprised the extent of original critical attention, even after the pirated first American edition of *Elia* was published in Philadelphia (1828). It was not until 1832, when the *New-York Mirror* printed an appreciative sketch on the "Style and Writings of Charles Lamb" that Americans had much opportunity to learn about the author - "the Hogarth of the Pen," as the reviewer called him. Lamb called the sketch "that intolerable rabble of panegyric from over the Atlantic." His reputation in America continued to grow with subsequent eulogies in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* (1835) and the *American Quarterly Review* (1837). From then on, as in England, Lamb was read, quoted, praised, reprinted, imitated, occasionally critized, but most of all appreciated.

The centenary of Lamb's death in 1934 was marked by the publication of several books and articles. E V Lucas published in England and America a new, three-volume edition of the *Letters*. Also published in or near 1934 were A C Ward's *The Frolic and the Gentle* (1934), J L May's *Charles Lamb: A Study* (1934), Edmund Blunden's *Charles Lamb and His Contemporaries* (1933),

and Edith C Johnson's *Lamb Always Elia* (1935). Exhibits, such as the one at the University of Texas, were set up to display Lamb manuscripts and books. In 1935 the Charles Lamb Society was founded by Samuel M Rich in London. Since then, it has acquired a world-wide membership and has included, among its many activities the publication of a *Bulletin*, the establishment and maintenance of a Charles Lamb Library at Edmonton, and the proprietorship of Button Snap, the thatched cottage bequeathed to Lamb by his godfather, Francis Fielde.

At the time of his centenary, Lamb was suffering from the general anti-Romantic attack of the "new critics" that began in the Twenties and continued into the Forties. In particular, there was the charge of F V Morley in *Lamb Before Elia* (1932) that he was an escapist. Graham Greene, writing in 1934, saw his pathos as cunning and his sentiment as guile. Mario Praz in 1936 granted him only a narrow mind, and Denys Thompson, in 1934, most violent of all, characterized his mind as regressive. At a time when the personal and emotional qualities were out of fashion, Lamb shared with his fellow Romantics disparagement and consequent critical neglect.

By the late 1940's the "new critics" had become old, and more temperate judgments prevailed. Lamb scholars added new letters and essays to the canon, biographical data was refined, if not significantly enlarged, and the need for a new bibliography, a new biography, and a new edition of the letters became apparent. While the first two have not been realized, the letters will soon be available in an edition by Professor Edwin W Marrs, Jr that will, undoubtedly, be accepted as definitive. In the never-ending search for subjects for masters' and doctors' dissertations, American students have, especially in the last ten years, found Lamb a mine of profitable study. His style, criticism, reputation, humor, and association with the drama have served as topics. Other studies reflect the critical trend of published articles toward analysis, as exemplified by the work of Haven, Mulcahy, Reiman, and Lieb.

Lamb is still "a good man of most dear memory," as Wordsworth elegized in his lines "Written after the Death of Charles Lamb." But we are no longer content with a eulogy of his character. To be sure, there is moral inspiration - a humanizing effect - in his essays, but we are no longer satisfied, as was much Victorian encomium, with repeating this truth. Nor do we today go to the extreme of setting up Lamb as the sole responsibility for the Romantic revival of interest in the Elizabethans or as the editor solely blameworthy for the practice of piecemeal anthologizing, although his contributions are important, and H N Coleridge's allegation that Lamb's promotion of older literature influenced the establishment of the *Retrospective Review* in 1820 may be a specific instance. Further, we are no longer willing to dismiss his style with the word that more than any other is identified with commentary on Lamb - *quaint*. Rather, dissection has begun to lead to an understanding of the means to its beauty, and critics now find that Lamb is a poet - but, as Geoffrey Tillotson put it, "his most remarkable poetry is embedded in his prose...It mixes beauty and commonplace, richness and dinginess, and those two things which, according to Thackeray, make humour when combined - wit and love." The same critic, President of the Charles Lamb Society from 1955 until his death in 1969, expressed the cumulative judgment of four generations when he alleged that "for anyone working in the mid-nineteenth century field Lamb is as important as Wordsworth and Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, Jane Austen and Scott."

The obvious importance of Lamb for such interests lies in his influence on

subsequent essayists - often mentioned but difficult to prove. Structure, subject matter, use of quotations, humor, and tone have been among the specifics that Lamb is credited with influencing in the development of the essay, in America as well as in England. Undoubtedly his essays have been a force, but, as Tillotson writes, "Up to now, what these later essayists got from him has been the only ground advanced for his historical importance - or for his notoriety - which is like condemning Shakespeare because he set up so many tragedy writers in the nineteenth century."

Beyond these particular influences, there can be no doubt that Lamb's fascination with books - not as utilitarian depositories of knowledge, nor even as vehicles for the transmission of ideas - but as objects of veneration, to be accumulated, pored over, treasured, and loved - stimulated a new emotional attitude toward books. Hunt and Hazlitt in their essays added impetus to this new attitude, and subsequent writers transmitted the love of reading as a means of exercising the imagination and freeing the emotions.

But Lamb's significance extends beyond the interests of "anyone working in the mid-nineteenth century field." There is, obviously, the enduring value of his criticism, praised and edited by Brander Matthews and, again, by E M W Tillyard. At the centennial of Lamb's death, Desmond MacCarthy wrote: "...scattered through his letters, in his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*, and in his essays, are some of the most imaginative and unerring perceptions to be found in the whole body of English criticism." In the same brief summary, MacCarthy notes two other dimensions to Lamb's significance that have not been essentially affected by time: "It is quite unnecessary to add that he also stands high among English humorists, or that he is one of the great English sentimentalists - perhaps the best of them. His humour is the humour of sympathy, even when it takes the form of self-delighting extravagance. His sentiment is that of one who loves to share the little arts of happiness, to whom past things are peculiarly endeared because they are no more, who is content with 'the most kindly and natural species of love', as he calls it, in the place of passion."

Ernest Bernbaum, in his survey of Lamb's philosophical ideas, wrote that his "chief general contribution, however, was his persuasive warning against narrow formalization of one's conceptions of human life and character." Such formalism is opposed to truth, virtue, beauty, Lamb reminds us, too, of the limitations of materialism, rationalism, and dogmatic moralism. Seeking the ideal in the actual experience of his own life, he demonstrates the importance of the particular, of the individual, of the self. Describing the normal feelings of mankind with sympathetic affection, he exhibits the values inherent in friendships, in literature, in the simple life.

## A NOTE FROM LAMB TO COLERIDGE

Kathleen Coburn

In the Coleridge Collection in the Victoria College Library in the University of Toronto there are various bits and pieces - letters, manuscript fragments, verses, by other members of the circle - Lamb, Wordsworth, Southey, de Quincey, and many lesser men. Of Charles Lamb there are some fragments of verses, and the whole of his verse-letter "To Sara and her Samuel".

Among these pieces of verse is a scappy note to Coleridge in prose, apparently unpublished and unknown. It was written on paper watermarked 1799. This date and the biographical facts together suggest some time in March 1800 when Coleridge was staying at 36 Chapel Street Pentonville with Lamb and was trying to extricate himself from newspaper commitments to finish his translation of *Wallenstein*. "O this Translation is a Bore - never, never, never will I be so taken in again" he wrote to Samuel Purkis. Lamb's urging in the little message was doubtless based on experience.

Dear Col. We are gone out & shall return about three. -

What a fine morning -

I expect W<sup>m</sup> Dollin to dinner.

If he comes before we return, he need not be in your way -

Give him a book, and go you on with your writing. -  
He is as silent as an old glove.

How this scrap got among Coleridge's papers has probably a very simple explanation. He folded it into a pocket or a book and carried it northwards at the end of March to Grasmere, from where, in one of the many boxes of books and papers sent to him in London, it wound up if not in Highgate, at least in the gathering together of all his papers by his children and his grandson, Ernest Hartley Coleridge.

Does anyone know who William Dollin was? So far as I have been able to learn, he has remained as silent as Lamb avowed him to be.

Dear Col. we are gone out &  
shall return about three.

What a fine morning

I expect Wm. Döllin to dinner.

If he comes before we return, he  
need not be in your way -

Give him a book, and go you  
on with your writing. - He is  
as silent as an old glove.

Ed

LAMB, SOUTHEY, AND *THE DOCTOR*

Kenneth Curry

The friendship between Robert Southey and Charles Lamb is a well-known fact of literary biography. The details of their friendship can be quickly told. Southey and Lamb first met when they were each about twenty when Southey had gone to London in 1795 in search of Coleridge and had found him with Lamb at the Salutation and Cat, an inn which proved hospitable to good talk and good cheer. At this time Lamb was a writer of poetry rather than prose, and Lamb looked up to Southey, who was already the author of a volume of poems (a joint venture with Robert Lovell) and several months Lamb's senior, as a mentor as well as a friend. He became an ardent admirer of Southey's early poems, and most of their correspondence - and by inference their conversation - concerned itself with comments upon poetry. We actually do not have all the details of this friendly association that we would wish to have partly because we lack Southey's letters to Lamb, which must have been numerous. The years between 1797 and 1802 marked the flourishing of the intimacy when Southey was often a resident of London, where he was for about a year ostensibly a student of law at Gray's Inn. Southey's name often appears in the correspondence between Lamb and John Rickman, a close friend of Southey too, and from these sources we learn that Southey was a frequent guest at Lamb's parties. During 1798 and 1799 Southey became Lamb's chief correspondent. After Southey moved to Keswick in 1803 the visits and the exchanges of letters grew less frequent, but the affectionate esteem did not diminish. Perhaps Southey's last service for Lamb was performed in 1830 when William Jerdan strongly attacked Lamb's *Album Verses*, to which Southey responded by a poem with the long title, "To Charles Lamb, on the Reviewal of his *Album Verses* in the *Literary Gazette*," published in *The Times* of August 16, 1830. Lamb died in January, 1834, and Southey recorded that "never was there a kinder, a more generous, or a more feeling heart than his."

It is not difficult to find parallels between the early poems of Southey and Lamb as they experimented with the sonnet in the fashionable vein of William Lisle Bowles and the pathetic tale, but the parallels with their later work are less obvious. Lamb was to make his fame through his personal essays, a fame that came rather late in his literary life, whereas Southey as a professional man of letters was trying his hand at almost every thing including reviewing, history, biography, social and political criticism, and editing such writers as Bunyan and Cowper. But in 1834 - the year of Lamb's death - appeared the first two volumes of *The Doctor* to be followed by a third in 1835, a fourth in 1837, a fifth in 1838, and two final volumes posthumously published by J W Warton in 1847. *The Doctor* is a difficult work to classify, but it can be called a novel in the rambling style of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: however, it is really a reflection of Southey, who as narrator is a much more important character than is the nominal hero, Dr Daniel Dove, who frequently disappears from the narrative while the author pursues one of his favorite topics. If much of Southey's prose for reviews and histories was heavily polemic, this polemicism is laid aside in this work. Southey was a good hater when the occasion arose, but in *The Doctor* his genial, whimsical, and humorous side prevails. It has much in it that would please the admirers of the Elia essays, and the work shares in abundance many of the interests which the two writers had shared for almost forty years of friendship.

The plot of *The Doctor* is slight in the extreme and tells of the life of

Daniel Dove from his birth in 1723 until his marriage, with accounts of his parents, his education, his schoolmaster, his benefactor who enabled him to study medicine in Leyden. We have digressions on the Bacons, his mother's family, Mr Allison, a retired tobacconist from London, and a few minor characters such as the ill-tempered Miss Trewbody, and Daniel's uncle, William Dove, but the cast of characters comes to scarcely a dozen, and very little happens to them. The pleasure in reading the book comes from the digression, from individual paragraphs, and from short essays on topics similar or congenial to those used by Lamb. If the autobiographical element in the Elia essays is strong, it is equally strong in *The Doctor*. A cursory leafing through *The Doctor* reveals much that would have appealed to Lamb. Southey at the beginning plays with words, a play that reaches a climax with Interchapter II devoted to the word Aballiboozobanganorribo. This was the sort of literary fun Lamb enjoyed. Other oddities of the book were variations in type and in spacing. The most notable of these uses of type occurs in the Story of the Three Bears where Gothic indicates the Big Bear, capitals, the Middle Bear, and italics, the Little Bear.

Southey's purpose in writing *The Doctor* was recreational. It was a labor of love, first begun in 1814, and for the next twenty years, it was a work that occupied his leisure, but never interfered with the serious business of earning his living by writing. The work was published anonymously, but it was so characteristic of Southey and his interests that the public was not long deluded. In writing his novel he could forget the troubles of the age and his own personal vexations. In chapter 38 he stated: "I wish neither to make my readers laugh nor weep. It is enough for me, if I may sometimes bring a gleam of sunshine upon thy brow, Pensoso: and a watery one over thy sight, Buonallegro; a smile upon Penserosa's lips."

At times *The Doctor* reads like Southey's posthumously published *Common-Place Book*. It seemed to be, as he forgot his narrative of the Doves, a convenient repository for his out-of-the-way reading and his thoughts about a variety of sometimes rather unimportant topics. But Lamb and Southey shared this love for the author whom few authors knew, and a listing of the writers mentioned by both would be lengthy, but seventeenth-century writers dominate. As early as 1799 Lamb and Southey shared their love for the emblem writers, notably Quarles and Wither, all of whom are represented, sometimes by quotations, in *The Doctor*. Jeremy Taylor is another favorite of both as are a host of seventeenth-century divines.

From time to time in *The Doctor* the reader stumbles upon the same type of material he found in Elia. In chapter 15 we have comments upon schoolmasters and an idealized portrait of Richard Guy (chapter 19), perhaps the ideal teacher for a boy like Daniel Dove. Lamb was not the only writer to savor the odd character, who can be picturesquely described, for we have in *The Doctor* admirable sketches of William Dove, called "half-saved," but who had a wonderful fund of stories; of the beautiful but ill-tempered Millicent Trewbody; and the entertaining account of Rowland Dixon and his puppets. Although Southey and Lamb parted company in their attitudes towards country versus city living, Southey had lived in London long enough to know that city, and his account of the shop of Mr Allison, the tobacconist at 113 Bishopsgate Street-within would be enough to satisfy any lover of the odd, forgotten byways of London. Nostalgia is a constant note in *The Doctor*, and here nostalgia finds its way to the city, where the passing of the independent shopkeeper is lamented.

The love of out-of-the-way books is so pervasive in *The Doctor* - just as

for Southey himself - that it is hard to know what to mention or to recommend. But certainly the chapter on school textbooks is charming and even Elian. All of chapter 20 is devoted to a description of the Dialogues of Johannes Ravisius Textor, a sixteenth-century French writer, Rector of the University of Paris, who wrote moralities in an allegorical strain which Southey compares to *Piers Plowman*, Calderon, and Bunyan. The schoolmaster, Richard Guy, was not sophisticated enough to despise such a writer as Textor "and Joseph Warton never rolled off the hexameters of Virgil or Homer, *ore rotundo*, with more delight, when expatiating with all the feelings of a scholar and a poet upon their beauties, to such pupils as Headley and Russell and Bowles, than Guy paraphrased these rude but striking allegories to his delighted Daniel." The title of this chapter indicates the author's point of view: "A Doubt Concerning School Books, Which will be Deemed Heretical: and Some Account of An Extraordinary Substitute for Ovid or Virgil."

The essay quality of *The Doctor* is one of its notable features, and this article may fittingly close with a recommendation of what I consider to be the most attractive, and would recommend to Elians as in the Elian spirit: all the chapters describing the Doves, the Bacons, and the Allison's; then such chapters as those on shaving (103-6); the chapter on women (208) which quotes widely from anti-feminist literature, but whose seriousness, however, may be estimated by the derivation of mulier as "whatever grammarians may pretend, is plainly a comparative, applied exclusively and with peculiar force to denote the only creature in nature which is more mulish than mule." Further chapters I can recommend are chapter 47 on early friendship, chapter 5 on pockets, and chapter 22 on the puppets of Rowland Dixon, already mentioned.

But enough has been written to call attention to Southey's *The Doctor*. To me there is no doubt that it would have delighted Lamb, and it is indeed lamentable that he did not live to savor - and to record somewhere his impressions of - this work of his old friend.

## LAMB'S HOAXES AND THE LAMB CANON

Carl Woodring

The canon of every major writer ought to be guarded closely against incremental accretion from the attribution of anonymous works. Scholars equally with enthusiasts seem to undergo strong temptation to find reasons for attributing an anonymous work they have not encountered before to some celebrated but in this matter defenceless author. When an orphaned piece of language has once been attributed to a major author, no amount of refutation will prevent its appearance in - at the least - an appendix of "doubtful works" or its repeated resurrection as a possible work of the master. After Mabel Steele demonstrated that the sonnet "The Poet" in Keats's "complete works" was almost certainly written by Keats's publisher, H W Garrod first removed the poem from Keats's canon and then restored it without refuting the argument he had accepted. In 1966 a parodic piece entitled "The Barberry Tree" was attributed to Wordsworth: How Wordsworthian is it to gather his variously incongruous themes and styles into one poem? A further twist to dubious attribution is given by Norman Fruman in *The Damaged Archangel*, wherein fragments erroneously attributed to Coleridge by his grandson in 1912 are treated as if they were plagiarized and claimed by Coleridge when he copied them into his private notebooks.

Lamb has suffered no more than other major authors from doubtful attribution based on the internal evidence of style. Perhaps he is too nearly inimitable for many works by anonymous imitators to be attributed to him. Nevertheless, some certainly are, and since the last complete edition there have been numerous new attributions - some of them highly speculative, some still more dubious, and others altogether unwarranted - enough to fill a page in George L Barnett's survey for *The English Romantic Poets & Essayists: A Review of Research and Criticism*, edited by Carolyn and Lawrence Houtchens in 1957 and revised in 1966. To some of these items, Professor Barnett opens his generous Elian arms too invitingly.

In addition to false attribution based on seductive similarities of style, Lamb's canon is almost uniquely endangered by failures to interpret with sufficient subtlety the tone of his language to friends. A considerable degree of misattribution can be charged to the opportunity of enhancing the financial value of certain anonymous books in the opportunists' possession. Because E V Lucas identified *The King and Queen of Hearts*, published by the Godwins, as a work given by Lamb in 1806 to Wordsworth's son John "I being the Author," booksellers have advertised as "possibly" by Lamb a *King and Queen of Clubs* and *King and Queen of Spades* published by Newbery. Crabb Robinson came away from a visit to Lamb on 15 May 1811 convinced that he had read there "his version of the story of Prince Dorus - the long-nosed king"; in consequence, booksellers have done well with *Prince Dorus*, published in 1811 by the Godwins, and it was accepted as Lamb's by Lucas, Macdonald, and Hutchinson. On the basis of this probably justified attribution, an alert entrepreneur in 1885 added also to Lamb's charge a *Beauty and the Beast*, 1811, categorically rejected by Lucas but still available in several variants as "probably" by Lamb, or "possibly" by Lamb and his sister.

None of the books on ranks and dignities sold as by Lamb contains a passage similar to that which led to the false attribution. In one of his joyously comic letters to Thomas Manning (then in China) Lamb wrote in 1810, "I have published a little book for children on titles of honour...supposing myself to receive the following various accessions of dignity from the king, who

is the fountain of honour - As at first, 1, Mr. C. Lamb; 2, C. Lamb, Esq.; 3, Sir C. Lamb, Bart.; 4, Baron Lamb of Stamford; 5, Viscount Lamb; 6, Earl Lamb; 7, Marquis Lamb; 8, Duke Lamb. It would look like quibbling to carry it on further...otherwise I have sometimes in my dreams imagined myself still advancing, as 9th, King Lamb; 10th, Emperor Lamb; 11th, Pope Innocent, higher than which is nothing but the Lamb of God." Musing on the relativity of time and space between London and Canton, Lamb wrote to Manning what he imagined might be true by the time his letters arrived. If we had no other account of 1815 but his, we would know from the tone not to believe: "Coleridge is just dead, having lived just long enough to close the eyes of Wordsworth, who paid the debt to nature but a week or two before. Poor Col., but two days before he died he wrote to a bookseller proposing an epic poem on the 'Wanderings of Cain,' in twenty-four books."

Since a blundering attribution by Mary Victoria Cowden Clarke (née Novello) in 1873, "Serenata for Two Voices" has been included in editions of Lamb's works, but Lamb merely substituted the names "Victoria" and "Cowdenio" for the names in the original by John Hughes (1677-1720). In sending it to Vincent Novello as a hoax, Lamb wrote that Mary "thinks it a little too old-fashioned in the manner, too much like what they wrote a century back." Edmund Blunden, who read everything and read attentively, discovered the jest. Yet even so estimable a scholar as Ian Jack has been taken in, and quotes Lamb's sentence in the Oxford History of English Literature as something Lamb acknowledged of one of his poems" (1963, X, 283). Novello, founder of the music-publishing house bearing his name, was one of the foremost musical scholars of the day. If Novello believed in Lamb's authorship, he might have been thought to deserve the hoax from one who had "no ear." Fortunately, Lamb's readers are not likely to apply to him the principle Fruman applies to Coleridge, that so devious a character might have intended to deceive scholars of a later age.

We ought to hesitate before repeating as fact anything said in Lamb's letters but not supported by other evidence. As he said of the essays of Elia, his way was not matter-of-fact but matter-of-lie: 'e-lie-a, Italian style. From the rule of doubting what we find only in his letters, perhaps we must except his statement to Coleridge, in his earliest known letter, that he had spent six weeks in a madhouse; certainly the sober context seems to lack irony of any kind. Even so, a careful biographer could say no more than that Lamb *said* he had been mad. That he drank more than the abstemious have approved, we know; that he sat in a pillory, however, or that his "Confessions of a Drunkard" are scrupulously autobiographical rather than parodic, we do not know.

The canon has been unjustifiably expanded by taking certain of his private hoaxes as if they were reports of fact. More surprisingly, the canon can also be diminished by misunderstanding his methods and his tone. He wrote one of his better-known poems, "Angel Help," for the album of Mrs Charles Aders, to illustrate a drawing there by Jakob Götzenberger, a pupil of Cornelius' who later decorated Bridgewater House. Lamb also copied for the album a burlesque of the interpretation afforded by "Angel Help." Lucas included the burlesque in 1912 from a copy in Lamb's hand found among Hazlitt's effects. For the album Lamb had signed Mary's name and had written a covering letter to Mrs Aders: "My sister has tried her hand upon the same subject, but with a slight shade of difference in the handling of it."

For making Götzenberger's drawing available, along with transcriptions of

the two Lamb poems, in the *Harvard Library Bulletin* for October 1974, Mr James T Wills deserves the gratitude of all Lamb's readers. He has, however, declared that "the letter to Mrs. Aders proves conclusively that Mary was the source," and it is the thesis of the dissertation now before you that a statement by Lamb in a playful mood proves no such thing. A more likely interpretation of the materials would be that Lamb gave the true solution to Mr and Mrs Aders by his words (with my emphasis) "has *tried her hand* upon the same subject." To one who questions, as I do, that Mary would perpetrate what Lucas called "an attempt to make fun of this beautiful poem" - Lamb's "Angel Help" - one might answer that Mary's name is signed to five couplets of retort to Lamb's "Free Thoughts on Several Eminent Composers"; but the ascription of those couplets to Mary (on the testimony, again, of Mary Cowden Clarke) raises exactly the sort of question that Lamb's editors have not sufficiently examined. We must not, like Mary Cowden Clarke, make attributions based on a failure to comprehend Lamb's games. Like the couplets appended to "Free Thoughts," the lines on the Aders drawing that Lamb headed "Another version of the Same" are in one of Lamb's styles as well as solely in his autograph. Nothing in the Aders album at Harvard suggests that the authorship should be taken from him. The burlesque, which begins "Lazy-bones, Lazy-bones, wake up, and peep" in parody of "Lady bird, lady bird, fly away home," includes criticism of his first version as serious as the echo of Lessing's *Laocoön* in Lamb's letter to Aders on "Angel Help": the verses cannot adequately represent the drawing, he says, "because you cannot give by succession of words in time an idea of a Complex Scene given to the eye at once." The pranks and puns are as much a part of the one Lamb as are his underestimated learning and play with ideas.

## THE IMMORTAL DINNER

*A photo-facsimile of pages from Haydon's Diary*

As Professor Willard B Pope records in his *Preface* to the five volumes of *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, the manuscript was in family hands until 1935. Until then it had not been freely available, although Maurice Buxton Forman was allowed access when he was preparing the second edition of *The Letters of John Keats*, to collate sixteen letters from Keats to Haydon which were attached to pages of the Diary. In his preface to that edition Buxton Forman says

"First I must mention with deep regret that Miss Ellen Mary Middleton Haydon, the daughter of Frank Scott Haydon, who died on 25th of March 1935. Miss Haydon up to last Christmas seemed never to weary of answering my interminable questions about her grandfather and his associates, and she displayed an interest in anything by or concerning him I was able to send her. I fancy that, like her father, she had no delusions about him, while she was obviously anxious that he should not be misunderstood. I have evidence that almost up to the last she was searching among the voluminous correspondence left to her by her father for points of interest to me, and I feel I have lost a kind and helpful friend.

Professor Pope had not been so fortunate in 1931-32 when, for the purposes of his doctoral dissertation on Haydon, he asked to see the manuscript, having tracked Miss Haydon down through a letter in the local Eastbourne newspaper. He records that Miss Haydon's lawyer "told me frankly that his duty was to protect his client from meddlers who wished to consult private family papers for mere curiosity, and he remained unimpressed by my arguments that scholarship could be served only by reference to the manuscripts, since Taylor's text was corrupt and abridged".

Buxton Forman was successful in buying from Miss Haydon's estate two chests containing the manuscript of the Diary "in twenty-six nearly uniform vellum-bound folios, approximately eight by thirteen inches, and in three smaller notebooks", and also a supporting manuscript volume entitled "Vita", which seems to have been a first draft of the "Autobiography" or "Memoir" and which ends with the year 1825. The manuscript of the "Autobiography" was not present and cannot be traced. Buxton Forman permitted Professor Pope to microfilm the entire Manuscript of the Diary in 1936, and sold the chests and their contents to him in 1951.

It is on these that Professor Pope based his fine edition of the *Diary* in five volumes (Harvard University Press, Vols. I and II 1960, Vols. III-V 1963). He has most kindly supplied photographs of the pages containing Haydon's account of the immortal dinner, a fine recitation piece for a character actor and, as we all know, vastly entertaining.

How <sup>26</sup> ought to be, Shakespeare to delight deeply  
glowing Nature herself how she is - It would  
be the height of absurdity to say that the power  
of dear Shakespeare in its infinite variety  
do not entitle himself to the highest place, <sup>on all points</sup> ~~but~~  
but in moral scope & height of purpose  
Milton & Wordsworth have greater intention  
& nobler purposes than Shakespeare has  
~~shown~~ take any one power separately &  
compare it, with theirs - but they have <sup>one</sup> ~~one~~  
<sup>one</sup> - that one in the highest on Earth - to guide  
man to deserving endless happiness & futurity.

26<sup>th</sup> Got in Keats in hand - Voltaire  
newton & Wordsworth - make a  
wonderful contrast



Dec 28 - Wordsworth dined with me,  
Keats & Lamb with a friend made up  
the dinner party and a very pleasant  
party we had - Wordsworth was in fine  
and powerful cue - we had a glorious  
sit to our Honor Shakespeare Milton &  
Virgil - Lamb got especially merry and  
witty - and his fun in the intervals of  
Wordsworth's deep & solemn utterances  
of oratory was the fun & out of the fool  
in the intervals of Lear's passion -

270

Lamb soon gets tipsy - and tipsy he got very  
shortly - to our infinite amusement "Now  
you carefully take Poet and Lamb you  
call Voltare a dull fellow" - We all  
agreed there was a state of mind when he  
would appear so - and ~~that~~ Will let  
us drink his health and Lamb -  
then Voltare the Melancholy of the French  
nation & a very fit one - He then  
attacked me for putting in Newton -  
"a fellow who believed nothing unless  
it was as clear as the three sides of a  
triangle" - ~~and~~ and then he & Keats  
agreed he had destroyed all the poetry  
of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism.  
It was impossible to resist them, and we  
drank Newton's health and confession  
to mathematics! - It was delightful to  
see the good humour of Woodworth in giving  
in to all our jokes without affectation and  
laughing as heartily as the best of us -  
by this time other visitors began to drop  
in - & a Mr Ritchie who is going to penetrate  
into the interior of Africa - I introduced  
him to Woodworth as such - I ~~and~~ the  
conversation got into a new train after  
some time Lamb who had seemingly  
paying no attention to any one - suddenly  
opened his eyes and said alluding to the  
danger of penetrating into the interior of  
Africa -

27  
And pray who is the Gentleman  
we are going to lose - I am a son of  
Coughlin the Victim Patriotic joining  
with us - we now retired to Ted, and  
among other Friends a Gentleman who  
was comptroller of the Stamp Office  
came, he had ~~been~~ been peculiarly anxious  
to know & see Woodsworth - He ~~was~~ was  
was introduced to let Woodworth know who I  
officially was, this was an exquisite touch of  
human nature. Tho' Woodworth of  
course would not have suffered him to  
speak inadvertently, or impudently without  
a proof - yet he had a visible effect on  
Woodworth - I felt pain at the slavery  
of office, in command Men are despotic,  
and those who are dependent on others  
who have despotic control must be  
ful affected by their presence - The  
Comptroller was a very mild & nice fellow  
but rather weak & very fond of talking  
he got into conversation with Woodworth  
on Poetry and after he had been putting  
forth some of his silly stuff - Lamb who  
had been dozing, or usual suddenly opened  
his mouth and said - "What do you  
say Sir?" - Why he said the Com-  
ptroller in his milk & water insipidity,  
I was saying he so see - "Do you say so  
Sir?" - "Yes Sir" - "Why the  
Comptroller say - hump - You are -"

you are a ~~very~~ silly fellow" This quoted  
like thunder! - The Comptroller (p. 272)  
nothing of his previous 2 tapings, & looked  
at him like  $\frac{2-2}{4}$  "4"  
a man bewildered, the remarkable anxiety of  
Wadsworth to prevent the Comptroller  
being angry, said his speculations  
with ~~him~~, also ~~and~~  
quite back again into his eyes  
as evidence of the confusion he had  
produced on a being above it -  
~~really's~~ ~~the~~ ~~astonishment~~  
of Landrew the Engraver who was  
deaf & with his hand to his ear  
I his ~~eye~~ eye was trying to catch  
the meaning of the gestures he saw &  
the agonizing attempts of Keats & Pate  
I go to suppress <sup>an</sup> one laugh, and  
the smiling struggle of the Comptroller  
to take all in <sup>his</sup> good part, without  
losing his dignity made up a strong  
of comic expressions totally unrecalled  
in ~~Wadsworth~~ - I felt that they make  
Keats as Wadsworth should be under  
the supervision of such a being as this  
Comptroller - the people of England have  
a horror of office - an instinct against it -  
They are right - a man's liberty is gone  
the moment he becomes official - he is

52

continued from Vol 8<sup>th</sup>

273

the slave of Superior, and make other slaves to  
him - The Comptroller went on making his pro-  
found remarks - and when any thing very deep  
came forth <sup>(such as my I don't see that)</sup> Lamb, roared out, <sup>that</sup> <sup>nothing</sup>

Diddleiddledean

My son John

Went to bed with his heels on

one stocking off & one stocking on

My son John -

The Comptroller laughed as if he marked it  
& went on, very remark'd Lamb (chough'd)

with  
Went to bed with his heels on

Diddleiddledean -

There is no describing this scene adequately -  
There was not the restraint of refined company  
nor the vulgar freedom of low - but a frank  
natural licence, such as one sees in an act  
of Shakespeare, every man expelling his  
natural emotions without fear, into this  
company a little heated with wine, the Com-  
ptroller of the Stamp Office walked, filled,  
dressed, & official, with a due awe of the power  
above him, and a due contempt for those  
beneath him, - his astonishment at finding  
when he was come; cannot be conceived, and  
in the midst of his mild rambling family  
spinnings, Lamb's address deadened his vision.  
When they separated, Wordsworth softened his  
feelings, but Lamb kept saying in the stammer  
who is that fellow? let me see it had the  
poodle once more to his face -

My son John

Went to bed with his heels on

& there were the last words of C Lamb.

any given  
you may  
This I recollect  
1823

The door was closed upon him! - There was  
 something interesting in seeing Wardworth  
 sitting, & Keats & Lamb, & my Mother &  
 Christ! entering, towering up behind them,  
 occasionally brightened by the gleams of  
 flame that sparkled from the fire &  
 hearing the voice of Wardworth repeating  
 Milton with an intonation like the funeral  
 bell of St Pauls & the music of Handel,  
 mingled - & then Lamb, wit came sparkling  
 in between & Keats' ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> fancy of Satyr  
 & Drama & oars, & white clouds, ~~and~~  
 up the stream of conversation - I never  
 hoped a more delightful day - & I am  
 convinced that nothing in Rowell,  
 is equal to what came out from the  
 poets - indeed there were no such poets  
 in time - it was <sup>an</sup> evening worthy of the  
 Elizabethan age - and with long flash  
 up - that moved eye what in the ~~light~~  
 of solitude - Rowell & Spence! -

Since writing this, poor Ritchie is dead!  
 he died on the 10th - 1839 - Lamb's  
 feeling was prophetic! -  
 Keats too is gone! - how we wish  
 to hear our evenings - when life  
 gives us so few of them - 1823 Nov -  
 Lamb is gone too! -  
 Monkhome the other friend is gone  
 Wardworth & I alone remain of the party -  
 of the Cambridge time - know at Jan 24 - 1837

## PERFECT SYMPATHY: LAMB ON HOGARTH

John I Ades

"Coercing all things into sympathy."

*The Prelude*, II, 390

## I

Coleridge and Hazlitt, as Romantic literary critics, have (of course rightly) overshadowed Lamb. Not only did they write more criticism than Lamb, but, more importantly as shaping the subsequent assessment of their achievement, they proceeded to set down, as Lamb did not, some kind of systematic or theoretical view. Lamb's failure to do so has left him pretty much outside the canon of significant Romantic critics, since, as James Russell Lowell snorted, Lamb did not feel he had to square his literary opinions with any "Westminster Catechism of aesthetics." And Lamb himself told us straight on that "I never judge systemwise, but fasten upon particulars."

We have become so fascinated with the aesthetic and psychological (not to say metaphysical) subtleties of literary theory that it becomes difficult to establish that a writer like Lamb *is* a genuine literary critic because he did not erect a complex theoretical system to validate his literary opinions. Lamb was neither inclined nor equipped to theorize as Coleridge did in *Biographia Literaria*, as Wordsworth did in "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (Lamb had some tart words for both), or even as Hazlitt did in the various essays in *The Round Table* ("On Imitation," "On Gusto," and the like)... "I never judge systemwise," said Lamb... It is basic to serious understanding of Lamb as critic to respect this judgment of himself and refrain from trying him on grounds he never presumed to occupy - and thus dismiss him as a producer only of precious marginalia and *obiter dicta*.

But the lack in Lamb of formulation of system does not necessarily argue the absence of constant and significant procedures in criticism, only that the basic premises of such procedures must be inferred from his practice. Lamb often hands the bouquet (or lands the punch) in such a way as to conceal the legwork. ("My metaphor, my dear Miss Prism," as Oscar Wilde's Canon Chasuble would say, "is taken from boxing.") Consistent attitude, characteristic manner, the habit of brevity and memorable phrase congenial alike to journalism and private correspondence - all these are parts of Lamb's method which yet rests on two basic ingredients of English Romantic criticism, *sympathy* and *imagination*, through which they form a consistent and illuminating approach to literary criticism. It is almost as if Lamb, picking up or absorbing currents of his time unconsciously and combining them with his natural predilections, had taken up Coleridge's "two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting *sympathy* of the reader...and the power of giving the interest of novelty by modifying colors of *imagination*" (Biog. Lit., Ch. XIV, italics mine) and had made them principles not only of the creation of art but also of criticism.

I should like in this paper to review the importance of sympathy as part of the distinctively Romantic conception of the "sympathetic imagination" and then suggest how Lamb, giving it his own twist, applies such a concept as a critical strategy in his essay "On the Character and Genius of Hogarth."

Lamb's essay on Hogarth is the longest piece of criticism Lamb ever wrote

(outside the Elia signature), forming with "On the Tragedies of Shakspeare," the review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, and "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century" his most significant public critical essays. His essay on Hogarth, dating from 1811 in *The Reflector*, is one of the first public recognitions of Hogarth's genius as a serious artist (as against a producer of caricature prints merely); and Lamb's announced purpose is to counter the generally-held view that Hogarth was simply interested in "exposing meanness, deformity, and vice, paddling in whatever is ridiculous, faulty, and vicious" (*Lucas Works*, I, 83; hereafter cited only by page). Lamb argues, as a result of his remarkable imaginative sympathy for the intentions in Hogarth's prints that there is, more importantly, matter which "attempts and reaches the heart," that even in the stunning satirical prints there is usually, in a single touch (often a face or a single figure) "that sprinkling of the better nature, which, like holy water, chases away and disperses the contagion of the bad"; and that in the very mode of teeming social caricature, Hogarth yet managed to convey the "restless activities, the diversified bents and humours, the blameless peculiarities of men...in a laughable point of view... They have this in them besides, that they bring us acquainted with the every-day human face, - they give us skill to detect those gradations of sense and virtue...and prevent that disgust at common life, that *taedium quotidianarum formarum*, which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms and beauties is in danger of producing" (p. 86). Thus, in *Beer Street*, the "conceited, long-backed Sign painter" with his look of "self-applause" asks the viewer to "smile at the enormity of the self delusion" and love "the good humour and self-complacency of the fellow" (p. 86). And amidst the grim depravity of *Gin Lane*, "the supplicating posture of patient Poverty in the poor woman that is persuading the pawnbroker to accept her clothes in pledge...is a little of the *good* nature that overpowers a world of bad" (p. 83). By imaginatively sympathizing with one or more of the characters in the prints - by placing himself for the moment in their situation - Lamb derives his critical judgment of the meaning of the work.

## II

The centrality of imagination in both Romantic artistic creation and criticism is by now commonly understood and accepted. What is not so immediately recognized is the regular association of sympathy with imagination in such a way as to indicate that a sympathetic outlook was essential to the operation of the Romantic critical imagination. In his study of Collins and the creative imagination, A S P Woodhouse argues that

the severest blight on 18th-century neoclassicism was its cynicism, and the sentimental movement that followed it is in large part a reaction to this cynicism: the tendency to exalt the thinking head over the feeling heart. This demand comes at the same time as the demands for a freer creative imagination. The first effects the liberty of the emotions, the second effects the liberty of the imagination, and these two together make the romantic turn imminent.

("Collins and the Creative Imagination," in *Studies in English* by Members of University College Toronto (Toronto, 1931,) p. 123.)

And in *From Classic to Romantic*, Walter Jackson Bate shows that in the late 18th century sympathy derives from the confluence of empirical associationism and emotional intuitionism. "It may also serve," he

continues, "as a very characteristic example of how to find, in the welter of individual and subjective response, some valid means of both moral and aesthetic understanding" (Cambridge, Mass, 1946, p.148). Further, in his essay, "The Development of Modern Criticism," Professor Bate well indicates the important connection between sympathy and imagination:

A...distinctly romantic aspect of the theory of the imagination - and one of the outstanding contributions of English critical theory - was that which stressed the sympathetic ability of the imagination to identify itself with its object. The mind, as if by infection, takes on the character of what we contemplate. ...Earlier in the eighteenth century, the attempt had been made to ascribe moral feeling to *sympathy*. Hume had already suggested as much; and his friend, Adam Smith, had tried to found an entire *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) on the principle of sympathy. Psychological analysis joined with this assumption to evolve a theory of the imagination that was eminently adaptable to criticism, especially the criticism of Shakespeare and the drama. Developed most fully by Hazlitt, and echoed by Keats in his term "negative capability," this was a concept of the imagination by which few English critics were untouched... The power of poetry /Coleridge argued/ is not attained through detailed description, but by instilling "energy into the mind, which compels the imagination to produce the picture."

Through suggestion, in other words, art may incite a more energetic response, in which the reader or observer himself actively *creates*.

(In *Criticism: the Major Texts* (New York, 1970), p.274.)

Such currents in his time were bound to affect Lamb's criticism, as Coleridge recognized in the following observation about Lamb in the *Monthly Repository* (as quoted in Lucas's *Life*, II, 337):

Charles Lamb has more totality and individuality of character than any other man I know, or have known in all my life. In most men we distinguish between the differing powers of their intellect as one being predominant over the other. The genius of Wordsworth is greater than his talent, tho' considerable. The talent of Southey is greater than his genius, tho' respectable; and so on. But in Charles Lamb it is altogether one; his genius is talent, and his talent is genius, and his heart is as whole and one as his head.

I suggest, then, that under the surface of Lamb's criticism lay something very similar to the sympathetic imagination of the Romantic criticism in England.

Very similar, but not quite the same. For the sympathetic imagination as it is found in Hazlitt, as critic, and in Keats, as poet, would seem to represent a surrender of self more complete than Lamb could usually muster. In Hazlitt and in Keats, the quality of imaginative sympathy is pushed almost to the point of empathy, as in the "anihilation" of himself of which Keats spoke in his letter to Woodhouse (27 October 1818). This is a strong term, too strong, in fact, to describe Lamb's habit. There was in Lamb's criticism too prominent a tincture of personality for it ever to be entirely effaced. And so what he produced was a stream of critical commentary operating in terms of Romantic sympathetic imagination, but more or less clearly stamped with Lamb's ineradicable personality. It was as if Lamb stood somewhere to the left of center on a scale reaching from the

"negative capability" of Keats to the "egotistical sublime" of Wordsworth. For this outlook, then, let the phrase "imaginative sympathy" indicate that though Lamb as critic was operating in terms of a species of Romantic sympathetic imagination, he was temperamentally unwilling (or unable) to go as far toward empathy as Hazlitt's "sympathetic imagination" - nor had Lamb the intellectual vigor (as critic) of Coleridge's "creative imagination". Yet his criticism was widely sympathetic (in the technical sense) toward a large range of styles and subjects, and operated by an imaginative evocation in himself of the point of view in the created character.

In "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" Lamb could thus write, "I dream away my life in others' speculations. I love to lose myself in other men's minds." But he never quite lost himself. Writing to Wordsworth (26 April 1816), he said: "If I lived with him /Coleridge/ or *the author of the Excursion*, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, and be dragged along in the current of other people's thoughts... What amuses others robs me of myself, my mind is positively discharged into their greater currents, but flows with a willing violence." To Southey, he wrote (8 November 1798) about Quarles and Wither: "Quarles is a wittier writer, but Wither lays more hold of the heart.../Quarles/ turns God's grace into wantonness. Wither is like an old friend, whose warm-heartedness and estimable qualities make us wish he possessed more genius, but at the same time *make us willing to dispense with that want.*" And when Lamb considered the situation of Hamlet and Ophelia in "On the Tragedies of Shakspeare," he so sympathized with Hamlet's point of view (as contemporary actors, he tells us, did not) as to perceive in Hamlet's apparently brutal treatment of Ophelia (III.i) that "there is a stock of *supererogatory* love...which in any great grief of heart, especially where that which preys upon the mind cannot be communicated, confers a kind of indulgence...to express itself, even to the heart's dearest object, in the language of temporary alienation; but it is not alienation, it is a distraction purely...grief assuming the appearance of anger, - love awkwardly counterfeiting hate" (p.103 f). This is a just and perceptive and (for its time) highly original critical understanding arrived at by his imaginative sympathy for Hamlet's peculiar circumstances. (Cp., for instance, Coleridge on the same point in "Notes on the Tragedies of Shakespeare," *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T M Raysor, 2 vv. rev. (London, 1960), I, 27.) The word, "supererogatory," it might be ventured, is pure Lamb - that tincture of personality he could never quite efface: no one else would have stopped for such a word - except Coleridge.

### III

The first half of Lamb's essay on Hogarth is a straight-forward defense of Hogarth as a keen satirist able to infuse a certain compassion and artistic integrity into the meanest of subjects. His richness is conveyed in Lamb's often-quoted opinion: "His graphic representations are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of *words*. Other pictures we look at, - his we read" (71). Like Shakespeare's, "Hogarth's mind was reflective" (78). To the view that Hogarth often provokes a superficial laugh, Lamb goes on to argue that if the laugh does not give way to a "very different frame of mind...the painter has lost half his purpose" (72) - at which point he begins to evoke the very soul of the "misemployed incongruous characters at the *Harlot's Funeral*...depraved beings, who, without a grain of reverence or pity in their perverted minds, are

performing the sacred exteriors of duty to the relics of their departed partner in folly...who in death wants the accompaniment of one genuine tear. That wretch who is removing the lid of the coffin... gaze/s/ upon the corpse with a...perfect negation of all goodness or womanhood." The scene constitutes a "moral emblem," says Lamb, backing off from his sympathetic involvement; but this abstract judgment is the result of his first having imaginatively apprehended the state of the characters, so to speak, from the inside.

Lamb dismisses *The Four Stages of Cruelty* with its unrelieved savagery in Tom Nero, whose grotesque reward is to turn up as a disembowelled cadaver on the dissecting table at Surgeon's Hall: "mere worthless caricaturas, foreign to his general habits, the offspring of his fancy in some wayward humour" (83). But Lamb defends Hogarth from what he believes are shallow comparisons with Poussin, Reynolds, and even Domenichino and Raphael because of Hogarth's choice of subject. He argues that Hogarth is closer to real life, where "no such thing as pure tragedy is to be found." Like Shakespeare's, his world is one of "merriment and infelicity, ponderous crime and feather-light vanity...perpetually unite/d/ to shew forth motley spectacles to the world" (77).

The last half of Lamb's essay is given over to quoting and refuting the charges of the late James Barry, RA, who believed that Hogarth was unable to depict ideal beauty (by which he seems to have meant that Hogarth lacked drawing skill!) and that he diverted attention from the beautiful and ennobling in favor of "paddling" in vice. Lamb's reply points out that Hogarth is in fact a marvellous drawer of faces of all sorts, that his dealings with vice are actually moral concerns far beyond the depravity depicted, and that ultimately Hogarth touches the heart. So much, Lamb, concludes, for the "severer class of Hogarth's performances...They do not merely shock and repulse...there is in them the 'scorn of vice' and the 'pity' too; something to touch the heart, and keep alive the sense of moral beauty; the 'lacrymae rerum,' and the sorrowing by which the heart is made better" (83). It depends on the mind confronting the prints: if he lacks the ability to develop imaginative sympathy, he cannot get past the "scorn of vice" to the underlying "lacrymae rerum."

Lamb is brought to a final comprehensive assessment of Hogarth by an extended comment on a single plate: *Election Entertainment*. Nothing else so clearly illustrates Lamb's remarkable imaginative sympathy in critical judgment. After saturating himself in the inventive fecundity by which Hogarth, in this plate, "could bring so many characters...into a room, and set them down at table together...engage them in so many easy sets and occupations, yet all partaking of the spirit of the occasion...so that we feel that nothing but an election time could have assembled them," Lamb asks, "What is the result left on his /the viewer's/ mind" (85)? Superficial chaos? A judgment of the evil clutter of local politics? Not at all. Lamb's imaginative sympathy moved into the art more deeply than this, and he shapes his response by a sympathetic understanding of the very characters portrayed, that is, by a veritable adoption of their point of view: "Is not the general feeling which remains, after the individual faces have ceased to act sensibly on his mind, a *kindly one in favour of his species*...the whole scene wholesome...is not the general cast of expression in the faces, of the good sort? do they not seem cut out of the *good old rock*, substantial English honesty" (85)? Then, focusing his attention first on a single character (of the thirty-some depicted), Lamb moves to dissolve

himself into the very scene in a remarkable sympathetic identification:

That poor country fellow, that is grasping his staff (which, from that difficulty of feeling themselves at home which poor men experience at a feast, he has never parted with since he came into the room), and is enjoying with a relish that seems to fit all the capacities of his soul the slender joke, which that facetious wag his neighbour is practising upon the gouty gentleman, whose eyes the effort to suppress pain has made as round as rings - does it shock the "dignity of human nature" to look at that man, and to sympathise with him in the seldom-heard joke which has unbent his care-worn hard-working visage, and drawn iron smiles from it? or with that full-hearted cobbler who is honouring with the grasp of an honest fist the unused palm of the annoyed patrician, whom the license of the time has seated next him (85)?

Projecting himself into the very essence of the picture, Lamb here exhibits what Richard Woodhouse, Keats's friend and correspondent, identified as a component of the highest poetical imagination - "so high an imagination that he will be able to throw his own soul into any object he sees or imagines, so as to see, feel, be sensible of & express, all that the object itself would see, feel, be sensible of, or express - & he will speak out of that object..." (Quoted in Bate, *Criticism: the Major Texts* (New York, 1970) p. 349.)

In some ways, then, Lamb's most insightful understanding of Hogarth is reserved for this final point: the larger part of his prints were more for "entertainment" than for "instruction." Hogarth was larger than satire and correction, was, in fact, an artist who basically "affirmed." Lamb thus joins Hogarth's prints to "the best novels of Fielding and Smollett" (86) and, ultimately, both with the "kindly admixtures, which assimilate the scenes of...Shakspeare to the drama of real life" (87), and with "the characters of Chaucer's *Pilgrims*, which have strokes of humour in them enough to designate them for the most part comic,.../where/ our strongest feeling still is wonder at the comprehensiveness of genius" (77). Hogarth, in other words, far from merely "paddling in whatever is ridiculous," establishes, like Shakespeare and Chaucer, the true reconciliation of comic vision. That Lamb was one of the first critics - perhaps *the* first - to see Hogarth in this light is attributable, I believe, to his remarkable imaginative sympathy for the artist's work. Never did Lamb more brilliantly "fasten upon particulars."

## LEND YOUR BOOKS TO SUCH A ONE

George Whalley

In December 1820 Charles Lamb published in the *London Magazine* an essay entitled "The Two Races of Men" - about the men who lend books and the men who borrow them - and ended by saying that if a man were "Blessed with a moderate collection" of books, and his heart overflowed to lend them

let it be to such a one as S.T.C. - he will return them (generally anticipating the time appointed) with usury; enriched with annotations, tripling their value. I have had experience. Many are these precious MSS. of his - (in *matter* oftentimes, and almost in *quantity* not infrequently, vying with the originals) in no very clerkly hand - legible in my Daniel; in old Burton; in Sir Thomas Browne; and those abstruser cogitations of the Greville, now alas! wandering in Pagan Lands. -

Coleridge's practice of writing notes in the margins and on the blank leaves of books is now well known, but during his lifetime it seems not to have been known outside the circle of his intimate acquaintance. He referred to this propensity two or three times in print himself, and the first generation of his editors - his nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge and his daughter Sara - published enough of his marginalia to represent, up to about 1850, more than a third of the corpus of his published prose writing. What has been previously published is only a fragment of what can now be recovered from nearly 700 volumes (not counting seventy books that he is known to have annotated although we have no transcript of the notes and the books are lost) - a total of more than 8000 single notes. Among these, the notes that have survived from Lamb's books have a special status: many of them are early in date, all are coloured by affection and are vibrant with critical vivacity and responsive delight.

We do not know how many of Lamb's books Coleridge annotated, but we have - or know of - more than Lamb mentioned in his essay. The Daniel survives, and so does the Fulke Greville, but not the Burton. Although we have two copies of Sir Thomas Browne with Coleridge's notes, neither of them belonged to Lamb; but one of them - a collective edition of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, Religio Medici, Sepulchral Urnes, and The Garden of Cyrus* (1659) - was bought by Lamb for Coleridge just before he sailed for the Mediterranean in the spring of 1804, and has written in it - in Lamb's hand as well as Coleridge's - a record of the occasion.

/Lamb wrote:/ C Lamb March 9<sup>th</sup> 1804 bought for S T Coleridge /and Coleridge wrote:/ N.B. It was on the 10<sup>th</sup>; on which day I dined & punched at Lamb's - & exulted in the having procured the Hydriotaphia, & all the rest *lucro posito*. S.T.C.

On the front flyleaves, Coleridge wrote a long letter to Sara Hutchinson commending the book to her; the book may never have been delivered to her as intended - it went to Malta by mistake, Coleridge had it in Highgate in 1818, and the volume was still in his possession when he died. The letter to Sara Hutchinson was published (with suitable revision) in *Blackwood's* in 1819, ostensibly by James Gillman but probably by Coleridge himself, the first of the marginalia to appear in public with acknowledgment. This may have been the book by Sir Thomas Browne that Lamb was thinking of when he wrote his essay, even though it was not his own book.

The long and intimate friendship between Lamb and Coleridge was anchored at one end in Christ's Hospital ("He was a Grecian...when I was a deputy

Grecian; and the same subordination and deference to him I have preserved through a life-long acquaintance") and in the smoky rooms of the Salutation and Cat in 1794 at a turning-point in Coleridge's private life; it was tempered by much shared disaster and much shared delight in the course of Coleridge's comings and goings before he came to safe moorings on Highgate Hill. Throughout their friendship, and especially in the earlier years, Lamb's passion for collecting old and neglected books from the barrows in the Barbican and elsewhere overflowed in Coleridge's direction - as with the Thomas Browne - in the form of gifts and of books picked up on request. The list of books that we know came to Coleridge through Lamb is not long, but all the books were important ones although some of them were important to Coleridge at too early a date to be annotated.

In Lamb's earliest surviving letters we can see him, with uncanny critical insight, drawing attention to unusual books. So strongly did he communicate his enthusiasm for old books, and so unstintingly share his pleasure in new discoveries and old loves, that Coleridge sometimes thought the discoveries were his own when they weren't. In the fragmentary record of their correspondence we find Lamb recommending Walton's *Compleat Angler* to Coleridge in June 1796 (as to Robert Lloyd in 1801), Amory's *Life of John Bunce* in June 1797, Chapman's *Homer* in 1802; and he may have had something to do with Coleridge's acquisition of a little volume of Marcus Aurelius in Jeremy Collier's translation (1701) early in 1804 in which he wrote many marginal notes over a period of years. By 1806 Lamb was already at work on his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poetry*, and the aura of that fascination reached Coleridge before the book was published in 1808, not least to reinforce his own earlier admiration for the poems of John Donne. These are only a few identifiable moments in a rich and continuous process in which Coleridge did not always wait upon Lamb, and the traffic was not all in one direction. Lamb blessed Coleridge for first bringing him to Jeremy Taylor for consolation; it may have been in 1803 at a crisis in Lamb's life that Coleridge wrote two notes in Lamb's copy of Jeremy Taylor's *Eniautos* (1678); and Lamb came to be even more extravagantly eloquent in praise of Taylor's genius than Coleridge was. It was Lamb's copy of Taylor's *Polemical Discourses* (1674) that Coleridge annotated more densely than any other book; once he had embarked upon his policy of "spoiling" in 1808 he accumulated more than 250 notes in it and seems never to have returned the book to Lamb. The first principle of book-ownership, ascribed to Coleridge by Lamb, applied handsomely in this case: "the title to property in a book...is in exact ratio to the claimant's powers of understanding and appreciating the same."

Many of the marginalia that have survived in Lamb's books were written in 1808 and 1811 at the time of Coleridge's first two sets of literary lectures in London. These represent the richest vein in Coleridge's early annotations and have important implications for what was to become a settled habit: he knew that Lamb would read the notes, and he knew how Lamb would read them. In establishing a silent critical dialogue with Lamb, Coleridge established what was to become the distinctive character of dialogue in his marginalia - sometimes a dialogue with the owner of the book, sometimes an internal dialogue with himself, most often a dialogue between himself and the author although the author be centuries dead.

In Lamb's copy of Samuel Daniel's *Poetical Works* (1718) Coleridge addressed a letter to Lamb on a front flyleaf, dated 10 February 1808; it ends - "Have I injured thy Book -? or wilt thou 'like it the better *therefore*?"

But I have done as I would gladly be done by - thee, at least. -" When Lamb wrote on 7 June 1809 to congratulate Coleridge on "the appearance of *The Friend*" and to say that he had fetched away from the *Courier* office what books of his he could find - Dodsley's *Old Plays* (one volume missing, which was to cause trouble later), Sidney's *Arcadia*, and "'Daniel,' enriched with manuscript notes" - he said: "I wish every book I have were so noted. They have thoroughly converted me to relish Daniel, or to say I relish him, for, after all, I believe I did relish him... Your notes are excellent. Perhaps you've forgot them." "Ostrich oblivion" was one of the idiosyncrasies Lamb liked affectionately to ascribe to Coleridge; and the grave byplay continued in the spring of 1811 in Lamb's copy of Donne's *Poems* (1669).

/- on a front flyleaf:/ N.B. Tho' I have scribbled in it, this is & was Mr Charles Lamb's Book, who is likewise the Possessor & (I believe) lawful Proprietor of all Volumes of the "Old Plays" excepting one.

/- again:/ N.B. Spite of Appearances, this Copy is the better for the Mss. Notes. The Annotator himself says so. S.T.C.

/- on a back flyleaf:/ I shall die soon, my dear Charles Lamb! and then you will not be vexed that I had bescribbled your Books. 2 May, 1811.

Very similar to this last note is a note on Lamb's copy of Beaumont and Fletcher:

N.B. I will not be long here, Charles! - & gone, you will not mind my having spoiled a book in order to leave a Relic. S.T.C. - Oct<sup>r</sup> 1811. -

Lamb's approval of the notes on Daniel and on Sidney's *Arcadia* encouraged Coleridge in 1811 (if he needed any encouragement) to write more than fifty notes in Lamb's copy of Donne's *Poems* and a few in his tattered folio of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays (1679); in the same year he wrote more notes in the *Polemicall Discourses*. In "The Two Races of Men" Lamb said that Coleridge had taken away his *Opera Bonaventurae*, "Browne on Urn Burial" ("C. will hardly allege that he knows more about that treatise than I do, who introduced it to him, and was indeed the first (of the moderns) to discover its beauties"), a volume of Dodsley, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Walton's *Compleat Angler*, Amory's *Life of John Bunloe*. In some of these there is certainly an element of playful fiction: Coleridge had, or had access to, plenty of Thomas Browne without filching Lamb's *Hydriotaphia*. But not all the details are circumstantial moonshine. There are traces of Bonaventure in the notebooks; the volume of Dodsley was indeed missing; we know that Coleridge annotated Lamb's copy of Amory; and there is no reason to doubt that, of the various copies of Burton that Coleridge is known to have used from time to time, one was Lamb's and he wrote notes in it (though it too has vanished).

If it were not for the sombre fate of Lamb's "ragged regiment" we should probably know much more than we do about Coleridge's use of Lamb's books. Lamb bequeathed his library to Mary who lived until 1847. Edward Moxon, publisher, and husband of Emma Isola, had been appointed Lamb's executor but did not take possession of the books until after Mary's death, by which time some had drifted away. Crabb Robinson on 27 April 1848 gave an elliptical but indignant account of what then happened.

I had a chat with...Talfourd about Moxon, who has really sold Lamb's books to some American. Talfourd is displeased with this, and reasonably. /Moxon/ tells him that these were worth nothing, and that he got only £10 by them. This cannot be true, and if true so much the worse. Moxon told me at first that he would give the books to the University College; but

afterwards said they were not worth their accepting.

Moxon gave some books away indiscriminately to friends and, beyond the few sold for £10 to his friend Charles Welford, burned the rest. In February 1848, Bartlett and Welford of New York printed a catalogue of sixty titles, stating in a prefatory note that

The notes, remarks, &c., referred to and quoted...in the following list, are warranted to be *all* in the autograph of Lamb (except when otherwise mentioned)...no attempt has been made to re-clothe his "shivering folios"; they are precisely in the state in which he possessed and left them.

At a private sale these were sold for \$479.75. The last five titles in the catalogue, shown as "Books with notes by S.T. Coleridge", were all bought by George T Strong for \$108.50: Amory's *John Bunce*, Donne's *Poems*, Reynolds's *Gods Revenge agaynst the Cryinge, and Execrable Sinne of Murther* (1657), *The History of Philip de Comines* (1674), and Petvin's *Letters Concerning Mind* (1750). Strong, a perceptive collector of early printed books and outstanding association books, gave an account of the five Coleridge-Lamb books in the *Literary World* in 1853, with transcripts of some of the notes; he also sent transcripts to Derwent Coleridge to be used in his edition of *Notes Theological, Political, and Miscellaneous* (1853). Strong's library was sold in 1887 and four of the five Coleridge books are now in permanent collections - in Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and the Huntington Library. Only the most modest item - Amory's *John Bunce* - is missing, but it must be lurking shyly somewhere because it was in the possession of the Rosenbach Company in 1947.

As for the others, the Beaumont and Fletcher found its way to the British Museum library where it has been so skilfully cleaned up, repaired, and rebound that Lamb would no longer recognise it; Jeremy Taylor's *Eniautos* is at Yale; the *Polemicall Discourses* came to the British Museum by way of the Gillman family; also in the British Museum is Lamb's copy of Milton's *Poetical Works*, two volumes of a mixed set and of different sizes, with many textual notes by Lamb but only one short note by Coleridge. The Fulke Greville that Lamb accused James Kenney of taking away to France for the edification of his bride was already annotated by Coleridge but has disappeared since it came up in a sale in 1903.

Two other Lamb-Coleridge transactions in books can be added. One is the subject of that letter of August-September 1820 which turned out to be the first draft for "The Two Races of Men".

Dear C.,

Why will you make your visits, which should give pleasure, matter of regret to your friends? You never come but you take away some folio that is part of my existence. With a great deal of difficulty I was made to comprehend the extent of my loss. My maid Becky brought me a dirty bit of paper, which contained her description of some book which Mr. Coleridge had taken away. It was "Luster's Tables," which, for some time, I could not make out. "What! has he carried away any of the *tables*, Becky?" "No, it wasn't any tables, but it was a book that he called Luster's Tables." I was obliged to search personally among my shelves, and a huge fissure suddenly disclosed to me the true nature of the damage I had sustained. That book, C., you should not have taken away, for it is not mine; it is the property of a friend, who does not know its value, nor indeed have I been very sedulous in explaining to him the

estimate of it; but was rather contented in giving a sort of corroboration to a hint that he let fall, as to its being suspected to be not genuine, so that in all probability it would have fallen to me as a deodand; not but I am sure it is Luther's as I am sure that Jack Bunyan wrote the "Pilgrim's Progress;" but it was not for me to pronounce upon the validity of testimony that had been disputed by learned clerks than I. So I quietly let it occupy the place it had usurped upon my shelves, and should never have thought of issuing an ejection against it...I have several such strangers that I treat with more than Arabian courtesy; there's a copy of More's fine poem, which is none of mine; but I cherish it as my own... So you see I had no right to lend you that book; I may lend you my own books, because it is at my own hazard, but it is not honest to hazard a friend's property; I always make that distinction. I hope you will bring it with you, or send it by Hartley; or he can bring that, and you the "Polemical Discourses," and come and eat some atoning mutton with us one of these days shortly... So come all four - men and books I mean - my third shelf (northern compartment) from the top has two devilish gaps, where you have knocked out its two eye-teeth.

Your wronged friend,

C. Lamb.

Whether or not Coleridge went to eat atoning mutton, he began on about 25 September 1819 (if not before) to write marginal notes in "Luster's Tables", that is, *Colloquia Mensalia; or, Dr Martin Luther's Divine Discourses at his Table* (1652). The original owner of the book was Edward White, an old acquaintance in the East India House. Assisted no doubt by Lamb's deviousness, White may already have forgotten the book or later gave it to Lamb. Whether it passed back and forth between Coleridge and Lamb during the fifteen years of life that remained to Coleridge we do not know. Coleridge had written more than 100 notes in it and had it in his possession when he died, and like the *Polemical Discourses* it came to the British Museum through the Gillman family.

On a March day in 1829 Lamb found in a stall in the Barbican "one of whom I have oft heard and had dreams, but never saw in the flesh - that is, in sheepskin - The whole theological works of THOMAS AQUINAS!" His "arms aked with lugging it a mile to the stage, but the burden was a pleasure, such as old Anchises was to the shoulders of Aeneas - of the Lady to the Lover in old romance, who having to carry her to the top of a high mountain - the price of obtaining her - clamber'd with her to the top, and fell dead with fatigue." In October he wrote to Gillman to apologize for not knowing, because of his infrequent visits to Highgate, that Coleridge had been "in indifferent health."

A little school divinity, well applied, may be healing. I send him honest Tom of Aquin; that was always an obscure great idea to me: I never thought or dreamed to see him in the flesh, but t'other day I rescued him from a stall in the Barbican, and brought him off in triumph. He comes to greet Coleridge's acceptance, for his shoe-latches I am unworthy to unloose. Yet there are pretty pro's and con's, and such unsatisfactory learning in him... Well, do not break your lay brains, nor I neither, with these curious nothings. They are nuts to our dear friends...

This sounds like a gift, but Lamb evidently intended otherwise for he wrote a little later asking for the loan of two of Coleridge's volumes of Thomas

Fuller and added: "Also give me back Him of Aquinum." I should like to be persuaded that Coleridge ignored this plea, and that these are the five great folios from a broken set of twenty volumes of Aquinas that Derwent Coleridge inherited and that are now in the Victoria College Library where they still make the arms ache to lift them down from the shelves. But that is not the case. Coleridge had in fact left behind at Allan Bank in 1810 his own five folios of Aquinas; they were kept at Rydal Mount until his death, and these are the ones that in the end went to Derwent. This time Lamb did get his books back.



*S. T. Coleridge*

## THE MEMORY OF BARRY CORNWALL

P M Zall

It is too bad that 1974 has passed without so much as a commemorative nod to the centenary of Barry Cornwall's death. He once said of Lamb's face: "It was full of sensibility, and it came upon you like a thought, which you could not help dwelling upon afterwards; it gave rise to meditation and did you good" (*Memoir*, 2nd ed., p. 117). The same could be said of his own *Charles Lamb: a Memoir*, a delightfully ruminative book that seems to have bubbled from the wellsprings of a good man's mind. Surely for that book alone, and the sidelights it sheds upon the Lamb we love, we owe Barry Cornwall a nod of gratitude at least. Yet it is a measure of our negligence that we speak of his book as "Barry Cornwall's" forgetting that behind the anagrammatic pseudonym was a real live man, Bryan Waller Procter.

There is some satisfaction for Americans that their countrymen have tried to sustain Procter's memory in its own right. The nineteenth-century publisher T J Fields wrote a memoir shortly after Procter died and included a batch of delightful letters that alluded to young poets, both British and American - Browning, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Swinburne - as dear friends. In our own time, Richard Armour (in 1935) published another set of letters of the same sort, along with a brief biography and a selection of Procter's "Literary Recollections." Again, it is a measure of our neglect that when Professor Armour wrote his own autobiographical sketches for *Who's Who* and the *Dictionary of American Scholars* he listed over 36 titles he had published, without mentioning his books on Procter even once. Worse, the students' edition of Merriam-Webster's *Dictionary* has dropped Bryan Waller Procter completely from its list of "Over Five Thousand Names with Pronunciations," a certain sign of his lapse into obscurity.

Yet in his own day he was celebrated as a poet and patron and friend of poets. Schoolfellow of Byron's at Harrow, he had studied law at Calne where he knew William Lisle Bowles and then at London where Leigh Hunt introduced him into the circle around Lamb. "I have been acquainted, more or less, with almost all the literary people of England who have flourished in my time," he could boast in his waning years, and made a random list of 100 from memory alone. While building a profitable law practice and using the anagram "Barry Procter" to mask his authorship, he published four volumes of verse in as many years (1819-23) and also a drama, *Mirandola*, that Kemble and Macready played at Covent Garden for 16 weeks.

Marriage to Basil Montagu's step-daughter broadened his circle of acquaintances while at the same time restricting his literary work to an occasional piece of verse or prose for the annuals or periodicals. A growing family kept him close to his law practice, but he seldom disappointed a begging editor. He wrote one sketch, "Confessions of a Penny-a-Liner," for the anthology edited by his daughter Adelaide in 1861, *Victoria Regia* (a book manufactured entirely by women to demonstrate their capability to pursue the printing trade). For thirty years (1832-61) a Commissioner of Lunacy, his home was always open to young writers, from Beddoes to Swinburne - who, upon Procter's death in 1874, composed the elegiac, "In Memory of Barry Cornwall." That elegy, like its subject, is seldom sung today, and it is perhaps safe to say that it is in his *Lamb* alone that Bryan Waller Procter lives.

He composed the *Memoir* while suffering a slow death, wracked by arthritis, rheumatism, and - worse - ennui that drove him to reading the encyclopedia

for pleasure. In 1864 he had lost the use of his legs "and I suppose my head also" (Armour, p. 289). He had trouble simply forming the letters of words upon paper: "I have great difficulty in forming the letters, and you would be surprised to learn with what labor *this* task is performed" (Fields, p.117). "I wish that I could read or write... But I cannot. I have in my head a good deal to say of literary men, but it all comes forth in such commonplace feeble words that I cannot endure them" (Armour, p.289). Despite the physical pain and mental anguish, he was still willing to undertake the *Memoir*, not only because Moxon's fee would help his dwindling income, but because of the obligation he felt to delineate the Lamb that he had known no matter what it cost himself.

The letters he wrote to John Forster during its composition reflect the pain and anguish: "The 77 Anno Dominis are too apparent in the feebleness of thought and expression" (Armour, p.297). "I get on slowly... I have given it up half a dozen times - and recommenced. I find it so difficult to write legibly. What I now write is done with great difficulty" (p.301). "I am almost 80 - and have neither the legs nor the faculties of a man of 40" (p.302). "I have taken up the Lamb MS. every day and every day have added a trifle - or struck out a trifle - but I don't seem to get on. It is like riding a rocking horse. My friends nod at me as they pass - I don't get on" (p.303). And we can see his difficulties more clearly still in the manuscript of the *Memoir* now at the Huntington Library (HM 656).

Mrs Procter must have saved every scrap of paper associated with the project, and collected them into a thick (8.5 cm) quarto volume bound in morocco - now so brittle, one hesitates to turn the pages for fear of cracking its back. Even a cursory glance, however, gives dramatic evidence of what the letters mean when Procter reports to Forster: "My MS. is all in a heap of confusion...a great deal written on the *backs* of the leaves. A good deal of rubbish and some froth" (p.302). "Of the old MS. perhaps one fourth remains" (p.306). Despite the physical pain and mental anguish, Procter had taken the trouble to revise a manuscript he had only recently laboriously completed - he had in fact written two books about Lamb, one a straightforward narrative, the second the rambling recollection that we have today.

There now appear to have been four distinct phases of composition. First, Procter compiled on scraps of paper notes from various books, such as Talfourd's earlier *Life*, and a few apparently of his own memoranda. He then prepared rough pencilled drafts, chapter by chapter, which - with little revision - he copied into note books entirely in ink. The final phase, and the most remarkable, is the one in which he went through the entire manuscript he had so neatly copied, scratching out whole paragraphs, inserting new ones in his crabbed hand not only marginally but, as the letters say, "on the *backs* of the leaves." The product is a compositor's nightmare, since the additions are in pencil and in a crabbed hand that cramped them into every available space on the page, and sometimes crossed out some lines but not others that seemed connected with them.

Typical is this comment on Lamb's death: First the original on ms. p.32 of ch. 7-. "It was the fading away or disappearance of Life, rather than the violent transit into another destiny world." Inserted interlinearly are two lines: "He died at Edmonton; not as has been supposed, at Enfield; to which place he never returned (after quitting it) as a place of residence." Then we are directed to the margin: "It is not a fact that he was ever deranged or subjected to confinement shortly before his death. There was never any

the least symptom of mental disturbance in Charles Lamb, after the time (1795-6) when he was for a few months in Hoxton Asylum. His letter to Mrs. Dyer Dyer, written 4 days only before he died, is sufficient evidence of his perfect sanity even at that period." That marginal comment is squeezed into a space 3-by-10 cm, and then summarily crossed out!

The manuscript makes it appear that Procter could not unlock his recollections of Lamb until after he had laid out the pedestrian record of events neatly copied into his notebooks. Then it must have been as if, relieved of the tedious copying, his mind caught stimulation by association of ideas, then flowed at its own sweet will, overflowing between the lines and columns onto the backs of sheets. The alterations made this way changed the character of the book from a pedestrian record to the charmingly ruminative discourse we now have. But if these additions create a sense of spontaneous improvisation, it is the dozens of deletions in every chapter that contribute to the uniformity of tone creating a sense of Procter's presence. Where the printed passage (p.120) reads that Lamb was "terribly shy; diffident, not awkward in manner; with occasionally twitching motions that betrayed this infirmity," the manuscript has gone on: "His step was slow & uncertain. He had to make many attempts, before he could untie a string or undo a button; his sisters offers of 'Let me do it, Charles,' being gently disregarded." Feeling perhaps that the passage would overload the narrative with pathos, Procter deleted it.

Two other deleted passages reflect Procter's care for Lamb's memory and his own temper: Again on page 120, the text reports Lamb's speaking of a visit to the home of Samuel Rogers as a "terrible" experience, but the manuscript had read originally: "D n it, my dear boy, its terrible. It's running the gauntlet." And (on page 16) a passage comments briefly that De Quincey's three essays on Lamb do not adequately illustrate Lamb's character. In the manuscript the immediately following passage is struck out: "In rambling backwards & forwards on the road of irrelevancy, they exceed every thing that I know in the history of English literature. Tristram Shandy is the only rival of Mr de Quincy." In an otherwise warm-hearted book, this passage would have sounded sour, and not at all in keeping with the character of Barry Cornwall his public knew.

That passage could have been written in a moment of self-pique, for it echoes the letter to Forster mentioned earlier ("It is like riding on a rocking horse") lamenting that he could not drive straight on. In May 1866, however, he has finally reached his destination - as far as the appendix anyway, and in July could complain that though the book was "*substantially*" finished a month ago, it had not yet been printed - small wonder, considering the state of the manuscript. Still, his good spirits rose to the occasion with a punning rhyme on the printer's name:

Payne! Payne!  
Never complain!

All we can say or do is in vain!  
In youth, in manhood, in life's sad wane,  
Our verse must have ever the same refrain,  
Of Pain, Pain, Pain!

And when the book appeared in August it found critical acclaim. "It has," he wrote to Fields, "been very well received" (Fields, p.117) - adding that he never could have seen it through if he had not loved Lamb so well.

While the fee he received was welcome and the critical acclaim also, the

book itself caused Procter one more pain when he saw that his dedication to Forster had been omitted. Quickly apologizing to Forster, he sent him a copy of the dedication to insert in his own volume, transcribing it thus:

To John Forster;  
In Commemoration of a Friendship  
of Five and Thirty Years  
I dedicate  
These Recollections  
Of a Friend who was dear to us both.

In the accompanying note, he lashed Payne the printer with uncharacteristic ill temper: "This seems to me the most impudent fraud upon an author which a publisher can be guilty of" (Armour, p.313). But this letter is remarkable in another respect, for it assures Forster that the dedication enclosed with it was a verbatim copy ("*in the above words*"). The manuscript copy, however, differs in the second line, and speaks of "Intimacy" rather than "Friendship." The letter thus calls into question the clarity of Procter's accuracy in copying or the clarity of his memory - his short-range memory at least.

In any event, the lapse would be considered immaterial by the common reader, and entirely pardonable by those who knew the circumstances under which the *Memoir* of Lamb was composed. Procter accomplished what he had set out to do in separating Lamb's life from the legends that even then were becoming encrusted on his name. It was an unsought benefit that the book enhanced his own reputation. Echoing Lamb, he sighed: "I must give up writing... I will write for antiquity" (Armour, p.300). Over the next eight years, he tried to do for other friends what he had done for Lamb, compiling his delightful reminiscences of men of letters he had known - published in 1877, three years after his death, as *An Autobiographical Fragment*. This was the volume that Richard Armour edited in 1935 and that now seems destined for antiquity also. Perhaps this is as it should be, for Procter's last letter to Forster laments that he can neither speak nor write but that he can still "enjoy the comfort (such as it is) of silence" (Armour, p.340).

#### NOTE

We are grateful to the Librarian, Huntington Library, for permission to quote from the manuscript of Procter's *Charles Lamb: a Memoir*. Books referred to in parentheses are: (Fields) - James T Fields, *Barry Cornwall & Some of His Friends*, Boston, 1876 and (Armour) - Richard Armour, *Barry Cornwall*, Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1935.

## LAMB, DICKENS AND THE THEATRICAL VISION

Peter A Brier

Lamb and Dickens have often been juxtaposed because of their jollity and human warmth. And of course there is that striking similarity between Mr Micawber and Captain Jackson - giants in the art of affecting grandeur in the midst of squalor. What I would like to suggest in the following paragraphs is that the connection between the two writers goes beyond merely suggestive parallels in subject and tone. To juxtapose them is to point out an important bit of literary history which indicates generic trends in the formal evolution of modern English literature.

F R Leavis denies Dickens and Thackeray, social realists but prone to eccentric and puppet-like characterizations, membership in his Pantheon of English novelists. Both of them are in the tradition of Fielding's comic realism tintured slightly with Shandyan madness. "We all know that if we want a more inward interest it is to Richardson we must go.../to discover/ one of the important lines of English literary history - Richardson, Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, and on to George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad." (*The Great Tradition*, 1948, p.4) But Leavis does concede that Fielding opened the "central (as opposed to 'Great'?) tradition of English fiction." He attributes Fielding's importance to his involvement in both the drama and the essay: "He completed the work begun by *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, in the pages of which we see the drama turning into the novel." Is this not even truer of Lamb's essays? Where else can we see more clearly the continuing evolution of the drama turning into the novel? In fact, Lamb identifies with dramatic values more than his predecessors. Addison created a character in Sir Roger de Coverly, but he did not "play" one as Lamb did Elia. Lamb conceived his mimetic procedures, his way of making art, in a manner strongly suggestive of theatrical conventions like pantomime ("I am already come to be known by my vacant face and careless gesture, preambulating at no fixed pace, nor with any settled purpose. I walk about, not to and from." *The Superannuated Man*), farce (the accidental near-drowning of the good but absent-minded George Dyer in *Amicus Redivivus*, and burlesque (the Figurantes "never plump on earth" circling Elliston's ghost. *To The Shade of Elliston*). Lamb's theatrical stance in essay form makes him a guardian of the English novel's formative principles, principles which Dickens was to realize in the most significant manner since Fielding's discovery of them.

If we focus on the theatrical or dramatic dimension in both Lamb and Dickens, the movement from drama to novel that informs their work becomes strikingly manifest. Dickens shared with Lamb a fascination with theatre going back to earliest childhood. A visit to the theatre at the age of six parallels Lamb's "first play" in psychological importance:

He certainly saw Richard III, because "his heart leapt with terror as the wicked king struggling for life against the virtuous Richmond, backed up against the box" in which he was sitting, and also *Macbeth*, "in which the witches bore such an awful resemblance to the thanes and other proper inhabitants of Scotland," while "good King Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else."

J B Van Amerongen, *The Actor in Dickens...*, 1926

The child's confusion of the actor with his role ("Duncan" obviously played

other parts) recalls Lamb's inability to distinguish between the opera and the pantomime; both were equally serious: "Harlequin's Invasion followed; where, I remember, the transformation of the magistrates into reverend bedlams seemed to me a piece of grave historic justice..." (*My First Play*). But the two children's responses differ in one very important respect. Dickens' chief recollection is "terror" whereas Lamb's is wonder: "I was awe-struck, and believed those significations to be something more than elemental fires. It was all enchantment and a dream."

Dickens' association of terror with theatrical effects made him a master of melodrama. His novels abound in "tableau" scenes that recall the frequent use of that convention in stage melodrama. Often Dickens managed to perfect the terrifying tableau into a richly ominous frozen scene with symbolic implications that transcend terror and approach the sublime. Very powerful is the description of the leave-taking of David Copperfield and Mrs Steerforth after Littimer has told his disgraceful story: the two women (Steerforth's mother and Rosa Dartle) sitting motionless on the terrace in the gathering gloom, some early lamps twinkling in the distance, a lurid sky hovering overhead and a mist from the valley below rising towards them like a sea, which "mingling with the darkness threatened to drown them" (*David Copperfield*).

When they are not terrifying or sublime, Dickens' groupings tend to be obviously stagy as in the scene in which Miss Tox, in search of a nurse for little Dombey, brings the whole Toodle family, father, mother, unmarried sister and five children for Mr Dombey to inspect (*Dombey and Son*, Chapter 2). And when he ends his novels, Dickens relishes the tested theatrical convention of the curtain tableau. Because this convention calls for the presence of the *entire cast* on the stage, the plot of the novel often suffers.

Lamb's "awe" over the theatre - his almost mystical sense of wonder - led him toward framing memories and dreams in tableau form. The dreams were often nightmares; though a child of wonder, Lamb was no stranger to terror. (*Witches and other Night Fears*) His naive response to the melodramatic tableau in John Howard Payne's melodrama *Ali Pasha* shows how susceptible he was, all his life, to the manipulative powers of theatrical forms. Nevertheless, he was pictorially imaginative to a very high degree, and his descriptive powers have at least as wide a psychological and realistic scope as Dickens'. "Awe" eclipses "terror" in the frozen scenes of Charles Lamb. His chimney-sweep in a royal bed; the Roman busts at Mackery End; Bridget and Elia playing "sick whist" - or captured in miniature on a cup of China; Quakers sitting in silent worship and Coleridge commanding the worship of his schoolmates; these are all examples of the sublime, somewhat diminished by rococo playfulness, but nevertheless mysterious and wonderful.

When Elia gathers all of the Old Benchers from his childhood memories and has them "parade" by at the end of *Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*, it is almost as if he were anticipating Dickens in the final grouping of a closing tableau. But the Benchers lack the substance that would enable them to pose for a closing curtain, so they flit away like phantoms in a comic procession:

Fantastic forms, whither are ye fled. Or, if the like of you exist, why exist they no more for me? Ye inexplicable, half-understood appearances, why comes in reason to tear away the preternatural mist,

bright or gloomy, that enshrouded you?

The tone and diction are very similar to the opening paragraphs of Lamb's eulogy for William Elliston, the actor's actor:

Joyousest of once embodied spirits, whither at length hast thou flown?  
To what genial region are we permitted to conjecture that thou hast flitted?

Art thou sowing thy WILD OATS yet /Lamb is punning on one of Elliston's greatest stage hits/ (the harvest time was still to come with thee) upon casual sands of Avernus? or art thou enacting ROVER (as we would gladlier think) by wandering Elysian streams?

Elia's fantasy grows increasingly mock-spiritual:

What new mysterious lodgings does thou tenant now?  
or when may we expect thy aerial house-warming?

Tartarus we know, and we have read of the Blessed Shades; now cannot I intelligibly fancy thee in either.

Elliston is finally placed in "a LIMBO somewhere for PLAYERS...by the neighbouring moon...mayst thou still be acting thy managerial pranks, great disembodied Lessee...but Lessee still, and still a Manager." And so it is with Elia's Benchers. They people the stage of Elia's childhood, a limbo in the mature Elia's memory. Elia is the "Lessee" and "Manager" of that limbo. As actor-writer he evokes the Benchers in "fantastic forms" that flit by him like the dancers surrounding the ghost of Elliston: "Thin ghosts of Figurantes (never plump on earth) circle thee in endlessly..." Lamb projects himself into Elliston's ghost, but Dickens dreamed the same dream in the flesh:

Walking with a friend...Dickens had paused in the shadow of Westminster Abbey...and summarized his lifelong love affair with the theater: "What do you think," he demanded, "would be the realization of one of my most cherished day-dreams?" It would be, he said eagerly, to "hold supreme authority" in the direction of a great theater, with "a skilled and noble company. The pieces should be dealt with according to my pleasure; and touched up here and there in obedience to my judgment; the players as well as the plays being absolutely under my command. That," he concluded, laughing and glowing, "*that's* my day-dream!"

Where Lamb's tableaux tend to dissolve in the wake of his impressionism, Dickens has the greater control of the forming novelist. His closing tableaux may seem forced, but nevertheless they are affixed to the "stage" of his novels. Lamb's stage, in a formal sense, was his memory.

Dickens and Lamb both loved the London Pantomime, but Dickens identified even more closely with its values and its heroes than did Lamb. Early in his career he helped edit Grimaldi's memoirs, and in an introductory chapter reminisced with great nostalgia over the "Clowns" of his childhood:

Nor were our speculations confined to Clowns alone; they extended to Harlequins, Pantaloons and Colombines, all of whom we believed to be real personages, existing in the same forms and characters all the year round. How often have we wished that the Pantaloon were our godfather! and how often thought that to marry a Columbine would be to attain the highest pitch of all human felicity!

Lamb weaves tableaux and pantomime into the symbolic texture of his essays, and Dickens does the same in his novels. Because Lamb's final product is less ambitious structurally than Dickens', the theatrical convention often

holds its own weight as the principal vehicle for the symbolic meaning which the essay as a whole conveys. For example, in *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* the concluding scene, in which James White instructs the sweepers in the art of sausage eating, is an outspoken "entertainment" (See V L Clinton-Baddeley, *The Burlesque Tradition and the English Theatre after 1660*, 1952). The extended food-joke bears the weight of Lamb's theme: the convivial goodheartedness that the sweepers radiate toward others and which they elicit from free spirits like White. In *Oliver Twist*, on the other hand, the complexities of plotting and character development require a subtler use of similar conventions. When Oliver is first brought before Fagin, Dickens describes a scene that very much evokes James White and his chimney sweepers:

The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt. There was a deal table before the fire: upon which were a candle, stuck in a ginger-beer bottle, two or three pewter pots, a loaf and butter, and a plate. In a frying-pan, which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over them, with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare; and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying-pan and the clothes-horse, over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. Several rough beds made of old sacks were huddled side by side on the floor. Seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men. These all crowded about their associate as he whispered a few words to the Jew; and then turned round and grinned at Oliver. So did the Jew himself, toasting-fork in hand. (Chapter 8)

The tone is entirely different from Lamb's. "Pleasant James White" is replaced by an "old shrivelled Jew" with a "villainous-looking and repulsive face" and "the nostrils of the young rogues" (chimney sweepers) give way to "four or five boys...smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men." Lamb's scene is gay and Dickens' tableau ominous and grotesque, but the theatrical conventions of clown-like character, sausages, and impish boys are unmistakably similar. That Dickens is aware of Fagin's clownish origins is suggested by the ironic way he refers to him in the very next chapter heading; the "shrivelled" satanic Jew with "toasting-fork" in hand becomes a "PLEASANT OLD GENTLEMAN" and the "middle-aged" boy thieves, "HOPEFUL PUPILS." The master-pupil relationship, the same in both Lamb's essay and *Oliver Twist*, reaches a comic crescendo in Dickens when Fagin puts on the costume of a "merry old gentleman" and puts the boys through their routine practice-sessions in pick-pocketing:

When the breakfast was cleared away; the old gentleman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a notecase in the other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket, with a guard-chain round his neck, and sticking a mock diamond pin in his shirt: buttoned his coat tight round him, and putting his spectacle-case and handkerchief in his pockets, trotted up and down the room with a stick, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen walk about the streets any hour of the day. Sometimes he stopped at the fireplace, and sometimes at the door, making believe that he was staring

with all his might into shop-windows. At such times, he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn't lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this time, the two boys followed him closely about; getting out of his sight, so nimbly, every time he turned round, that it was impossible to follow their motions. At last, the Dodger trod upon his toes, or ran upon his boot accidentally, while Charley Bates stumbled up against him behind; and in that one moment they took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle-case. If the old gentleman felt a hand in any one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again. (Chapter 9)

Fagin cooking his sausages and the boys huddled about the table provide the melodramatic tableau that actually prepares for the pantomime of the pick-pocket session. Dickens' reading "audience" would have made the necessary connection between the "sausages" and the costume of the "merry old gentleman." On the premise that Fagin is basically a Clown figure, readers are lulled into accepting him on the same terms as does Oliver: an entertaining old man who has a way with children. By turning his readers into a pantomime audience, Dickens makes them as innocent in their responses as Oliver's childhood makes him naive. Later in the novel, Fagin's satanism dominates; he becomes a man in whom "every evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart" (Chapter 47). And in his death cell he panics in a manner that seems a grotesque parody of the clownishness of the pick-pocket session: "Now, he started up, every minute, and with gasping mouth and burning skin, hurried to and fro, in such a paroxysm of fear and wrath that they - used to such sights - recoiled from him with horror" (Chapter 52). The detached, pantomimic clown becomes the involved, melodramatic actor. In his opening scene Fagin made the child Oliver laugh "till the tears ran down his face"; in his closing scene, he terrifies two hardened jail guards. The "transformation" is complete; Clown has become Satan, and the reader-audience is manipulated into accepting the change. It laughs with Oliver; it gasps with the jail guards. Lamb's James White and his chimney-sweeps move through a pantomime that follows a burlesqued melodrama - the tableau in which the exhausted sweeper beds down in Arundel Castle. Dickens' Fagin and his boy thieves are swept up in pantomime, farce, and melodrama all intertwined and subsumed to the needs of the novel of which they are only a part.

Late in October 1834, only two years before *Oliver Twist* ran as a serial in Bentley's Miscellany, and only two months before his death from an infection incurred through an accidental fall (an ironic death for a lover of the comic "fall" of clowns), Lamb wrote his friend and literary disciple, Thomas Hood, a letter responding to a comic, experimental novel Hood had just published:

I have been infinitely amused with Tylney Hall. 'Tis a medley, without confusion, of farce, melodrama, pantomime, comedy, tragedy, punchery, what not? if not the best sort of novel, the best of its sort; as how could it fail, being the only one? The Fete is as good as H/ogarth's Strollers in the Barn.

It is curious that Lamb should invoke his concept of the "medley" in exactly the same manner in which he used it thirty-six years earlier in a letter to Southey to describe his first major literary work, the tragedy

*John Woodvil*: "My tragedy will be a medley (or I intend it to be a medley) of laughter and tears, prose and verse, and in some places rhyme, songs, wit, pathos, humour, and, if possible, sublimity; at least, it is not a fault in my intention, if it does not comprehend most of these discordant colours." Unlike the traditional "medleys" of Roman satire, Lamb's early "tragedy" pointedly avoids the prevalence of a comic tone. The blend of approaches becomes its own reason for being. If *John Woodvil* did not succeed as a medley rich enough to embody the "antithetical manner," the impressionistic essays of *Elia*, twenty years later, did.

Lamb's praise of Hood's book is somewhat guarded because he is not entirely certain it can pass for a "novel." Even though Lamb derived his "antithetical manner" from Laurence Sterne, a *novelist*, he was uncomfortable with fictions that were not plotted in a traditional and conventional manner. Wordsworth had urged him to write a novel, but the poor plotter in Lamb demurred. The early tale *Rosamund Gray* (1798) remains his only finished, longer prose narrative. In June, 1826 Lamb began a confessional-type story about a jilted suitor which never got past the opening chapter. *Reminiscences of Jude Judkins, Esq., of Birmingham* could not carry on the program in art that *Elia* had begun.

But if the novel, as Lamb conceived it, did not seem an appropriate vehicle during the period of his greatest productivity, his response to Hood's novel ("...if not the best novel, the best of its sort; as how could it fail, being the only one?") would indicate that toward the end of his life Lamb was beginning to recognize that the novel could satisfy some of his own artistic needs. It is almost as if after a lifetime of identification with *Yorick*, the originator of the "antithetical manner," *Elia*-Lamb suddenly understood the whole of which *Yorick* was only a part - a rhapsodic novel called *Tristram Shandy*. Finally, the explicit references in *Tylney Hall* to the popular stage must have struck Lamb as indicative of a new direction for dramatic ideas. "The Fete" Lamb alludes to in the letter to Hood is a "rural gala" given by a nouveau riche farmer for his aristocratic neighbors. To "dramatize" the comical absurdity of Farmer Twigg's social pretensions, Hood compares him to a producer of Pantomimes: "In the midst of this dramatic storm, the author of the pantomime runs to and fro, and bellows till he is as hoarse as a boatswain... To see a pantomime in this stage is like getting a glimpse of chaos..." When a cow breaks into the central pavilion of the Fete and upsets all the tables, spreading food everywhere, the result is a "food joke" of epic proportions far beyond the capacities of the stage. One cannot help but wonder if Lamb did not discover in this novel a comic vindication of his own argument in the famous essay on the "fitness" of Shakespeare's plays "for stage-representation," namely that only a stage of the "mind" could do Shakespeare's plays true justice. Hood had satisfied Lamb that the novel could do for comedy what a good imagination could do for Shakespeare's tragedies.

Had Lamb lived to witness the rising talent of Dickens, he would most probably have agreed that the younger writer had succeeded in finding a generic home for the older writer's impressions of character and situation. *Oliver Twist* is simply a more advanced version of the "medley" Lamb admired in Hood's *Tylney Hall*; the movement "from drama to novel" is clearly more advanced. As conveyors of the dramatic mode from essay to novel, Lamb and Dickens share an important responsibility in the development of fictive imitation. Their achievement is all the more remarkable because their concept of the "dramatic" was taken almost entirely from the vulgarized theatre of their time.

## AN ELIAN ENIGMA

Ralph M Wardle

On July 15, 1820, Charles and Mary Lamb arrived in Cambridge for a four-week holiday. After Mary's first visit there in 1815 she had told friends: "In my life I never spent so many pleasant hours together"; back in London, she "could hardly keep from crying" when they left the coach stop in Fetter Lane and headed for the Temple. Her brother was equally fond of the fascinating old city. If he had not been cursed with that confounded stammer - if he had risen to the rank of Grecian at Christ's Hospital - he might well have matriculated at the University like the three men he most admired: Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Thomas Manning. When he allowed himself to reflect on what might have been, he grew wistful; in a sonnet written during a holiday stay in Cambridge in 1819 he had observed:

I was not train'd in Academic bowers,  
 And to those learned streams I nothing owe  
 Which copious from those twin fair founts do flow;  
 Mine have been any thing but studious hours.  
 Yet can I fancy, wandering 'mid thy towers,  
 Myself a nursling, Granta, of thy lap;  
 My brow seems tightening with the Doctor's cap.  
 And I walk *gowned*.

Yet Lamb had learned to accept the bad with the good, and he did not let his disappointment of thirty years earlier cloud his enjoyment of Cambridge in 1819.

During that visit he and his sister had stayed at the house of a Mr Bays, a hatter, on Trumpington Street. That section of the street has since been dignified with the name King's Parade, and the house has been replaced by a modern building. But the site is still occupied by a haberdasher's shop managed by another Mr Bays, a direct descendant of Lamb's host, and the display window boasts facsimilies of a letter which Lamb wrote there to "T" (probably Thomas Noon Talfourd) urging him to join them and to send down a copy of Hazlitt's *Political Essays*, just published.

Probably the Lambs stopped at Mr Bays again during their 1820 visit, which proved to be an especially pleasant one. Three days after they arrived Mary called on Crabb Robinson, who had been riding the circuit and was about to go over to visit his family at Bury St Edmunds. He spent two evenings playing whist with them and a neighbor, Mrs Smith, whom they had met through William Ayrton's sister Mrs Paris, another Cantabrigian. Mrs Paris chattered incessantly, but it was Mrs Smith who commanded Lamb's attention - because of her mammoth size. Little did the poor man realize, as she sweltered through those summer days, that presently she would be immortalized as the Widow Blasket, "The Gentle Giantess."

Even more interesting to Lamb was another member of Mrs Paris's circle, the twelve-year-old daughter of Charles Isola, former Esquire Bedell of the University. In 1820 she was living with her late mother's sister, Miss Humphreys, in Cambridge; later she was to brighten - and sometimes darken - the Lamb household as their "adopted daughter" Emma, Lamb's "girl of gold."

Cambridge offered plenty of diversions besides whist. Robinson took the Lambs "on a walk behind the colleges" and through the "exquisite chapel and gardens of Trinity" before he left for Bury, and they joined an excursion to view Lord Braybrooke's place at Audley End. Perhaps also they had the fun

of showing the local sights to their brother John and a friend of his who had promised to come down from London for a few days. They had time for reading and writing too. And one day Lamb visited Trinity College Library and was privileged to see with his own eyes the treasured manuscript of Milton's *Lycidas*. - Or did he?

Shortly before he left London he had submitted to John Scott, editor of the *London Magazine*, a curious essay, "The South-Sea House," signed "Elia," describing the "magnificent relic" where he had worked briefly as a young man and the "odd fishes" who were his colleagues. It was a remarkable sort of essay - nostalgic, humourous, essentially humane in both subject matter and treatment - and Scott probably notified Lamb promptly that he would welcome others of the kind. To one who had, over the years, tried his hand at the novel, verse, tragedy, comedy, humourous sketches, and critical reviews with very little recognition, Scott's encouragement must have been welcome. Accordingly, on August 5, he sat down to begin what would prove to be the second essay of Elia.

For reasons of disguise, presumably, he called the essay "Oxford in the Vacation," and he dated it "from my rooms facing the Bodleian." But he was almost certainly looking out on King's College and the lacy spires of its chapel, and he wrote primarily about Cambridge. Since he knew more whist-playing ladies than members of the University, he focused his attention on himself, reporting how Elia likes to spend a holiday. He mused along very much in the vein of his sonnet:

Here I can take my walks unmolested, and fancy myself of what degree of standing I please. I seem admitted *ad eundem*. I fetch up past opportunities. I can rise at the chapel-bell, and dream that it rings for *me*. In moods of humility I can be a Sizar, or a Servitor. When the peacock vein rises, I strut a Gentleman Commoner. In graver moments, I proceed Master of Arts.

He described the trees, the buildings, the libraries - then told of an encounter with an inmate of one of the libraries, "G. D." - his old friend George Dyer, the bibliophile of bibliophiles, historian of Cambridge University. And he closed his essay with some anecdotes about the bumbling old fellow who, all unawares, had been entertaining his friends for years. The essay ranged from sentiment about ancient building to jests about the absurd old pedant - jests tempered by the author's obvious affection for Dyer. The style varied from histrionic ("Antiquity! thou wondrous charm, what art thou?") to mundane ("D. started like an unbroken heifer..."). It was the reverie of a tolerant, perceptive man, a lover of life and people, one endowed with a sense of humour and a mastery of words, whose kindly spirit fused the rambling thoughts into a coherent essay and gave it its interest - human interest.

Two thirds of the way through the essay, commenting on the manuscripts in the Bodleian, Lamb inserted 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, together with the other minor poems of its author, in the Library of Trinity, kept like some treasure to be proud of. I wish they had thrown them in the Cam, or sent them, after the latter cantos of Spenser, into the Irish Channel. How it staggered me to see the fine

things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure! as if they might have been otherwise, and just as good! as if inspirations were made up of parts, and those fluctuating, successive, indifferent! I will never go into the workshop of any great artist again, nor desire a sight of his picture, till it is fairly off the easel; no, not if Raphael were to be alive again, and painting another Galatea.

It was a curious comment, at least when applied to *Lycidas*, because that manuscript was singularly free from corrections or interlineations. There is only one major revision in the 184 lines of the manuscript - and only twenty verbal substitutions, less than one every nine lines. It could almost pass for a fair copy.

What was amiss? Had Lamb confused the *Lycidas* manuscript with that of some other poem? Or had he not seen it at all? (In the *May Indicator* Leigh Hunt had complained that he was denied access to the manuscript of *Comus* because "the keeper of it was from home.") Was Lamb, accordingly, venting his spleen by suggesting that the manuscripts were not worth seeing? Or was he genuinely disturbed to discover that fine poems did not spring forth "with all their parts absolute"? Surely his own experience should have told him otherwise. As Professor Barnett has revealed, Lamb carefully revised his essays; and he must have laboured quite as much when he strove to cramp his thoughts into the sonnet form, as he often did. Still, he may have cherished the Romantic notion that the finest poems came into existence as full-grown beauties.

Yet he was not usually prey to such highfalutin theories; his feet were, necessarily, quite firmly fixed on the ground. He leaned more toward the mischievous than the mystical, and at least one of his admirers cannot help wondering if he was speaking here with tongue in cheek, obliquely telling believers in "spontaneous overflow" that Milton agonized over his sublime lines quite as much as an ordinary mortal like Charles Lamb did.

Whatever the motives that prompted his footnote, he had second thoughts about it; and when he reprinted the essay in *Elia* in 1823, he omitted the note altogether. Perhaps he had learned that his description of the *Lycidas* manuscript was inaccurate. Perhaps readers of the *London* had resented the hint that mere craftsmanship played so vital a part in literary creation. (He modified his remarks about Dyer after a reader objected to them.) Perhaps...perhaps... But speculation is fruitless: the imp of the perverse often led Lamb into devious paths which cannot easily be charted.

Presently, in "The Character of the Late Elia," he remarked that Elia "sowed doubtful speeches" and "reaped plain, unequivocal hatred." Surely few men ever hated Charles Lamb, but many, in his own time and later, found him hard to pin down. Nor would he have it otherwise; surely he would have been delighted to know that, on his 200th birthday, an admirer from the heart of darkest America would still be puzzling over one of his doubtful remarks.