

THE CHARLES LAMB BULLETIN

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

'Monuments to goodness', wrote Lamb in 1827, 'even after death, are equivocal... We should be modest for a modest man, as he is for himself.' Later in the same letter he described with some self-irony how he 'yearned with cheap benevolence' and decided to ask the local stone-cutter how much it would cost to have inscribed on his tombstone simply - 'Here C. Lamb loved his brethren of mankind.' However, it is not the business of the Charles Lamb Society to be too modest, and certainly not on this occasion. Lamb would probably have been amazed to know that a Society founded in his honour was well and thriving after nearly fifty years, and that it was eager to commemorate the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of his death. Lamb was not, like Keats, hungry for immortality. His Elian essay, 'New Year's Eve', in which he meditates on the departing year and 'the unpalatable draught of mortality', gives us characteristically his love of life, 'summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society', and of course books, 'my midnight darlings, my Folios!' He thinks much of the past, and of childhood. And amid all this retrospection, and introspection, it never seems to occur to him to imagine that he might himself achieve a future beyond 'that capital plague-sore' of death, a future in which the things he valued would be valued by others in him.

The essays collected in this volume are a testimony to the life there still is in Lamb's writings and in the personality which warms them. The writers see Lamb as a stylist, a critic, a lover of children, a brother, and many other things besides. The Society is fortunate indeed amongst its members and supporters to have scholars with such a diversity of interests, talents and approaches, with which to honour the occasion.

John Stevens

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LAMB'S WOMEN

Gillian Beer

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My first memory of Lamb is not a lucky one. It is of standing at a bus-stop at the age of ten reading, and trying to like, Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. I was balked by their terseness, by the sense of gloomy judgment (it was *Macbeth* I was reading), by the echoes of a ranging Shakespearean language bound in by common sense prose. Later, though, I read *Essays of Elia* for A-level and, as a result, his crowded, whimsical poignant writing is set always in my mind in the long vista from the hilltop where our school stood, across silent hills and fens to Glastonbury Tor. When I recollect that scene, it is tempered with Lamb's spry, warm voice moving in my mind, describing London and urban green land. He summoned for me in those days a sense of adult experience oddly close to that of Blake, particularly the Blake of the *Poetic Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence*, in which adult experience (the experience of being alive in London and its surrounding countryside) is turned awry, gravely and comically thwarted by a child's eye. Of course, they both wrote on chimney sweeps, but beyond that, they both paid attention, with extraordinary directness, to neglected sources of life.

It may seem perverse to speak of Lamb's directness, so curlicu-ed is his style, so dashed like *Tristram Shandy* with the oddity of recorded life, but there is a serene archness to his observation. It makes strange the familiar and brings close the unforeseen. As he says of Munden's acting: 'Can any man *wonder* like him. Can any man *see ghosts*, like him'... His gusto 'antiquates and ennobles what it touches'... 'He understands a leg of mutton in its quiddity'. 'He stands wondering, amid the common-place materials of life, like *primaeval man* with the sun and stars about him'.

Not perhaps, for Lamb himself, like '*primaeval man*'. - well-buttoned and garbed he is, but still 'wondering amid the common-place materials of life'. As Coleridge wrote of him: (183, Elton) 'Lamb every now and again *irradiates*, and the beam, though single and fine as a hair, is yet rich with colours, and I both see and feel it.' So I connected the voices of Blake and Lamb:

How sweet I roamed from field to field
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the prince of love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide...

Or 'Holy Thursday':

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two and two in red and blue and green;
Grey-headed beadles walked before with wands as white as
snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames waters
flow.

Oh, what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London
town!
Seated in companies they sit, with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent
hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of
 song,
 Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven among.
 Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
 Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

This describes the charity school procession among whose children, with a child's confusion, I had always seen Lamb in his Christ's Hospital uniform.

Lamb's name, by one of those pleasant quirks that life offers, suggests a part of his character: the frolics, the innocent: and perhaps has played its part in a sentimentalisation of his work. (If such naming went on in a novel we would see it as pushy and factitious, 'Wordsworth', 'Shakespeare', 'Freud' (Joy), 'Jung'.)

Despite the tone of escapade in much of his writing, it is grounded in a firm sense that life is difficult, hard to make sense of, and fully worth living. His method is, not to encompass the whole of life, but to occupy corners of it - rather as when he writes at the end of a newsy letter from Mary to Dorothy Wordsworth: 'Mary has left a little space for me to fill up with nonsense, as the Geographers used to cram monsters in the voids of their maps and call it Terra Incognita.' He goes on: 'She has told you how she has taken to water, like a hungry otter. I limp after her in lame imitation... I have been aquavorous now for four full days and it seems like a moon... Damn Temperance and them that first invented it!' It is from Dorothy Wordsworth that we discover that in that month of 1810 Mary was very poorly and Charles 'in miserably bad spirits'. The rectitude and élan with which Lamb sustained Mary through her long, intermittent mental illness, underpins those flourishes and Shandyeanean dispatches by means of which his essays speak. There is in him, as Virginia Woolf, one of his admirers, wrote in quite another context, 'a sternness at the heart of his beauty'. And by Mary he was equally sustained:

Hazlitt used to say, that he never met with a woman who could reason, and had met with only one thoroughly reasonable - the sole exception being Mary Lamb. (Talfourd)

- it was not an unequal relationship. The dignity of their relation is the basis of his comic reversals: 'I always call my sister Maria when we are alone together, Mary when we are with our friends, and Moll before the servants.'

Looking back, I've sometimes wondered whether Lamb's *Essays of Elia* were chosen in my girls' school for study because of their virtuous whimsicality, which did not threaten to draw us into *too much* adult experience, at least not sexual experience. But I think now that it was a fortunate choice, because there is another aspect of Lamb which spoke particularly easily and unnoticeably to us: his sympathy with women. He is one of those writers whom Virginia Woolf wished for, as being 'man-womanly' and 'woman-manly': his writing discloses his empathy with female experience, his feeling particularly for the single woman, for his aunt.

The only secular employment I remember to have seen her engaged in, was, the splitting of French beans, and dropping them into a China basin of fair water. The odour of those tender vegetables to this day comes back upon my sense, redolent of soothing recollections. Certainly it is the most delicate of culinary operations.

Male aunts, as somebody calls them, I had none - to remember.

He speaks of himself, and Bridget living in double singleness.

We house together, old bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness; with such tolerable comfort, upon the whole, that I, for one, find in myself no sort of disposition to go out upon the mountains, with the rash king's offspring, to bewail my celibacy. We agree pretty well in our tastes and habits - yet so, as "with a difference." We are generally in harmony, with occasional bickerings - as it should be among near relations. Our sympathies are rather understood, than expressed; and once, upon my dissembling a tone in my voice more kind than ordinary, my cousin burst into tears, and complained that I was altered.

The warm sociability of celibate affection finds expression too in 'Old China', which opens with the affirmation 'I have an almost feminine partiality for old china', and ranges into the voice of Bridget reminding her of the 'good old times' when we were not quite so rich.

You used to say, that the Gallery was the best place of all for enjoying a play socially - that the relish of such exhibitions must be in proportion to the infrequency of going - that the company we met there, not being in general readers of plays, were obliged to attend the more, and did attend, to what was going on, on the stage - because a word lost would have been a chasm, which it was impossible for them to fill up. With such reflections we consoled our pride then - and I appeal to you, whether, as a woman, I met generally with less attention and accommodation, than I have done since in more expensive situations in the house?

In 'Modern Gallantry' he took a less complaisant view of the gallery, saying that he would not believe in gallantry until:

I shall no longer see a woman standing up in the pit of a London theatre, till she is sick and faint with the exertion, with men about her, seated at their ease, and jeering at her distress; till one, that seems to have more manners or conscience than the rest, significantly declares "she should be welcome to his seat, if she were a little younger and handsomer".

These full flowing memories in 'Old China' are retrieved and augmented by Lamb's voice remembering alongside Bridget, tempering her affection for the past, and at last deflecting her nostalgia, in a Keatsian turn, by bringing her back to the quaint, painted figures of Old China: like the figures on the urn the essay ends with a return to a further description of 'these little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques, that under the notion of men and women, float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspective - a china tea-cup'.

I love the men with women's faces, and the women, if possible, with still more womanish expressions.

Here is a young and courtly Mandarin, handing tea to a lady from a salver - two miles off. See how distance seems to set off respect! and here the same lady, or another - for likeness is identity on tea-cups - is stepping into a little fairy boat, moored on the hither side of this calm garden river, with a dainty mincing foot, which in a right angle of incidence (as angles go in our world) must infallibly land her in the midst of a flowery mead - a furlong off on the other side of the same strange stream!

Farther on - if far or near can be predicated of their world - see horses, trees, pagodas, dancing the hays.

Here - a cow and rabbit couchant, and co-extensive - so objects show, seen through the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay.

This is Lamb's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', with the same sense of the timelessness, the lawlessness, of represented people in the plastic arts - apparently so free, but so excluded from change. Set against them are the conditions of human life (in particular the inevitability of ageing 'we were happier when we were poorer, but we were also younger, my cousin'.) The richness of the dialogue (here between man and woman, kin, not between human and urn) tips the balance differently from that of Keats's great poem. We are left with a sense of the warm sedimentation of human experience, against the delicate insipidity of the figures on the cup.

- could I once more hear those anxious shrieks of yours - and the delicious *Thank God, we are safe*, which always followed when the topmost stair, conquered, let in the first light of the whole cheerful theatre down beneath us - I know not the fathom line that ever touched a descent so deep as I would be willing to bury more wealth in than Croesus had, or the great Jew R-- is supposed to have, to purchase it. And now do just look at that merry little Chinese waiter holding an umbrella, big enough for a bed-tester, over the head of that pretty insipid half-Madonna-ish chit of a lady in that very blue summer house.

For his plangent meditation on human life-cycle against permanent art-object Lamb chose the female domain of tea-cups, of domestic concerns, and companionable intimacy ('I am quick at detecting these summer clouds in Bridget').

Lamb's ability to enter and to identify himself with feminine concerns does not mean that he can't criticise women. He dislikes domineering women as much as domineering men, and he spots precisely how affectation can provide a veneer for the power-hungry:

Her lodgings are up two pairs of stairs in East Street. Tea and coffee, and macaroons - a kind of cake I much love. We sat down. Presently Miss Benje broke the silence, by declaring herself quite of a different opinion from D'Israeli, who supposes the differences of human intellect to be the mere effect of organisation. She begged to know my opinion. I attempted to carry it off with a pun upon organ; but that went off very flat. She immediately conceived a very low opinion of my metaphysics; and, turning round to Mary, put some question to her in French - possibly having heard that neither Mary nor I understood French.

We next discussed the question, whether Pope was a poet? I find Dr. Gregory is of opinion he was not, though Miss Seward does not at all concur with him in this. We then sat upon the comparative merits of the ten translations of 'Pizzaro', and Miss Benje or Benje advised Mary to take two of them home; she thought it might afford her some pleasure to compare them *verbatim*; which we declined.

His celibacy, and the exclusion of sexual passion from his writing, allows him a particular freedom (as he writes of the stars, 'I guess at Venus only by her brightness'). He can observe and touch the borders of institutions like marriage, as in the essay 'The Wedding', and his childlessness allows him an equable insight into the complexity of the

relationship between father and daughter:

The hardheartedness of fathers is a fine theme for romance writers, a sure and moving topic; but is there not something untender, to say no more of it, in the hurry which a beloved child is sometimes in to tear herself from the parental stock, and commit herself to strange graftings? The case is heightened where the lady, as in the present instance, happens to be an only child. I do not understand these matters experimentally, but I can make a shrewd guess at the wounded pride of a parent upon these occasions. It is no new observation, I believe, that a lover in most cases has no rival so much to be feared as the father. Certainly there is a jealousy in *unparallel subjects*, which is little less heart-rending than the passion which we more strictly christen by that name.

So he finds himself, improbably, giving away the bride:

I do not know what business I have to be present in solemn places. I cannot divest me of an unseasonable disposition to levity upon the most awful occasions. I was never cut out for a public functionary. Ceremony and I have long shaken hands; but I could not resist the importunities of the young lady's father, whose gout unhappily confined him at home, to act as parent on this occasion, and *give away the bride*. Something ludicrous occurred to me at this most serious of all moments - a sense of my unfitness to have the disposal, even in imagination, of the sweet young creature beside me. I fear I was betrayed to some lightness, for the awful eye of the parson - and the rector's eye of Saint Mildred's in the Poultry is no trifle of a rebuke - was upon me in an instant, souring my incipient jest to the tristful severities of a funeral.

(Saint Mildred's in the Poultry - a marvellous pastiche of city church names.)

Recollected emotion in Lamb rediscovers intensity not as pain but as freedom, as play in its profoundest sense. His childlessness is felt - he makes himself his own child - disturbance manifests as levity. As he puts it, in a style which looks forward to Winnicott's work on play, in 'New Year's Eve':

I encounter pell-mell with past disappointments. I am armour-proof against old discouragements. I forgive, or overcome in fancy, old adversaries. I play over again *for love*, as the gamesters phrase it, games, for which I once paid so dear.

He goes on, in a revealing phrase: 'In a degree beneath manhood, it is my infirmity to look back upon those early days' and feel 'love' for 'the child Elia - that "other me", there, in the background.'

He has access to the range of self which runs *beneath* the social 'man' or 'woman' and their expected attitudes. But he did not only 'turn back upon memory'. In their later years, he and Mary adopted Emma Isola (I-sola, the solitary orphan) whom Lamb called 'a girl of gold' and for whom he persuaded his friends to compose an album or extract book. He himself wrote in for her verses ranging from Wilbye's madrigal 'Love me not for comely grace', several Marvell poems, ballads such as 'Fair Helen of Kirkconnel' to Coleridge's poem, 'Love'. The collection included Elizabethan love-poems, and Waller's gentle, erotic verse too. To him, ease and freedom between men and women, warm companionship and empathy - kinship

- came naturally, and it is for that reason that his writing still has direct access to men and women now. In 1829, indeed, he was infuriated when his sonnet written in the person of a gypsy woman was turned down 'on the plea that it would *shock all mothers*'. The poem opens:

Suck, baby, suck, Mother's love grows by giving,
Drain the sweet founts that only thrive by wasting;
Black Manhood comes, when riotous guilty living
Hands thee the cup that shall be death in tasting.

'I am born out of time', he writes plaintively to Barry Cornwall, 'I have lived to grow into an indecent character'.

Was this a fourteener to be rejected by a trumpery annual? forsooth, 'twould shock all mothers; and may all mothers, who would so be shocked, be damned! as if mothers were such sort of logicians as to infer the future hanging of *their* child from the theoretical hangibility (or capacity of being hanged, if the judge please) of every infant born with a neck on. Oh B.C., my whole heart is faint, and my whole head is sick (how is it?) at this damned, canting, *unmasculine* age!

I give you the immortal memory, the 'double singleness' - Charles, and Mary, Lamb.

Gillian Beer as Guest-of-Honour proposed this toast at the Birthday Luncheon on 12 February 1983

CHARLES LAMB'S MODEST PROPOSAL

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If one were in an aphoristic frame of mind, he might argue that no situation shows a man's character more clearly than the way he handles a refusal to his proposal of marriage. After all, what more can a man offer than himself?

Such a thought is stimulated by a series of letters of July 1819, in which Lamb made such a proposal to the well-known actress, Fanny Kelly, and received the politest of refusals. At the time, Lamb was 44, Miss Kelly, almost 29. The deft, ironical humour with which Lamb accepted Miss Kelly's rejection is a masterpiece in illustration of Nietzsche's dictum that 'we have Art in order not to perish of Truth'.

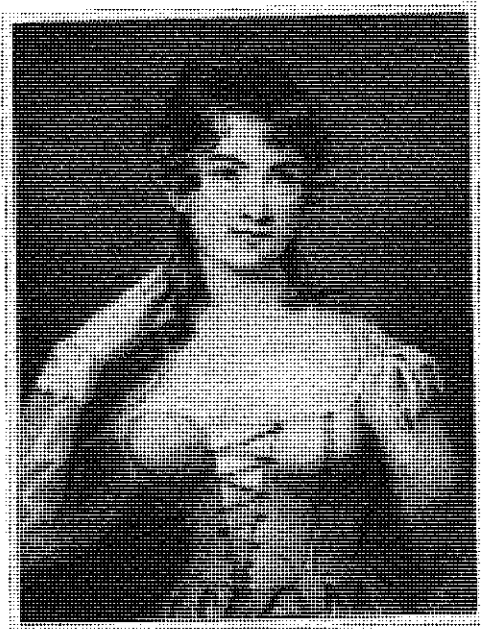
Fanny Kelly was one of the finest actresses of the early 19th century London stage, and Lamb, devoted to the theatre, had long admired her professionally. His earliest reference to Miss Kelly (so far as I have been able to determine) appeared in *The Examiner* of 18 July 1813, in a piece on 'The New Acting' [Lucas's title, not Lamb's]. There Lamb objected strenuously to what he called 'this coquetting between the performer and the public', and then went on to give Fanny Kelly a clean bill on this charge:

I am sure that the very absence of this fault in Miss Kelly, and her judicious attention to her part, with little or no reference to the spectators, is one cause why her varied excellencies, though they are beginning to be perceived, have yet found their way more slowly to the approbation of the public, than they have deserved. Two or three more

such instances would reform the stage. (Lucas, *Works*, I, 152)

Then in 1818, a year before the July letters presently to be examined, Lamb published a sonnet to Miss Kelly's acting skill, and yet another, some four months after the July letters - proving that his esteem for her was not clouded by her refusal of his marriage proposal. And then the Elia piece, 'Barbara S----', owes much to Fanny Kelly ('a story gleaned from Miss Kelly', as he told Wordsworth: there may be much in this word, 'gleaned', as Lamb himself might have put it). In a letter of Fanny Kelly's of 1875 (conveniently printed by Lucas, *Works*, II, 430), she remarks:

I perfectly remember relating an incident of my childhood to Charles Lamb and his dear sister, and I have not the least doubt that the intense interest he seemed to take in the recital, induced him to adopt it as the principal feature in his beautiful story of 'Barbara S----'. Much, however, as I venerate the wonderful powers of Charles Lamb as a writer - grateful as I ever must feel to have enjoyed for so many years the friendship of himself and his dear sister, and proudly honoured as I am by the two exquisite sonnets he has given to the world as tributary to my humble talent, I have never been able thoroughly to appreciate the extraordinary skill with which he has, in the construction of his story, desired and contrived so to mystify and characterize the events, as to keep me out of sight, and render it utterly impossible for any one to guess at me as the original heroine. (Lucas, *Works*, II, 430)



There can be no question, then, that Lamb knew Fanny Kelly very well. But the adroit blending of fact and fancy in 'Barbara S----' (as many have noted) should alert the investigator to be on guard for such strategy in reading all documents touching the relationship between the two.

By early July 1819, Lamb's attachment to Fanny Kelly had become quite personal, even though it might still be expressed in a published piece by Lamb's hovering playfulness. Reviewing Fanny Kelly's starring performance as a beggar in 'The Jovial Crew' for *The Examiner*, Lamb slyly digressed long enough to exclaim: 'What a lass that were to go a gypseying through the world with!' (Lucas, *Works*, I, 187). He passed the remark off as something he had heard 'from a stranger who sate beside us', but this is a dodge not uncommon even in 20th century reviewing. And to Wordsworth, Lamb spoke of Fanny Kelly's 'divine plain face'.

And now the proposal of marriage series of letters. The first one, written on 9 July 1819, fairly staggers under Lamb's ingenious punning. It looks innocent enough, merely asking for theatre passes (in those days they were small ivory or bone discs) which she, as performer, was at liberty to bestow. But when it is considered in the light of his next two letters to Miss Kelly, I cannot help feeling that in it Lamb wrote with a *double entendre* he knew the recipient would understand. Or, to put it another way, it was an amusing sally a little short of the real target.

Dear Miss Kelly,

If your bones are not engaged on Monday night, will you favor us with the use of them? I know, if you can oblige us, you will make no bones on it; if you cannot, it shall break none betwixt us. We might ask somebody else, but we do not like the bones of any strange animal. We should be welcome to dear Mrs. Liston's, but then she is so plump, there is no getting at them. I should prefer Miss Iver's - they must be ivory I take it for granted - but she is married to Mr. xxx, and become bone of his bone, consequently can have none of her own to dispose. Well, it comes to this, - if you can let us have them, you will, I dare say; if you cannot, God rest your bones. I am almost at the end of my bon-mots.

C. Lamb

(Lucas, *Letters*, II, 253)

The sophisticated affection of this request took a more serious turn in a letter eleven days later, on 20 July 1819. Here is Lamb's formal proposal - which I feel sure he knew would be turned down:

Dear Miss Kelly,

We had the pleasure, *pain* I might better call it, of seeing you last night in the new Play. It was a most consummate piece of Acting, but what a task for you to undergo... It has given rise to a train of thinking, which I cannot suppress.

Would to God you were released from this way of life; that you could bring your mind to consent to take your lot with us, and throw off forever the whole burden of your Profession. I neither expect or wish you to take notice of this which I am writing, in your present over occupied & hurried state. - But to think of it at your leisure. I have quite income enough, if that were all, to justify for me making such a proposal, with what I may even call a handsome provision for my survivor

... I am not so foolish as not to know that I am a most unworthy match for such a one as you, but you have for years been a principal object in my mind. In many a sweet assumed character I have learned to love you, but simply as F.M. Kelly I love you better than them all. Can you quit these shadows of existence, & come & be a reality to us? Can you leave off harassing yourself to please a thankless multitude, who know nothing of you, & begin at last to live to yourself & your friends?

As plainly & frankly as I have seen you give or refuse assent in some feigned scene, so frankly do me the justice to answer me. It is impossible that I should feel injured or aggrieved by your telling me at once, that the proposal does not suit you. It is impossible that I should ever think of molesting you with idle importunity and persecution after your mind was once firmly spoken - but happier, far happier, could I have leave to hope a time might come, when our friends might be your friends; our interests yours; our book-knowledge, if in that inconsiderable particular we have any little advantage, might impart something to you, which you would every day have it in your power ten thousand fold to repay by the added cheerfulness and joy which you could not fail to bring as a dowry into whatever family should have the honor and happiness of receiving you, the most welcome accession that could be made to it.

In haste, but with entire respect & deep affection, I subscribe myself,

C. Lamb

(Lucas, *Letters*, II, 254-5)

Miss Kelly's reply - written, posted, and received the same day - was kind, direct, and firm. Whatever affection she may have had for Lamb - and her correspondence suggests it may have been more than casual - could not overcome her awareness that Mary Lamb, with her recurrent insanity, was a permanent part of Lamb's household. From her reply one also sees that she believed Lamb's mental state was also uncertain. Her actual reply to Lamb does not, of course, touch on such matters; but writing to her sister, Lydia, some ten days later, Miss Kelly explained:

Yesterday I saw the Lambs for the first time, except for the stage, since his recent offer of marriage. I was indeed sorry to refuse him, for he shows the most tender and loyal affections. But even at the peril of my decision causing him great despondency, which I rather feared, I could have no other course than to say the truth that I could not accept his offer. I could not give my assent to a proposal which would bring me into that atmosphere of sad mental uncertainty which surrounds his domestic life. Marriage might well bring us both added causes for misery and regrets in later years. (Lucas, *Letters*, II, 256)

To Lamb himself, on the other hand, she composed a masterpiece of tact:

An early & deeply rooted attachment has fixed my heart on one from whom no worldly prospect can well induce me to withdraw it, but while I thus *frankly* & decidedly decline your proposal, believe me, I am not insensible to the high honour which the preference of such a mind as yours confers upon me - let me, however, hope that all thought upon this subject will end with this letter, & that you will henceforth encourage no other sentiment toward me than esteem in my private character and a continuance of that approbation of my humble talents which you have already expressed so much & so often to my advantage and

gratification.

Believe me I feel proud to acknowledge myself

Your obliged friend

F.M. Kelly

(Lucas, *Letters*, II, 255)

Lamb's reply to this - written, posted, and received the same day - was a direct and gracious acceptance of the inevitable as well as a gem of humorous obliquity, alluding, as it does, to the earlier letter asking for the theatre passes. The regret, scarcely concealed, lingers, but is held in check by Lamb's remarkable humour - even though the very jests do scald. The handwriting, Lucas tells us, is far shakier than that of the proposal letter. But this letter apparently restored the relationship of Lamb and Fanny Kelly to that of critic and performer, as she requested, without estrangement or bitterness.

Dear Miss Kelly,

Your injunctions shall be obeyed to a tittle. I feel myself in a lackadaisical no-how-ish kind of humour. I believe it is the rain, or something. I had thought to have written seriously, but I fancy I succeed best in epistles of mere fun; puns & *that* nonsense. You will be good friends with us, will you not? let what has past 'break no bones' between us. You will not refuse us them next time we send for them?

Yours very truly, C.L.

Do you observe the delicacy of not signing my full name?

N.B. Do not paste that last letter of mine in your book.

(Lucas, *Letters*, II, 255)

There is courage as well as character and charm in that reply.

A final note on this relationship is found in a remark Lamb slyly inserted in a review of a subsequent performance of Fanny Kelly's some two weeks later:

She is in truth not framed to tease or torment even in jest, but to utter a hearty *Yes* or *No*; to yield or refuse assent with a noble sincerity. We have not the pleasure of being acquainted with her, but we have been told that she carries the same cordial manners into private life.

(Lucas, *Letters*, II, 255)

And there, as far as Lamb was concerned, the matter rested. One wonders what Fanny Kelly might have thought as she read that review - as surely she must have. Such a deliberately ironical statement would have assured her that her injunctions had been 'obeyed to a tittle' - and then some. As Yeats was to say a century later, 'Never give all the heart'.

'DAMN THE AGE! I WILL WRITE FOR ANTIQUITY!': LAMB'S STYLE AS IMPLIED MORAL COMMENT

John Coates

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A writer may challenge his time by clearly set-out arguments like Mill or

by overt polemics, prophecy or invective like Carlyle but the texture of prose may, in itself, be a criticism of the culture or the atmosphere in which it is written. To write in, say, the style of Walter Pater when most quality journalists were, to a greater or lesser extent, imitating Macaulay, is to distance oneself, to define a different set of intentions, priorities or responses. If an author like Lamb speaks softly when everyone else is loud, tentatively when his contemporaries are almost uniformly assertive, whimsically, ironically, or 'quaintly' when the expected stance is one of declamatory moralistic antithesis, then, whether or not this is his chief or only purpose, such an author is making a statement about some feature of his age. With Lamb such an intention is uppermost in his deliberate evolution for himself of a rich and strange prose, drawn from the then almost forgotten writers of the seventeenth century. The enormous success of his style and the way in which it and 'Elia' caught the contemporary imagination were owing to much more than the pleasure given by amusing archaizing or the scholars' satisfaction in spotting the half-submerged allusions. It was due, rather, to the altogether more fundamental recognition among Lamb's first readers and later, that a need had been filled, that neglected emotional needs or ways of feeling were being satisfied by a style which placed itself deliberately at an odd angle to the conventional writing of its period. The clue lies in the reasons for Lamb's cultivation of the early seventeenth century writers.

Lamb's emotional claim upon the writers of the early seventeenth century has never been a secret. What has varied is the interpretation put upon the kinship of spirit and attitude of personal proprietorship which he adopted towards 'odd, out of the way, old English plays and treatises'.¹ One tradition, running from some of the earliest commentators,² has seen Lamb's attitude as one of genuine and uncomplicated affinity with what is called the 'Jacobean spirit'. This interpretation, paramount in the nineteenth century, emphasised Lamb's originality in his choice of field and the suggestiveness and scholarship he brought to it. Israel Gollancz, in his Preface to the 1893 edition of *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets* speaks of 'the sacred texts of Lamb's most precious comments',³ and J Lewis May, a late example of the school, declares of one of Lamb's notes, 'This was interpretive criticism of a strength and delicacy and insight unknown to Lamb's contemporaries'.⁴

According to this version, the Old Dramatists were virtually unknown before Lamb rediscovered them in 1808, and what he presented was an objective display of their strengths and weaknesses in the form of discriminating extracts and commentary. The title of one account of the verbal parallels between Lamb and Browne sums up this attitude: 'A Perfect Sympathy'.⁵ The author contends that Lamb entered whole-heartedly into the spirit of Browne and proceeded to recreate it in his own writings.

The opposing interpretation, represented by Wasserman's book *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*⁶ and by R D Williams' *Antiquarian Interest in Elizabethan Drama before Lamb*⁷ among several others, tends to minimise the supposed originality by indicating the extracts and imitations current before Lamb. However, both authors concede that though he may not have rediscovered Elizabethan literature in the technical sense, Lamb certainly gave it currency in a way which it did not have before. Wasserman points out that the eighteenth century knew the earlier literature through the medium of its own literary sensibility and did not hesitate to 'amend' the material to suit its own presumptively polite standard. Lamb broke the

mould of this tradition but what he substituted for it was acutely personal.

His earliest critics⁸ complained of the odd allusive style of the notes and the hyperbolic praise showered on certain extracts in the *Specimens*. Several modern discussions of Lamb have sensed the extent to which so many of his critical positions have to do with the evolution of his own personality.⁹ One writer lays his finger on an important fact:

The attitude which most adequately satisfied Lamb was a sophisticated stoicism wherein posture, artifice, solemnity and rhetoric had value, as they had with the Elizabethans.¹⁰

Lamb's criticism, though interested in the quaint, is not, like that of his contemporaries, J.P. Collier and Isaac D'Israeli, the collection of quaintness for its own sake. It resembles that of Edgerton Brydges in that both critics are myth-making, though Lamb is concerned to create something more positive than a romantic reactionary view.

The *Letter of Elia to Robert Southey Esq.*, is possibly the best introductory guide to the world Lamb had created. As Katherine Anthony puts it,

though the eminent Lamb critic E.V. Lucas remarks that it does not show Lamb at his best, it nevertheless shows him as he really was.¹¹

Miss Anthony errs, however, in seeing the letter as primarily a political document, a 'tirade against superstition and repression'. Hints of Lamb's political beliefs may be found in the verses on the Prince of Wales or in the essay on Guy Faulkes, but these are extremely marginal to the mind of the man and to the moral values and sympathies he evolved. Lamb's manner in the *Essays of Elia* is sometimes fey and always oblique, though it is likely that his display of tentativeness is a part of the very value system itself. When he comes out into the open in *The Letter to Southey* this impression is confirmed.

As a polemic the letter does not appeal to the eighteenth-century abstractions, freedom of conscience and liberty. Rather it takes the form of a personal attack on spiritual pride and moral bullying, relying on a style reminiscent of Browne and sometimes of Burton. Lamb suggests an alternative subtlety, caution and humility.

Some (and such have been accounted the safest divines) have shrunk from pronouncing upon the final state of any man; nor do they pronounce the final case of Judas to be desperate.¹²

The very locutions and rhythms of Browne's prose are made in Lamb's *Letter* the vehicle of more humane attitudes,

the best people, herding together exclusively, are in danger of contracting a narrowness. Heat and cold, dryness and moisture in the natural world do not fly asunder to split the globe in sectarian parts and separations but mingling as best they may, correct the malignity of any single predominance.¹³

There are verbal parallels but also characteristically Brownean moods such as the sympathy with elaborate Catholic worship, as when Lamb talks of 'their crossings, their holy waters, their Virgin and their Saints'¹⁴ and the solemn naiveté which cannot understand, 'those conjunctions for which Nature has provided no excuse because no temptation',¹⁵ recalls Browne's

account of the man 'that carnalled with a statua' in *Religio Medici*.¹⁶ Neither the style nor the attitudes are pastiches since their quaintness is deliberately chosen as a medium as remote as possible from the downright certitudes and moral clumsiness they oppose. The style is one in which it is impossible to be brutal and it is therefore a reproach to brutality. The direct echoes of Browne's attitudes are substantial appeals to a civilized tradition, when Lamb says

I own I could never think so considerably of myself as to decline the society of an agreeable and worthy man upon the difference of opinion only.¹⁷

The portraits of various kinds of constitution in religious belief recall Burton's analyses in the third part of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, in the similarity of turns of expression, 'Some whose hope totters on crutches, others who stalk into futurity upon stilts',¹⁸ or

Another, embracing a more exalted vision, so that he might receive indefinite additaments of power, knowledge, beauty, glory, etc.¹⁹

and especially in those pithy reproaches to Southey for using in his verse the Roman Catholic manners and customs he attacks in his prose, 'You have drawn copious draughts upon Loretto. Their legend has been a golden one to you'.²⁰

More important than this, the style of the letter is meant to recall the humanity of Burton's work on Religious Melancholy, which was far more than a parade of esoteric learning for Lamb. Burton shows a reverence for religious principles combined with unshakeable common sense and humility in their application. Presumption of the kind which Southey falls into had been the subject of Burton's most salty rebukes,

A company of giddy heads will take upon them to tell how many shall be saved and who damned in a parish, where they shall sit in heaven, interpret apocalypses (headstrong and scatterbrain commentators one calls them, as well he might).²¹

Lamb's attack is identical in substance and similar in its tendency to quaint parenthesis,

Others (with stronger optics) as plainly as with the eye of the flesh shall behold a given king in bliss and a given chamberlain in torment even to the eternising of a cast of eye of the latter.²²

The importance of the *Letter to Southey* is that it shows Lamb at his most earnest, retaining the substance and manner and characteristic preoccupations of early seventeenth-century prose. He sees himself calling in the past to redress the balance of the present. The manner and its implications have become essential to the way in which Lamb saw the world.

It is probable that Lamb's myth of the seventeenth century had formed in his mind by 1802, when he included *Curious Fragments*, imitations of Burton, in the same volume with his play *John Woodvil*. The placing of the two together is in itself suggestive since Lamb valued *John Woodvil* as his chief work at that time, sought the advice of Coleridge and Southey upon it, defended it to Manning and finally published it under severe criticism.²³ Many years later in the slight sketch of his life, written for Upcott,²⁴ he emphasized *John Woodvil* as one of his most important works, along with the *Elia* essays and the *Specimens from the Dramatists*.

He had already gone out of his way to vindicate its style particularly, in the last paragraph of the dedicatory letter to Coleridge prefixed to the 1818 edition of his works.²⁵ At the end of his life he still gave away this particular book to favoured visitors.

The Burton parodies show an importance which is not surprising when their personal origins and overtones are remembered. As Lamb explained in a letter to Manning of March 1800, they were the fruit of Lamb's reconciliation with Coleridge after their quarrel of two years before. As Lamb wrote,

He is uncommonly kind and friendly to me.
He ferrets me night and day to do something.²⁶

Coleridge's suggestion of a parody of Burton was not merely kind but shrewd. It would offer Lamb the opportunity to express his unhappiness, but in a guise which would turn it towards quaintness and self-parody. The convolutions of Burton's style would set Lamb laughing at his own melancholy and help him to acquire a manner which would disguise the morbidity present in such explicit declarations of feeling as those in his tale *Rosamund Gray*. If this was Coleridge's intention, then Lamb took it up.

The parody of Burton's *Democritus Junior* verses which Lamb had at first entitled *Conceit of Diabolic Possession*, was then altered to *Hypochondriacus*,²⁷ implying a closer personal relation to his own state. Comparison of *Hypochondriacus* with its original, the *Abstract of Melancholy* reveals more clearly Lamb's intention. Burton's verses are a compendium of the pleasures and pains of melancholy, the alternating of moods of elation and depression. Both of these states are described in terms which make them comprehensible as common experience,

While I lie waking all alone,
Recounting what I have ill-done,
My thought then on me tyrannize
Fear and sorrow me surprize.²⁸

Lamb's version is more personal,

By myself walking
To myself talking
When as I ruminate
On my untoward fate.²⁹

His reference to the burden of his sister's madness is followed by another personal allusion without a parallel in the Burton original - voices,

In my ears whispering
'Thy friends are treacherous'.³⁰

Coleridge's assiduous kindness at this time had the effect of winning Lamb's over to him once more,

the more I see of him in the quotidian undress of his mind, the more cause I see to love him and believe him a *very good man* and all those foolish impressions to the contrary fly off like morning slumbers,³¹

was Lamb's verdict on 17 March 1800. Yet on 5 April, there was still a flicker of the old resentment, 'Coleridge has left us to go to the north, on a visit to his god Wordsworth'.³²

A third support for the personal interpretation of these Burton imitations

lies in Lamb's alteration of title. The original one would have had no relation to himself. 'Hypochondriacus', the name which Burton gave to one branch of melancholy, 'windy melancholy', might well be a covert reference to those physical discomforts caused by Lamb's excessive drinking and smoking, which five years later he was to denounce in the 'Farewell to Tobacco'.³³

The prose imitations of Burton which accompany 'Hypochondriacus' form in themselves Lamb's critique of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. They show what he believed its fundamental moral tone and pre-occupations to be. The most striking of these, from the point of view of Lamb's 'philosophy', is Extract 2, with its parallel with the argument of the *Letter to Southey*. Lamb evidently valued Burton for his modest common sense and avoidance of dogmatism. The philosophic core of the *Anatomy*, as he saw it in 1800, was the same morally as the spirit he attempted to conjure up twenty-three years later. Lamb's version of Burton has obvious affinities with the 'sensibility' of the late eighteenth century,

Truth is no Doctoresse, she taketh no degrees at Paris amongst great clerks, disputants, subtle Aristotles, men nodosi ingenii, able to take Lully by the chin, but often-times to such a one as myself, an idiotic or common person, melancholising in woods where waters are.³⁴

The modesty is certainly characteristic of Burton. The underlying sentimentality is closer in spirit to *Rosamund Gray*. What Lamb is doing is reflecting Burton through the medium of his own temperament. Taking from him earthiness and philosophic doubt, Lamb uses Burton's style to conceal his own temperamental bias. This evolution of a personality for himself has been a truism of Lamb criticism at least since E V Morley's sketch of it in *Lamb before Elia*. Another critic has shown the extent to which *Elia* himself is a development from Sterne's Yorick.³⁵ *Curious Fragments* is an important stage in this evolution. Sterne had shown the way, through his borrowings from the *Anatomy*, in which a literary identity might be created.

Lamb's purpose was more complicated. He genuinely wished to resurrect the author, 'a scarce gentleman, not much known',³⁶ as well as defining Burton's relation to himself. Commenting on his imitations in a letter to Manning, he hints at an autobiographical significance,

Burton was a man often assailed by the deepest melancholy and at other times given to laughing and jesting as is the way with melancholy men,³⁷

the similarity to Lamb's own manner being obvious. In another letter to Manning shortly afterwards, Lamb lays his finger on the stylistic quality which proved most useful to him, when he remarks of Burton that, 'His manner is to shroud and carry off his feeling in a cloud of learned words'.³⁸ 'Shrouding and carrying off' personal feeling represented a new departure for Lamb's literary style which in *Rosamund Gray* had sought an artless simplicity.

One of his first loves in the literature of the early seventeenth century had been Walton's *Compleat Angler*, which together with Wither's *Emblems* was one of old Margaret's few books, and which, in the novel, had been used to suggest the apostolic meekness of her and Rosamund's life.

I know not whether the particular cast of her mind might not be traced, in part, to a tincture she had received from Walton and Wither

and Bunyan and her Bible.³⁹

Though this was written in the burst of Evangelical feeling which Lamb had experienced immediately after the tragedy of his mother's death, he had tended to seek for models on which to base an atmosphere which even in *Rosamund Gray* is not altogether that of a conventional sentimental novel of the period. Lamb valued Walton's book as a creator of the legend of England before the Civil War. In one of his earliest letters to Coleridge the nature of its appeal is made clear,

It breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity and simplicity of heart; there are many choice old verses interspersed with it... it would Christianise every discordant angry passion.⁴⁰

The spirit of *Rosamund Gray*, with the two women in their cottage reading their Bible, annotated significantly by Bishop Jewel, and their book of Common Prayer,⁴¹ is closer to that of Isaac Walton's Bemerton than to *Clarissa* or the *Nouvelle Heloise*. Though *Rosamund Gray* shares the devotion to simplicity and nature one would expect to find in a 'Sentimental Novel', it is somewhat unlike even such explicitly Evangelical Christian ones as Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* in its deliberate muted effects and its emotional self-discipline. The relationship of old Margaret and Rosamund has none of the hot-house quality of that between the child and the guardian in Brooke's novel. The accent is on the purity and essential decency of Alan Clare and Rosamund rather than on their sensitivity. In the latter case, these qualities are related to the acceptance of an earlier historical standard,

There was Wither's *Emblems*, an old book, and quaint. The old-fashioned pictures in this book were among the first excitors of Rosamund's curiosity.⁴²

In his essay *On the Poetical Works of George Wither*, the qualities Lamb singles out for particular praise are 'a hearty homeliness of manner and plain moral speaking',⁴³ rather than the capacity to feel and suffer. He compares Wither favourably with Burns, as being more serene, without the 'alloy of soreness and sense of injustice'.⁴⁴

The note of dignity and restraint which Lamb detected at the time of his earliest enthusiasm for the early seventeenth century remained an important element in the version of the age which he proceeded to elaborate. The simplicity of Walton is the first stratum over which subsequent layers were added.

Lamb's interest in a myth of the old writers and their world does, in fact, considerably antedate his personal tragedy. It is found in the *Falstaff Letters* in which he collaborated with James White. In the Preface, where the editor of the 1907 edition thinks that the hand of Lamb can be most readily detected,⁴⁵ there is a nostalgia for past times and places which partly looks back to Sterne, as in the address to the reader to 'Shut the door', and partly looks forward to the Elia of the East India House or the Inner Temple.

A sage writer remarks, though time obliterate, yet not relentless in his ravages he leaveth some traditionary relics to soothe the memory of past times. Shut the door - thou art now where Sir John was wont to solace himself, in the identical pomegranate. The Pomegranate, ancient receptacle of illustrious wits, bloods who daff'd the world aside and bid it pass, to be cheaked with the seeds of every baser plant.⁴⁶

Lamb's persisting devotion to the work, even to the extent of giving away copies of it years later is recorded by E V Lucas.⁴⁷ In this early work, the currents of nostalgia and simplicity found in *Rosamund Gray* and the stoical elaboration and whimsicality of the *Curious Fragments* merge. Perhaps this 'remarkably open-hearted-joyous companion'⁴⁸ James White, helped Lamb to link the two sides of his nature. At any rate, in an *Examiner* article of 1819,⁴⁹ Lamb touches on the death of Abraham Slender, who is made to pine away for love in the *Falstaff Letters*, and on the humour of the letters themselves, as both essential characteristics. His praise of the letters as 'nimble, forgetive and evasive' is reminiscent of his remark on Burton's skill in 'shrouding and carrying off his feelings'.⁵⁰

Leaving aside the personal need to create the myth, the two main elements had become established by the time of the Burton parodies, and had in fact merged into each other. Modest earnestness and the avoidance of the strained and over-explicit,⁵¹ which one critic has seen as the lesson Lamb enforced on Coleridge in their poetic correspondence, was the first element in the seventeenth-century world Lamb created. (It is this which is at the core of his moral outrage in *The Letter to Southey*.) The second element is complementary to the first; concealment and defence through self-mocking elaboration. The antique becomes a way of defending humane values and eccentricity. (The influence of Overbury's and Hall's characters, which again Coleridge had urged on Lamb for imitation, has been detected in the very many character sketches of 'odd fish' in the *Essays of Elia*.)⁵²

The enemy which Lamb faced is clear enough from *The Letter to Southey* and from many notes in *Selections from Old Dramatists*. This enemy is heavy-handed moralism, emotional bullying, and lack of respect for privacy. Lamb's reaction was the same when Coleridge referred to him in print as 'my gentle-hearted Charles',⁵³ and when Southey declared that *Elia* was deficient in religious feeling.⁵⁴ Perhaps the recondite reasons sought by critics like E V Morley for Lamb's evolution of his historical myth and of the character of *Elia*, are less to the point than the fact of Lamb's sense of good taste and its opposition to his time.⁵⁵

A historical myth is, in effect, a method of social criticism. In Coleridge, the myth is explicitly that of a Platonic tradition, of a great age brought to an end by the arrival of mechanistic materialism after 1688. With Lamb, it is a moral atmosphere rather than an intellectual model that he tries to convey. But he never ceases to contrast it with his own time. A typical example is a footnote to his *Specimens from Fuller's Writings*. Quoting a passage from Fuller which describes how the cowardly Henry de Essex was forced to retire to a monastery, Lamb praises Fuller's use of antithesis to avoid explicit moral judgement,

The reader, by this device, is taken into a kind of partnership with the writer; he feels as if he were consulted in the issue. But the modern historian flings at once the dead weight of his own judgement into the scale and settles the matter.⁵⁶

Lamb is clearly attracted to these traits of style, seeing them as typical of the evasiveness he hoped to cultivate. What he thought he saw in the early seventeenth-century writers was a superior tact and humanity. Lamb remarks of Fuller's conceits that 'They are oftentimes deeply steeped in human feelings and passion'.⁵⁷ He also praises the old author's critical

poise. The feelings, deepened by concealment and conceits have in themselves the tension implied in these lines Lamb singled out for praise in Wither's *Philarete*,

Her true beauty leaves behind
Apprehensions in my mind
Of more sweetness than all art
Or inventions can impart,
Thoughts too deep to be expressed
And too strong to be suppressed.⁵⁸

The frequently hyperbolic tone adopted in Lamb's footnotes, (a notorious example being his comparison of Calantha's dance in *The Broken Heart* to the Crucifixion),⁵⁹ is explained by his urgent wish to show that real feeling existed under the veil of quaintness. It was essential to his campaign for humane values and good taste to prove that the moralistic had no monopoly of morals, and that the explicit were not the only people who loved truth.

In another comment on Fuller's story of the bird 'which hath a face like, and yet would prey upon, a man'⁶⁰ and which pined away when it saw by its own reflection that 'it had killed one like itself', Lamb praises the approach of the old authors towards such fables. Sir Thomas Browne would have detected the 'Hidden affinities and poetical analogies in the application of strange fable.'⁶¹ The implication is that this spirit is opposed to the literal-mindedness of Lamb's own time and is the example of a superior civilisation. Lamb appears to have seen himself as educating contemporary taste.⁶² It is possible, indeed, to see the sort of minds he felt he had to educate, from his comment on Fuller's famous image comparing the bones of Wycliff dispersed down the river into the sea with the growth of Protestantism,

I have seen this passage smiled at and set down as a quaint conceit of old Fuller... The most pathological parts of poetry to cold tempers seem and are nonsense, as divinity was to the Greeks foolishness.⁶³

As an event in the history of taste, Lamb's importance was to encourage the divorce between private and public life. 'The design of Elia is not so much "to give you yourself" as to control divert and appease the self that was ambitious and tormented'.⁶⁴ Although this is true, it would be a gross oversimplification to see Lamb merely as the originator of whimsy as a method of dealing with impossible conditions, an attitude which, when combined with a 'stiff upper lip', may be seen in a number of nineteenth-century figures, such as Kipling or Edward Lear, but which like Lamb's writings, has passed out of fashion in our own day.

That Lamb was a serious social critic is proved by the energy and persistence he employed in creating his version of the seventeenth century, and by the vigour with which he defended its value in many of the footnotes to the *Specimens* and in the *Letter to Southey*. Comparison of *Curious Fragments* with Lamb's poetry in the period immediately after the death of his mother reveals that the Burton-Browne, rather than the Walton strand, was the most important in weaving the fabric of both Lamb's later manner and of his historical construct. The verses of which 'Old Familiar Faces' are the most famous, are characterized by a simplicity of the kind which Lamb had recommended to Coleridge. In the *Letter to Southey*, the feeling for family and friends is central to Lamb's attitude. His use of the title of his own most famous poem is a hint of the persistence of

feeling. He reproaches Southey for being so confidently ready to 'forego the recognition of humbler individualities of earth and the old familiar faces.'⁶⁵

In its earliest form, the basic emotion is stated straightforwardly,

Thou shouldst have longer lived and to the grave
Have peacefully gone down in full old age.
Thy children would have tended thy gray hairs.⁶⁶

When this is compared to 'Extract 4' of the Burton parodies, the way in which the same emotion is 'shrouded and carried off' may be observed,

An old man, a poore man, deceased, is borne upon men's shoulders to a
poore burialle, without solemnities, mourners, plumes, mutae personae,
those personate actors that will weep if ye show them a piece of
silver.⁶⁷

The ambushes of this style hide the sting of the spectacle that Lamb is contemplating.

Richard Haven has drawn an interesting analogy between some Romantic poetry, such as Coleridge's Conversation poems, and the technique that Lamb employs in the *Essays of Elia*. The technique of 'Old China' for example, resembles that of Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight', where the poet

neither defines his private, unique experience in terms of the general, the abstract, nor does he use experience simply as a point of departure for a public discourse... We are presented (rather) with a psychologically-ordered movement of consciousness.⁶⁸

Haven shows how Lamb's Old China, like Keats' Urn, though cold, 'contains passion'. The 'very blue'⁶⁹ china limits the crescendo of the essay describing Elia and Bridget reaching the back of the gallery after struggling through a crowd as poor as themselves, with a 'Thank God we are safe'.⁷⁰

It would be possible to extend this analogy to explain the whole of Lamb's manipulation of myth. Just as in 'Old China' the myth of 'fair Cathay' is used as the ideal in contrast against the reality of growing old and losing all zest; so the ideal seventeenth century is used to display all that Lamb values, set against the present. But, just as in 'Old China', the ideal avoids sentimentality by a touch of absurdity, the 'cow and rabbit couchant and coextensive',⁷¹ the umbrella 'big enough for a bed-tester',⁷² so the seventeenth-century ideal defends itself, by quaintness, from direct attack. In both cases the slight absurdity is integral to the ideal: in the first, to show its freedom from common laws, and in the second to show its greater humanity.

The similarity in the use of myth, however, is not complete: since Elia remains whimsical throughout; while Lamb, as a historic myth-maker, is as earnest in his way as Coleridge. He will sometimes dart out from behind his disguise with some challenge to his time in the name of the past; 'Show the poor you sometimes think of them as other than mutineers and malcontents.'⁷³ or 'These follies are enough to give crying Heraclitus a fit of the spleen'.⁷⁴

NOTES

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- 3 *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets*, London 1893, p.VIII
- 4 J L May, *Charles Lamb, A Study*, London 1934, p.166
- 5 J S Iseman, *A Perfect Sympathy*, Cambridge USA, 1937
- 6 Wasserman, *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, 1947
- 7 R D Williams, *Antiquarian Interest in Elizabethan Drama before Lamb*, PMLA, LIII. 1938
- 8 Jeffrey's Review of Lamb's *Specimens*, *Annual Review*, 1808
- 9 E V Morley, *Lamb before Elia*, 1932, pp.263-5. Also J M Brown, *Elia Versus Charles*, SRL XXXI, pp.22-6
- 10 Morley, *Op.Cit.*, p.264
- 11 Katharine Anthony, *The Lambs*, 1948, p.119
- 12 Lamb, *Mrs Leicester's School and Other Writings*, ed.Ainger, 1908, p.335
- 13 *Op.Cit.*, p.338
- 14 *Op.Cit.*, p.336. Compare Browne's attitude towards Prayers for the Dead in *Religio Medici and Other Writings*, ed. L C Martin, Oxford, 1964, p.63
- 15 *Op.Cit.*, p.341
- 16 Browne, *Religio Medici and Other Writings*, ed. L C Martin, Oxford, 1964, p.64
- 17 Lamb, *Mrs Leicester's School and Other Writings*, p.341. Compare Browne's attitude to religious differences. *Religio Medici and Other Writings*, p.6
- 18 *Op.Cit.*, p.334
- 19 *Ibid.* Compare Burton's *Anatomy*, Vol.III. Everyman, p.340
- 20 *Op.Cit.*, p.335. Compare *Anatomy*, p.332. 'More regard for salmon than for Solomon'.
- 21 *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Everyman, Vol.III, p.37
- 22 Lamb, *Mrs Leicester's School*, etc., p.335
- 23 To Manning in a letter of December 1799. *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.122
- 24 Lamb, *Mrs Leicester's School*, etc., pp.331-2
- 25 Edited by Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, 1914, p.XV-XVII
- 26 *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.129
- 27 For the first version, *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, p.132. Vol.I, for the second Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.204
- 28 *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.11
- 29 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.204
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.129
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.130
- 33 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.70. In a letter to Barton of 1825, Everyman, Vol.II, p.141, Lamb remarks 'I am poor Hyponchondriacus'.
- 34 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.201
- 35 J V Logan, *Yorick and Elia*, *Lamb Society Bulletin*, LXXXV-LXXXVI
- 36 *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.131
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Ainger, *Lamb's poems, Plays and Essays*, p.159
- 40 *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.39
- 41 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.158, p.171
- 42 *Ibid.*, p.159
- 43 *Ibid.*, p.295

- 44 Ibid., p.297
 45 James White and others, *The Falstaff Letters*, London 1970, p.XII
 46 Ibid., p.XXXIII
 47 E V Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 1921, p.796
 48 Ibid. p.104. Quoted from Mathew Gutch
 49 *The Examiner*, 5 September 1819
 50 Letter to Manning, *Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed. E V Lucas, 1935, Vol.I, p.180
 51 His attack on the eighteenth century 'all so apposite and coming in so clever lest the reader should have the trouble of drawing an inference'. *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Lamb, Everyman, Vol.I, p.129
 52 V Lang, *The Character of the Elia Essays*, M L N May, 1941
 53 *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.I, p.141
 54 Southey, *The Progress of Infidelity*, Quarterly Review, January 1823
 55 Lamb remarks in a letter, *Letters of Charles Lamb*, Everyman, Vol.II, p.260, 'My whole heart is sick at this damned canting unmasculine unbawdy age'
 56 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.267
 57 Ibid.
 58 Ibid., p.300
 59 Lamb's *Specimens*, ed. I Gollancz, 1893, Vol.II, p.199
 60 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.268
 61 Ibid.
 62 His pride in the production of *Specimens* would imply this
 63 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.271
 64 E V Morley, *Lamb before Elia*, p.305
 65 Ainger, *Mrs Leicester's School*, etc., p.335
 66 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.19
 67 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.202
 68 R Haven, *The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb*, ELH, June 1963,XXX,pp.137-46
 69 'Old China', Everyman, *The Essays of Elia*, p.292
 70 Ibid.
 71 Ibid., 287
 72 Ibid.
 73 Ainger, *Mrs Leicester's School*, etc., p.346
 74 Ainger, *Lamb's Poems, Plays and Essays*, p.203

'BEAUTIFUL BARE NARRATIVES': CHARLES LAMB'S RESPONSE TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION

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Curious ideas still persist about Charles Lamb's reading of modern literature. The Victorian tendency to interpret his personality as if it was identical with that of his own creation Elia must surely lie behind Alfred Ainger's strange assertion, made in 1888, that 'it was literally true of him that "when a new book came out - he read an old one."' Canon Ainger was generally an acute and discriminating critic in the biographical-critical mode: only very powerful preconceptions concerning Lamb's character could have misled his judgement to such an extent.

But such misunderstandings do still linger on and this is nowhere more evident than where his attitude to the novel is concerned. On page 155 of *The Lambs: A Study of Pre-Victorian England*, first published in 1948 and

reissued some thirty years later, Katherine Anthony declares that 'Lamb himself is said never to have read a novel'. Her assertion seems all the more extraordinary when, on page 239, she proceeds to quote John Hollingshead's account of the books in Mary Lamb's library during her last years:

The old dramatists were, of course, well represented and the picaresque school of fiction, noticeably *The Rogue* and the *Adventures of Don Guzman*, etc...

We can scarcely assume that Mary Lamb read the early Spanish novelists while her brother was reading the early English dramatists. Clearly Katherine Anthony's original piece of hearsay was wrong.

In fact the evidence for Charles Lamb's having read a good deal of fiction and known it well is perfectly clear. He possessed a fine collection of works by the elder novelists, and he had been familiar with the work of the great English novelists of the eighteenth century since his adolescence, if not before. Barry Cornwall's recollection of Lamb's library indicates the comprehensive nature of his reading of fiction, romance and fable: Cornwall specifically mentions *Sir Charles Grandison* and then asserts that 'he traversed all the regions of fiction: from the Elysian fields to the plains of La Mancha - from the transformations of Ovid to the Arabian enchantments.'

Lamb's knowledge of the whole tradition of fiction, like his knowledge of contemporary literature, may surprise many readers still. At first sight his remarks on fiction can suggest that he had little time for prose narrative, for he remarked that 'narrative teases me' and 'books of quick interest, that hurry on for incidents, are for the eye to glide over only. It will not do to read them out'.¹ But these remarks, dating from 1821 and 1822 should not be taken to represent an E M Forster-like regret for the inevitability of plots in fiction. They represent Lamb's lack of sympathy with the stronger element of adventure and exciting action which Scott's *Waverley* and its successors (and their imitators) had brought into fashion. Lamb preferred the greater emphasis on character in the novels of the previous century. His further assertion that 'I could never listen to even the better kind of modern novels without extreme irksomeness' point to his preference for an older mode, as well as to what is probably his main contention: that the new, strongly-plotted novels move rapidly and require to be read with the eye, rather than be read out aloud by the domestic fireside, like the novels of his youth.

What were the 'better kind of modern novels'? The obvious candidates for that honour would be those of Sir Walter Scott, and they have traditionally been understood to be the works in question. In 'The Sanity of True Genius' we have a further pointer, as well as an indication of some of Lamb's early reading of fiction, when he rejoices that the 'innutritious phantoms' of Mr Lane's library, the Gothic and sentimental romances of the 1790s, have been replaced in popular favour by the works of 'a happier Genius'. Mary Lamb devoured the *Waverley* novels eagerly (at one point Charles seeks a copy of *Anne of Geierstein* in hopes of hastening her convalescence after an illness) and it seems unlikely that her brother (who had a slight but cordial acquaintance with Sir Walter) did not at least 'glide' his eye over some of the pages. Perhaps on occasion he was even engaged a little more profoundly. At any rate it was a *Waverley* novel which came to mind when he wanted to define the provinciality of 'dull Enfield' to Wordsworth in a

letter of January 1830:

...a circulating library that stands still, where the shew-picture is a last year's Valentine, and whither the fame of the last ten Scotch novels has not yet travel'd (marry, they just begin to be conscious of the Red Gauntlet)...

What Lamb thought of Scott's novels, and whether he had done any more than run an eye rapidly over some of the pages of the volumes which made their way to Mary's table it would be vain to enquire. But in view of the way he incorporates other novels which he knows into his jokes in letters written at all periods of his life it seems likely that he had at least a passing acquaintance with *Redgauntlet*. It would be unrealistic to claim that he cared for Scott's novels particularly deeply, and personal friendliness may have influenced his description of Scott as 'a happier genius' a little, yet the commendation is undeniably strong, and the claim that he was ignorant of Scott's novels (let alone of novels in general) surely cannot stand scrutiny for a moment.

One asks in vain what Lamb thought about modern fiction, but the situation is very different if we move back into the eighteenth century. Here a scattered but consistent body of opinions, expressed over the whole period of his adult life, can be assembled from his essays and correspondence to testify to his solid regard for most of the great English novelists of the previous century:

In his recent *Lamb as Critic* Roy Park expresses a common regret when he notes that 'although the eighteenth-century novelists were among Lamb's favourite reading and a frequent topic of his conversation, with the exception of Defoe, he never wrote on any of them.'² The extent of Lamb's reading in this area has been succinctly listed by Charles I Patterson.³ In addition to Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Smollett, Patterson declares, 'he was also acquainted with the writings of Sterne, Goldsmith, Henry Mackenzie, Robert Paltock, Jane and Maria Porter, Godwin... and many figures of lesser note, including the Minerva Press offerings.' We should not assume that Lamb knew the whole output of all these writers of course: in the case of Defoe, whose minor works were not easily found, he told Walter Wilson in 1822 that 'I have nothing of Defoe's but two or three novels, and the Plague History.' He had probably read more than this, but did not possess the books for re-reading and easy reference.

Nevertheless, we may feel sure that Lamb knew all the great eighteenth-century novels (and generally knew them well) along with a good deal of the minor fiction. He also had a scholar's knowledge of historical, biographical and critical writings related to the major figures. Writing to Wilson once again on 24 February 1823 he rattles off a brief list of writers on Defoe with the greatest ease and rapidity:

I do not know that Swift mentions him. Pope does. I forget if D'Israeli has. Dunlop I think has nothing of him. He is quite new ground, and scarce known beyond Crusoe...Do you know the paper in the *Englishman* by Sir Rd. Steele, giving an account of Selkirk? It is admirable, and has all the genius of Crusoe. You must quote it entire.

Of all the eighteenth-century novelists Defoe seems to have been Lamb's favourite in later years. The author of *Elia* appreciated the way in which 'the *Author* never appears in these self-narratives...it is perfect illusion.' He maintained that in respect of 'the appearance of *truth* in all

the incidents and conversations that occur in them, they exceed any works of fiction I am acquainted with.' Fifteen years before he wrote this, Lamb had declared in the prologue which he composed for Godwin's 1807 tragedy *Faulkener* (adapted from Defoe) that:

The genius who conceiv'd that Magic tale
Was skilled by native pathos to prevail.
His stories, though rough-drawn, and fram'd in haste
Had that which pleas'd our homely grandsires' taste.

And he ends by equating 'truth' and 'nature' with the name of Defoe.⁴

In his 1822 letter to Walter Wilson, Lamb uses identical language when he describes the beginning of *Colonel Jack* as 'the most affecting natural picture of a young thief that was ever drawn.' His appreciation of the way Defoe's truthful telling of a criminal's story can affect the reader's emotions and have a powerful moral impact without the interposition of didactic or moralistic colouring is at least equal to Dickens's in the child-thief scenes of *Oliver Twist*. His insistence on 'native pathos' in the 1807 prologue perhaps marks the point at which he fully defined his own changed response to one of the most popular fictional forms of his young manhood: the novel of sensibility, with its cult of feeling.

In later life Lamb had no time at all for the late eighteenth-century writers of the sentimental school. He felt that Steele, Sterne and Mackenzie had all committed 'blunders' by assembling instances of sensibility and then pretending they constituted a human character. He continued to appreciate the humour of *Tristram Shandy* (and sometimes quoted it in his letters) but he disliked the way Sterne and his disciples

continually put a sign post up to shew where you are to feel. They set out with assuming their readers to be stupid. Very different from *Robinson Crusoe*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Roderick Random*, and other beautiful bare narratives.

Yet as a young man, and especially during the terrible months following Mary's tragedy, Lamb's interest in sentimentalism had been much more lively. He knew Sterne's and Mackenzie's novels well, and in certain moods the kind of role-playing which Ralph M Wardle has detected in his letters led him to act out momentarily the character of a sentimental hero.⁵ Particularly interesting is the final sentence of a letter to Coleridge of 9 December 1796 less than three months after Mary's tragic action and scarcely a year after his own attack of madness:

God bless you - continue to be my correspondent, and I will strive to fancy that this world is not "all barrenness"

The quotation refers back to the third chapter, entitled 'In the street: Calais.', near the beginning of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. Here Yorick sets the pleasures of hopefulness and friendship against the gloomy misanthropy of the discontented traveller Smelfungus:

I pity the man who can travel from *Dan* to *Beersheba*, and cry, 'Tis all barren. And so it is; and so is all the world to him who will not cultivate the fruits it offers. I declare, said I, clapping my hands cheerily together, that was I in a desert, I would find out wherewith in it to call forth my affections.

The poignancy of Lamb's recollection of *A Sentimental Journey* here is

obvious. At about the same period he indulges in sentimental reveries linked with episodes in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* and Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné*: indeed the latter novel lies in Rosamund Gray's hands, and is quoted at some length, during a sentimental love scene in chapter four of Lamb's early story. But his responsiveness to the sentimental school did not last: perhaps he came to believe it was a dangerous stimulus to emotional indulgence; and there were artistic objections besides. As early as 1800 a brisker tone characterizes his remarks on sentimentalism and by the autumn of that year he can be found voicing his characteristic mature preference for a comic embodiment of emotion, such as can be found in *Tristram Shandy*.

Concerning Richardson, Lamb's feelings seem to have been ambivalent. He kept a copy of *Pamela* on his shelves, but rarely quoted Richardson or even mentioned him. On the whole he seems not to have responded to Richardson's method of psychological portrayal except when (characteristically) he found Richardson carried beyond the bounds of his own moral didacticism by the power of his vicariously-indulged insight into moral decadence: then, he felt, Richardson's imagination kindled:

The precise strait-laced Richardson has strengthened vice, from the mouth of Lovelace, with entangling sophistries and abstruse pleas against her adversary Virtue which Sedley, Villiers, and Rochester, wanted depth of libertinism sufficient to have invented.

In this case, Lamb does not find that any corrective (or even restraining) force of good humour operates to neutralize the seductive power of Lovelace's 'entangling sophistries'. Though he preferred *Clarissa* to *Pamela* (while finding merit in both of them) he seems to feel (as he does with stage comedy) that even *Clarissa* is weakened by the fact that it does not display that quality of 'good nature' which is desirable in all fiction. In his 1811 essay on Hogarth he maintains that 'good nature' 'overpowers a world of bad'. In direct contrast to his comment on Lovelace one may consider his statement on the hero of a very different novel, in which the powers of good and bad exist in opposition to one another throughout the story:

One cordial honest laugh of a Tom Jones absolutely clears the atmosphere that was reeking with the black putrifying breathings of a hypocrite Blifil.

Lamb finds the same quality of redemptive naturalness in Parson Adams, and in Strap in *Roderick Random*, as he does in Tom Jones. He discerns it in innumerable details of Hogarth's various series of didactic-narrative engravings.

Given a greater degree of interest, or more direct stimulus to engage critically with the fiction of the previous century, Lamb could surely have written most illuminatingly. Tantalizing fragments, such as his comment on the 'exquisite irony' of Ferdinand Count Fathom's 'filial fondness' towards the island 'which he is coming to fleece and plunder' when he first sees England, and his comment that 'if we are not led on by such passages to some more salutary feeling than laughter, we are very negligent perusers of them in book or pictures' point towards a larger critical understanding of the redemptive power of ironic as well as direct comedy. But the details of Lamb's criticism are generally to be found in contexts where he is primarily concerned with something else, as in his essay 'On the Genius and Character of Hogarth', which makes some of his clearest statements on

the moral power of eighteenth-century comic fiction while endeavouring to define the characteristics and the appeal of Hogarth's visual comic art.

The main features of Lamb's thinking about the eighteenth-century novel are easily summarized. In many respects they are close to the views of his friend William Hazlitt. Lamb appreciated the truth to nature, the realism both social and psychological, of Defoe, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. He found the centrality of these novelists, their concern with kinds of behaviour that could be found all about them, and their sustained or flashing insights into actuality tantamount to genius. Of Smollett, whose *Roderick Random* and *Humphry Clinker* he often quoted or mentioned, Lamb maintained that he was 'a great genius'. A true Scot, he declared, would question this and quote you 'Hume's history compared with his (Smollett's) continuation of it'. But 'what if the historian had continued *Humphry Clinker*?' Lamb demands with his characteristically illuminating slyness of humour.

The fictional dramatization of 'the every-day human face' has a moral value in Lamb's eyes. It gives us skill

to detect those gradations of sense and virtue (which escape the careless or fastidious observer) in the countenances of the world about us, and prevent that disgust at common life...which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms and beauties is in danger of producing.

Direct authorial intervention of the 'Let not the reader suppose' variety he could not bear; and after his early sensibilitous phase had passed he rejected novels which tried to manipulate his emotions excessively.

Lamb expected consistency of atmosphere, mood and characterization (it was the lack of these that made him lose patience with the circulating library books of his youth), but plotting as such was of little real concern to him. His own attempts at fiction bear witness to this: he is master of the incident or brief narrative but scarcely of consecutive events. Situations which allowed character to be revealed naturally and realistically were his delight. In the great masters of the eighteenth century he found 'Great Nature's Stereotypes', and, convinced of their timeless freshness, he revelled in the 'enchanted contents' of their well-known pages. The moralistic tendencies of his own time affected his reading of eighteenth-century fiction no more than his enjoyment of Restoration drama or the old masters of English prose. 'I have no repugnancies' he could declare: 'Shaftesbury is not too genteel for me, nor Jonathan Wild too low.' The fascination of life and character truly observed and presented was enchantment enough for him; and to its appreciation he brought both sensitivity and a well-nourished critical mind. One can only lament the fact that occasions to explain the sources of his delight in the great eighteenth-century masters so rarely came his way.

NOTES

- 1 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', *Last Essays*
- 2 *Lamb as Critic*, edited by Roy Park (London, 1980). Section 5, consisting of Selections from Lamb's comments on English prose writers (including novelists) is valuable. Lamb's correspondence with Walter Wilson on Defoe's novels is conveniently brought together in it.
- 3 Charles I Patterson, 'Charles Lamb's Insight into the Nature of the

- Novel', *PMLA*, 67 (1952), pp. 375-81
- 4 The entire 'Prologue to Godwin's Tragedy of "Faulkener"' is worth studying in this context
- 5 Ralph M Wardle, 'Role-Playing in Lamb's Letters', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, New Series No.16, (October 1976), pp.156-62

MRS. LEICESTER'S SCHOOL AS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Winifred F Courtney

Author of *Young Charles Lamb - 1775-1802*

Not until Charles and Mary Lamb's "The First Tooth"...do we become aware of any real attempt to imagine the world from a child's point of view...
Christopher Lehmann-Haupt reviewing *The Oxford Book of Children's Verse*

Children had hardly been considered children to the middle of the eighteenth century when John Newbery produced his *Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744), designed to entertain them. He signalled a new trend, but the didactic mode, as juvenile books proliferated, continued to prosper - and in the hands of pious ladies reached a kind of zenith as the nineteenth century dawned.

Not all of their works can be damned as heartily as Lamb damned Mrs Letitia Barbauld and Mrs Sarah Trimmer among them: Mrs Barbauld and her brother John Aikin's *Evenings at Home*, if a little preachy and teachy, has its own informative charm; Mrs Trimmer's *History of the Robins* sugarcoats the moral pill successfully. (The formidable Mrs Martha Sherwood's *Fairchild Family*, as late as 1818, enjoyed showing children disintegrating corpses as part of the learning process.) Mrs Barbauld noted in her preface to *Hymns in Prose for Children* that the little ones must be deflected from reading verse; Mrs Trimmer decried *Mother Goose* and *Robinson Crusoe*. All disapproved of fairy tales.

It was this narrow puritanical view of children's requirements - to be admonished, even frightened, by preaching adults who wrote down to them - that so roused Lamb's ire in his famous statement to Coleridge in 1802:

Goody Two Shoes is almost out of print. Mrs. Barbauld[']s stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery; & the Shopman at Newbery's hardly deign'd to reach them off an old exploded corner of a shelf, when Mary ask'd for them. Mrs. B's & Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense lay in piles about. Knowledge insignificant & vapid as Mrs. B's books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge*, & his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers, when he has learnt that a Horse is an Animal, & Billy is better than a Horse, & such like: instead of that beautiful Interest in wild tales, which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child. Science has succeeded to Poetry no less in the little walks of Children than with Men. -: Is there no possibility of averting this sore evil? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives fables in childhood, you had been crammed with Geography & Natural History.? Damn them. I mean the cursed Barbauld crew, those Blights & Blasts of all that is Human in man & child. -

Lamb had firm backing for his and Mary's (essentially Romantic) conviction that children were not clay to be moulded but human beings of great

interest in themselves, and possessed of *imagination* in more generous measure than most would cling to as adults. Children learned best when their own tastes were appealed to: John Locke (*Thoughts on Education*, 1693), who favoured illustrated books, and Rousseau (*Emile*, 1762), who admired *Robinson Crusoe*, had already advocated the pleasure principle as the most successful tool in education. Their theories in modern form had aroused the interest of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Wedgewoods, among others.

When William Godwin in 1805 (then out of favour for his radicalism) saw that writing was not going to support his increased family, his second wife, Mary Jane, was quick to note that charm of presentation in the little 5" x 4" books (a shilling plain, 18d coloured) put out by John Harris, Newbery's heir, did extremely well. (He claimed a quick sale of 10,000 copies for *Old Mother Hubbard*, 1805, by Sarah Martin.) The Juvenile Library, soon in Skinner Street, was the result, its ultimate failure due not so much to mistaken policies as to Godwin's inability to handle money. In its heyday the Juvenile Library ("M. J. Godwin") published all the Lambs' works for children, and Godwin's translation of *The Swiss Family Robinson* had its own enduring success.

By the time Mary set out to write *Mrs. Leicester's School*, Lamb had published his expansion of *The King and Queen of Hearts* nursery rhyme (1805) in the Harris format and both had struggled with Shakespeare to produce their ever-popular *Tales* of 1807. Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses*, in verse, appeared in 1808. (*Mrs. Leicester's School*, or, *The History of Several Young Ladies, Related by Themselves*, would come out by Christmas, 1808, but dated 1809, with a frontispiece illustrating 'The Sailor Uncle' by the Hopwood brothers.) So, considerable experience in writing for the young lay behind them, and Charles's lifelong preoccupation with his own childhood, and childhood in general, hardly needs a mention.

Mrs. Leicester's School is their (chiefly Mary's, who wrote seven of the ten stories) most spontaneous work in this genre - freed from the demands of other writers' plots and the rigours of verse. And, except for the *Tales from Shakespear*, it proved the most immediately popular of all their works, going through ten editions by 1828. Although E V Lucas says it faded from view after 1830, there have been twentieth-century editions from time to time: I own the delightful version of 1927 (Dent) with Winifred Green's Kate-Greenawayish illustrations, wreathed in garlands of most attractive flowers, as well as a plainer but pleasant little volume of 1948 (Harvill) with introduction by Richard Church.

While in some respects, like all works for children, a social document, *Mrs. Leicester's School* is extraordinarily modern in its sensitivity. Here, surely, is what children really feel and think in certain situations; the understanding adults portrayed are admirable too. There is nothing at all we would wish to censor for our young unless it were the recurrence of the deaths of mothers. In this the time of writing must be taken into account, when death all too frequently spared neither young parents nor children. Surviving children had somehow to cope with their grief for the good, the young, the beloved, as well as the old: the Lambs helped them cope. (I remember my own small daughter and the recently motherless little boy next door re-enacting the funeral and burial, complete with toy-box for coffin. We did not interfere. Playing out is one way children cope with grief; reading is another.)

For all Lamb's scruples, *Mrs. Leicester* is, of course, a little didactic - because any teller of tales is in some way presenting the conclusions of a lifetime. Even fairy stories show the triumph of the underdog through homely virtues and persistence. Peter Rabbit learns the penalties of rashness, Jemima Puddleduck and Little Red Ridinghood the perils of too-easy trust. Robinson Crusoe practises self-reliance. But the Lambs' purpose was deeper than didacticism: they wanted children to be not better but happier. The happiness attainable through or after the ordinary human trials is their major theme. *Mrs. Leicester's School* is a cheerful book about real experience which never lapses into sentimentality.

Its framework is as old as Chaucer - older: people telling stories to one another. The more immediate model was Sarah Fielding's *The Governess or The Little Female Academy* (1745), which was diluted with stories read aloud, including fairy tales. (Mrs Sherwood bowdlerized it in her own revised edition, eliminating these.) Mary Lamb made the girls the nucleus of a new school, with a beginning teacher ("M.B.") who loves teaching, trying to help them feel at ease. She has them tell something about their own lives to each other. How gracefully they do this is the genius of both Lambs. (It is pertinent that a twentieth-century Quaker has devised a similar method of exchanging life stories as a means of avoiding or resolving conflict among, for example, people of different races.)

Elizabeth Villiers in 'The Sailor Uncle' (all stories are Mary Lamb's unless otherwise noted) is the very young daughter of a country curate, devoted in a happy way to her mother's grave. She resents the arrival of her maternal uncle, unaware of his sister's death, because of the emotion and grief he first causes to father and daughter through his own grief. But in time he leads the two away from their brooding on the past until he, too, must leave Elizabeth and she discovers her sorrow at losing him, her regret that she has not been a better niece. Her father consoles her with all that can be said when after grievous parting the best of us torment ourselves with self-reproach:

This is the sort of way in which we all feel, when those we love are taken from us. - When our dear friends are with us, we go on enjoying their society...nor do we too nicely weigh the measure of our daily actions; - we let them freely share our kind or our discontented moods ...little hickerings... But these things come over us like grievous faults when the object of our affection is gone for ever.

He had felt the same on her mother's death, but, 'You did all a child could do to please your uncle, and dearly did he love you...' The little homily goes on, for children's emotions are to be treated seriously:

But your uncle will come back again, Betsy, and we will now think of where we are to get the cage to keep the talking parrot in, he is to bring home; and go and tell Susan to bring the candles, and ask her if the nice cake is almost baked, that she promised to give us for our tea.

Homely detail throughout brings these stories alive, and we are here reminded of Charles's china teacup and similar touches in the *Elia* essays years later. Cannot Mary be said to have 'influenced' Charles as Dorothy did William Wordsworth in her diary descriptions? Sister and brother in each case were, at any rate, two sides of the same coin.

Louisa Manners's 'The Farm House' is the least didactic of all the tales - Mary draws on her childhood memories of 'Mackery End', which Charles would

later recall from Elia's point of view. It is the sun-soaked tribute of the city child to farm life at her 'Grandmama's' - where her elder sister for a reason unexplained lives permanently, and is quite shy because of her lack of Louisa's London experience. The only shadow here is Louisa's loss of wildflowers through the haying. Mary's irony, akin to Charles's, has Louisa explain that her sister has told her what flowers to admire, as being the rarest. Louisa obeys but does not quite accept: her new-found passion for buttercups and daisies is resistant. The excitement of the sheep-shearing festivities ends this entrancing vignette.

Ann Withers's 'The Changeling' uses the age-old plot of exchanged babies to illustrate how one may adapt to drastic circumstances (when the exchange is discovered), as well as the folly of undue pride and the importance of kindness. Humane behaviour is to be valued above rank and station; through it even the lowly born may rise in the world through trials.

The same theme appears later in the book in 'The Merchant's Daughter' when the little girl's father goes bankrupt. An 'execution' takes place: all her fine toys and frocks are carted away to appease her father's creditors. The parents must escape to the Continent to avoid debtors' prison, and Charlotte Wilmot is thrown on the mercy of her father's former clerk, who has found a new job. *His* daughter treats Charlotte royally, to Charlotte's surprise and gratitude. A bequest retrieves the Wilmots. Charlotte, too, has been brought low in her pride, in this case to rise again with new understanding.

The perils of pride had been Charles Lamb's theme a few years earlier in the play *John Woodvil*, and it was a concern of Mary's as well, for it appears yet a third time in 'Visit to the Cousins', in which Emily Barton as a young child is poorly treated by her uncle, aunt, and their children during her parents' (unexplained) absence for a year. As so often in these accounts, the moral plea seems directed not only to the child reader but to its elders: do unto children as you would like to be done by.

Emily's father reappears to rescue her, and she learns to share her own possessions as her relatives in their arrogance have failed to do. But the real pleasure of 'The Cousins' is its demonstration of the happiness fortunate children can find in London. Emily's reunion consolation is to choose to her heart's content at a real toyshop (known to the Lambs) and at the bookshop in 'Skinner Street' (Godwins') rather than that in 'St Paul's Churchyard' (Harris's). Emily learns too the joys of theatre-going, so that the end of the story becomes the equivalent of Charles's later 'My First Play'. Kind friends take Mama and Emily into their box to see - of all things - Congreve's tragedy *The Mourning Bride*. Emily, a real child, confuses its plot with that of the Harlequinade that follows. (One must suppose that Charles and Mary discussed each story at some point - perhaps even in the planning stage - and while Mary may well have influenced Charles, the joint production may have been more joint than has hitherto been suggested, with 'influence' going both ways - oh, the perils of scholarship!)

Another child who has lost her mother, in this case to face the advent of a stepmother, is Elinor Forester in 'The Father's Wedding-Day' - a little masterpiece of irony (as W S Landor pointed out) when Elinor, rejoicing in her fine new frock for the occasion, yearns to show it to her dead mama. Her difficulty in coping with the maternal replacement is finely handled.

The new mother's winning of her stepdaughter, without reproach for Elinor's initial rejection (which has angered her papa) suggests to a stepmother how this may be accomplished. Mary's understanding of human relationships - I rashly credit this one entirely to her - was unparalleled, as her brother has confirmed.

Books that fascinate and frighten young bookworms who have browsed in adult libraries unobserved are the topics of 'The Young Mahometan' (Mary's Blakesware is the setting) and 'The Witch Aunt' (Charles's first to be here discussed - precursor of 'Witches and Other Night-fears'). Both girls are saved from illness and distress when loving adults enlighten and relieve each from her 'naughty fancy', as Charles Lamb puts it - tongue in cheek. For what has happened seems inevitable, given children's taste for the exotic and for forbidden pleasures. ('The Witch Aunt' has been treated in greater depth by Joseph E Riehl in the *CLB* for July 1982.)

We have come to Charles's contributions toward the end of the book. Richard Church thinks these inferior to Mary's, but beyond an occasional difficult word and the one long sentence Church cites, I find them to be of a piece with Mary's and to show similar imaginative skill. In his 'First Going to Church' little Susan Yates is isolated from town life in the remote Lincolnshire fens. Here she ponders what a church might be:

Sometimes I thought it must be like our house, and sometimes I fancied it must be more like the house of our neighbour, Mr. Sutton, which was bigger and handsomer than ours. Sometimes I thought it was a great hollow cave, such as I have heard my father say the first inhabitants of the earth dwelt in. Then I thought it was like a waggon or a cart, and that it must be something moveable... Was it any thing to eat or drink, or was it only like a great huge play-thing, to be seen and stared at? - I was not quite five years of age when I made this inquiry.

Church was an integral part of children's lives in those days, and many must have responded to a first visit as Charles did, recollecting, in the person of Susan Yates.

The final story is Charles's 'The Sea Voyage', in which he used what he knew of such journeys from his work and talk at the East India Company, his thirty-three year employer. A sympathetic young sailor is put in charge of a little girl being sent home from India by her parents - as so many children were, then and later. The sailor, we learn in time, is sick of an old wound, suffered in defending his captain successfully against great odds. He dies before the voyage is over, and again a child faces loss. But, alive and active through much of the long journey, he is called 'Betsy' by the tough all-male crew, because of his feminine qualities, so suitable for taking care of five-year-old Arabella Hardy. Here Lamb is saying firmly, to his adult readers as well, that a man may be both brave ('manly') and *gentle*, to his great credit. (How modern is the tone in our age, when young fathers backpack their babies and are not ashamed to care for them.) The sailor's gift for entertaining a child and the attraction of 'Betsy' for Arabella are vividly presented, as is the feel of the voyage and the unfamiliar wonders of the sea as experienced by the child and explained by 'Betsy'.

There is so much more one would like to say - and has not space for. *Mrs. Leicester's School* was first published anonymously - perhaps, as E V Lucas suggests, because Mary, with her tragic history, did not seek publicity.

Perhaps it will appeal most to very bookish little girls of the computer generation. Certainly a young lady, just five, who cannot yet read for herself, recently listened wide-eyed to 'The Farm House' and pleaded for more.

Charles Lamb later met Mrs Barbauld and got on well with her at first encounter. A yet later meeting suggests that they still had their differences. *Mrs. Leicester's School* contains Mary Lamb's finest work and is the freest example of what Charles and Mary knew children really needed in their time - perhaps even in our time, unlike most productions of the Barbauld-Trimmer crew. *Mrs. Leicester's School* is one of those literary gems demanding rediscovery.

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LAMB, LLOYD, LONDON: A PERSPECTIVE ON BOOK SEVEN OF *THE PRELUDE*

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'God made the country, and man made the town'.¹ For William Cowper, composing *The Task* in 1783, and for a great many of his contemporaries, there was nothing surprising about such a claim. Nature bore the imprint or alphabet of God; man, by building cities, was erasing His presence. But it was possible to go on from here, and see the city in more extreme terms, as the embodiment of vice and corruption, a sort of Hell-on-Earth. Cowper's voice is once again representative: 'Thither flow' he writes of the city in Book One of *The Task*,

Thither flow,
 As to a common and most noisome sew'r,
 The dregs and feculence of ev'ry land.
 In cities foul example on most minds
 Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds
 In gross and pamper'd cities sloth and lust,
 And wantonness and gluttonous excess.
 In cities vice is hidden with most ease,
 Or seen with least reproach; and virtue, taught
 By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there
 Beyond th'achievement of successful flight. (i, 682-92)²

The country, by comparison, is idealized, through the eyes of a gentleman of leisure, to contain no vice and no suffering:

Our groves were planted to console at noon
 The pensive wand'rer in their shades. At eve
 The moon-beam, sliding softly in between
 The sleeping leaves is all the light they wish,
 Birds warbling all the music. (i, 760-4)

Cowper is asking us to look for a moment at two opposite worlds. The one is a sort of Paradise; self-sufficient, harmonious; the other is dissonant, a universe of death - or, to take up the comparison with the Tower of Babel, implied at the end of *The Task* Book One, 'A mutilated structure, soon to fall' (l.774).

Sometimes, Cowper's handling of these two opposite worlds is prophetic of later Romantic positions. Writing in Book Four, for instance, about the 'love of Nature's works' which he sees as 'an ingredient in the compound man, / Infus'd at the creation of the kind' (ll.732-3), he goes on to make large, almost extravagant claims for its permanence and grandeur:

It is a flame that dies not even there,
 Where nothing feeds it: neither business, crowds,
 Nor habits of luxurious city-life;
 Whatever else they smother of true worth
 In human bosoms; quench it, or abate. (iv, 742-7)³

In Cowper's imagination, the city has become wholly symbolic: a world, or a way of being, that is opposed to the human spirit, just as 'the dreary intercourse of daily life' is in 'Tintern Abbey' (l.132); or 'that inanimate cold world' in 'Dejection' (l.51), or finally, in 'Intimations', 'all that is at enmity with joy' (l.160).

One associates Cowper so closely with formulaic contrasts of this kind that one tends to overlook occasions when the opposition breaks down. It does so, however, in two different ways. Firstly, there are moments in *The Task* when Cowper writes - as Johnson had done before, and Lamb was to do later - with a genuine affection for the vice and squalor of city life:

O thou, resort and mart of all the earth,
 Chequer'd with all complexions of mankind,
 And spotted with all crimes; in whom I see
 Much that I love, and more that I admire,
 And all that I abhor; thou freckled fair,
 That pleasest and yet shock'st me, I can laugh
 And I can weep, can hope, and can despond,
 Feel wrath and pity, when I think on thee! (iii, 835-42)

Secondly, there are rather more ambiguous moments when - quite unconsciously - his imaginative excitement challenges the conventional opposition:

Cities then
 Attract us, and neglected Nature pines,
 Abandon'd, as unworthy of our love.
 But are not wholesome airs, though unperfum'd
 By roses; and clear suns, though scarcely felt;
 And groves, if unharmonious, yet secure
 From clamour, and whose very silence charms;
 To be preferr'd to smoke, to the eclipse
That Metropolitan volcanos make,
Whose Stygian throats breathe darkness all day long;
And to the stir of commerce, driving slow,
And thund'ring loud, with his ten thousand wheels?
 (iii, 729-40)⁴

Cowper's rhetoric is attempting to persuade us that rural scenes - however ordinary - are preferable to the polluted city. But the excitement of the poetry tells us otherwise. Where the country is lifeless, flat, stylized, the city is full of movement and mystery. Chimneys become volcanoes, or grotesque Hellish mouths breathing darkness; while 'commerce' becomes 'stir' - activity itself, embodied as a fantastic, half-monstrous thing, 'driving slow / And thund'ring loud, with his ten thousand wheels'. Cowper's imagination is clearly activated, here, by the strangeness of the world encroaching upon him. He is of the devil's party without knowing it.

I should like, in this paper, to take the three different kinds of response to the city that I have detected in Cowper, and to show how they recur (sometimes singly; sometimes in complicated juxtaposition) in the writings of Lamb, Lloyd and Wordsworth. The central part of what I have to say will depend on a close reading of 'London', a blank verse poem by Charles Lloyd, which has been strangely ignored by critics, but which is nonetheless both influential and important in its own right.⁵ The rest of the paper deals with material in Lamb and Wordsworth that is much better known.

To begin, though, with the first of the responses I have noted in Cowper: a tendency to flatten, stylize and oversimplify the city, in making it symbolic of vice or spiritual death. One might expect this moral view in Augustan poetry; it is more surprising, perhaps, to find it so frequently taken for granted by the Romantics. A brief glance at Wordsworth and Coleridge, however, especially in the years 1797-8, shows how insidious it is. The phrase 'in city pent' - whose history I have traced elsewhere⁶ - echoes and re-echoes among the Conversation poems, carrying fresh associations with it on each occasion, but evoking as a constant those feelings of imprisonment, isolation and estrangement which characterized its first use. 'It thrills my heart', Coleridge writes in February 1798, as he imagines his son Hartley going through a Wordsworthian childhood:

it thrills my heart
 With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
 And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
 And in far other scenes...
 (11.48-51)

Then turning poignantly back to himself, he draws on past poems - Milton's, but also (and twice over) his own⁷ - to heighten the sense of longing he feels:

For I was reared
 In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim
 And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
 But thou, my babe, shalt wander like a breeze
 By lakes and sandy shores... (11.51-5)

As in 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' which Coleridge is consciously recalling, it is the city as a place of spiritual starvation that is being evoked. The poet shares his undernourishment with Charles Lamb, who (according to the earlier poem) had 'pined / And hungered after Nature many a year / In the great city pent' (11.28-30), while Hartley, on the other hand, grows spiritually fit and healthy on the genuine sustenance which lakes, sandy shores and crags of ancient mountain have to offer.

My sceptical tone of voice, here, is deliberate; for I am of course about to introduce Lamb, in one of his most whimsical moods, challenging the values that Wordsworth and Coleridge take for granted. The letter is well known, but I should like to remind you of both the sharpness of Lamb's perceptions, and their affinity with those subtle moments in *The Task* when conventional symbolism breaks down. 'Separate from the pleasure of your company', Lamb writes, in a not very gracious reply to Wordsworth's invitation to go North, 'I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life'. He continues,

I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of you Mountaineers can have done with dead nature.⁸

The power of Lamb's challenge here depends on brittleness, extremity, aggression. But there is also in his writing a Romanticism which is more finely tuned:

The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, play houses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles... (*ibid*)

Lamb's catalogue of sights and sounds - irreducibly themselves, and valued for that reason - recreates for the moment Cowper's London of *The Task*, Book Three, 'chequered with all complexions of mankind, / And spotted with all crimes' (11.836-7). But within and behind this reverence for the ordinary, the palpable, the seedy, is a Wordsworthian emphasis on imagination, and even (as I have argued elsewhere)⁹ a Wordsworthian language to describe imaginative growth:

the crowds, the very dirt & mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old Book stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself, a pantomime and a masquerade, all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much Life. (*ibid*)

Lamb makes use of his affection for London to challenge Wordsworthian values, but he uses Wordsworth to strengthen and enrich his affirmation of city life. In the quality of his responses, he aligns himself with Johnson, or the Johnsonian Cowper; in the vocabulary he chooses - and the poetic

strategies which his prose adopts - he offers the first Romantic realization of London's power.

And yet not quite the first. The most remarkable treatment of London during the 1790's was a poem of just over a hundred lines, by Lamb's friend Charles Lloyd, included in the volume of *Blank Verse* which they published jointly in the spring of 1798.¹⁰ The volume has been completely ignored by critics, but was read with enjoyment by Wordsworth himself, who wrote to Cottle in May saying that it contained 'some excellent passages'.¹¹ To judge from a number of verbal similarities, he may well have had Lloyd's poems at the back of his mind when writing 'Tintern Abbey'.

But to appreciate Lloyd just for the poems one can regard as 'sources' (among which I'd like to mention in passing 'The Melancholy Man', 'Oswald', and 'Ode to Keswick Lake') is to underestimate his own, highly individual, powers. He tends to be remembered merely as the author of *Edmund Oliver*, the novel which included details about Coleridge's early life he would rather have suppressed, and which caused the quarrel between the two men to get worse. He is never looked at as a poet in his own right, yet 'London' more than any of his other poems, should establish his claim to serious consideration.

The poem was probably composed in Spring 1798, while Lloyd was living with James White in London. In spite of the company of both White and Lamb, London must have seemed a lonely place. Lloyd had been rejected by Coleridge, and in July of the previous year, had received a version of 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' in which his old friend and mentor celebrated a new closeness - one which embraced not only Lamb but the Wordsworths, and which Lloyd could not possibly share. The 'Nehemiah Higginbottom sonnets' had come out in November; the rift with Coleridge was getting worse, and *Edmund Oliver* was under way. It was a moment of isolation for Lloyd, in which he doubted his friends and his own power of making friendships. One might expect him to write very sentimental, very self-pitying poetry.¹² Indeed, the 'motto' for 'London', taken from Book Eight of *Paradise Lost*, seems to suggest that the poem will be purely about loneliness:

In solitude
What happiness! Who can enjoy alone?
Or all enjoying, what contentment find? (viii, 364-6)

It turns out instead to be about personal impressions and the human mind's imaginings.

The first seven lines are taken up with a very formal address to 'social love':

Thou first of human feelings, social love!
I must obey thy powerful sympathies,
E'en though I've often found that those my heart
Most priz'd were creatures of its warm desires,
Rather than aught which other men less prone
To affections swift, transforming quality,
Might worthy deem or excellent!

The syntax is distorted, and Lloyd's personal voice scarcely comes through, except in the phrase 'affections swift, transforming quality'. Here he offers us something close to Coleridge's 'secret ministry of frost': a

power which is internal, yet capable of moulding external things. It is this power which is the real subject of the poem, but it can only come through as such when the excitement that Lloyd feels about it is not flattened and subdued by a conventional context.

The formal style then gives way to a much looser idiom, in which Lloyd is able to pass from one mood and tense to another:

Thy scenes,
Thy tainted scenes, proud city, now detain
My restless feet. 'Twill soothe a vacant hour
To trace what dim inexplicable links
Of hidden nature have inclin'd my soul
To love what heretofore it most abhorr'd. (11.7-12)

Lloyd appears at first to be offering a stylization of London, close to the sinful city of Cowper's *Task*, Book One. Its scenes are 'tainted';¹³ and it is 'proud' and 'abhorr'd'. But this is a more personal, exploratory idiom than Cowper's. Lloyd is fascinated by the workings of his own mind: the 'dim inexplicable links / Of hidden nature' are not simply bonds of association or familiarity (what Lamb called 'intense local attachments') but a mysterious and potent inner force.

The style becomes more fluid as Lloyd moves into the poetry of recollection:

When first a little one I mark'd far off
The wreathed smoke that capp'd thy palaces,
Oh what a joyous fluttering of the heart,
Oh what exulting hopes were mine! Methought
Within thy walls there must be somewhat strange
Surpassing greatly any wondrous dream
Of Fairy grandeur which my childhood lov'd (11.13-19)

His normal handling of time-sequence has for a moment been suspended. There is a charged, incantatory quality in the verse which heightens the effect of a mysterious and enchanted world. Lloyd is preparing us for something more entrancing than 'fairy grandeur'; but nothing can *fully* prepare us for the grandeur of his childhood vision:

And when I heard the busy hum of men,
And saw the passing crowd in endless ranks,
The many-colour'd equipage, and steeds,
Gaily caparison'd, it seem'd to me
As though all living things were centred here.
(11.20-4: my italics)

It is a moment of great power: comparable in its way to Lamb's 'fulness of joy at so much Life', or even to Wordsworth's 'We see into the life of things'. Lloyd is claiming - as no one has done before - that London is the *source* of imaginative life. There is enchantment in the rhythm of the verse and in the almost exotic heightening of the ordinary which he gives in phrases such as 'many-colour'd equipage' and 'gaily caparison'd'.¹⁴ At the back of his mind when he writes 'the busy hum of men' is the imaginary city of Milton's 'L'Allegro', a centre of chivalry and romance:

Towered cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men,
Where throngs of knights and barons bold

In weeds of peace high triumphs hold... (11.117-20)

Lloyd has taken over the romantic qualities of Milton's 'towered cities', but not their chivalric context. The enchantment is no longer associated with fairy tales or sleep ('L'Allegro', 115-16), but with the quality of childhood vision, which transforms the external world.

It is the monosyllabic power of that final line - 'As though all living things were centred here' - which is most impressive, conveying as it does the sense of activity magnetised by a still centre, as in Wordsworth's sonnet on Westminster Bridge:

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still.

This sense of London as a source of imaginative nourishment, of life itself, is seen by Lloyd as a quality of childhood vision, which dies away, leaving the feeling of 'merest emptiness' (1.26). Looking back, the only thing to do is to scorn it:

for I've sought
To cherish quiet musings, and disdain'd
The idle forms which play upon the sense...
(11.27-9: my italics)

The tone is exactly that of Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey', when he speaks of his instinctual communion with Nature in terms of 'the coarser pleasure of [his] boyish days', and his 'thoughtless youth'. For both poets, disparagement is a defence against the sense of loss. Both lament the passing of a time when the external world had had 'no need of a remoter charm'

By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrow'd from the eye ('Tintern Abbey', 82-3)

And both need to find 'abundant recompense'.

For Lloyd, as for Lamb, this can only come from 'friendship' or 'love', without which the external world is dead. Lloyd's rejection of solitary introversion is a magnificent piece of rhetoric (11.38-44). But only when he writes on a personal level does one get a sense of what 'solitude' really means:

Sometimes, 'tis true, when I have pac'd the haunts
Of crowded occupation, I have felt
A sad repression looking all around,
Not catching one known face amid the throng,
That answer'd mine with cordial pleasantness.
I've often thought upon some absent friend,
E'en till an assur'd hope that he was nigh
Has made me lift my head, and stretch my arm,
To gaze upon the form, and grasp the hand,
Of him who lived in my wayward dream.
And I have look'd, and all has been to me
A crowded desolation! (11.45-56)

This is Lloyd at his most powerful: writing simply, and suggestively, about himself. His use of a single physical gesture - the stretching out of an arm - is enough to create a sense of the loss and deprivation he feels; while the rhythms of the last two lines convey a hopelessness that seems permanent, yet permanently hoping.¹⁵

Given the enlivening power of love, or even just the memory of friendship, Lloyd's external world loses its numbness:

Thus can the heart, by its strange agency,
 Extract divine emotion from the scene
 Most barren and uncouth; which images
 To *him who cannot love*, who never felt
 That ever active warmth commingling still
 Its own existence with all present things,
 Naught beside forms, and bodily substances. (11.66-72)

Lloyd has moved into a new idiom to make his central claims. The language is close - extraordinarily so - to that of Coleridge's early poetry. It is not just that Lloyd has spent the most formative years of his life with Coleridge, and learnt his stylistic tricks, but that he seems to have felt himself intuitively into his friend's way of thinking. 'Love' is felt by Lloyd to have the power of imagination; its 'strange agency', (like the 'secret ministry' of Coleridge's frost) transforms the real world, and merges into it. Without love, the external world is 'barren and uncouth' ... 'naught beside forms, and bodily substances'.

Coleridge, writing to his wife from Germany in Spring 1799, puts it more emotionally:

I have, at times, experienced such an extinction of *Light* in my mind, I have been so forsaken by all the *forms* and *colourings* of Existence, as if the *organs* of Life had been dried up; as if only simple BEING remained, blind and stagnant! - After I have recovered from this strange state, & reflected upon it, I have thought of a man who should lose his companion in a desert of sand where his weary Halloos drop down in the air without an Echo. - I am deeply convinced that if I were to remain a few years among objects for whom I had no affection, I should wholly lose the powers of Intellect - Love is the vital air of my Genius...¹⁶

It is a nightmarish vision, more intensely portrayed than the loneliness of Lloyd's London, but with very close parallels: the man stranded in the desert, unable to shout to his friend, is like Lloyd, reaching out to grasp someone's hand, and touching only the forms which move in his 'wayward dream'. Coleridge's 'Light' is like the 'strange agency' of the heart, or the 'affection's swift, transforming quality': it is both within and without - rising from the objects perceived, and cast on them by the mind perceiving. The 'vital air' of love is Lloyd's 'ever active warmth commingling still / Its own existence with all present things'. One thinks forward to Coleridge in 'Dejection', abandoning faith in Nature's power to 'uphold and cherish', turning instead to the idea of the mind sharing its own joy with the external world:

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
 Enveloping the earth... (11.53-5)

Or of Wordsworth, writing (with Coleridge in mind) in his first *Essay on Epitaphs* (1810) about love as imagination:

The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen, no - nor ought to be seen, other than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualizes and beautifies it...¹⁷

Lloyd does not (like Wordsworth and Coleridge in the Conversation Poems) offer a one-sided view of the ways in which imagination is nourished; nor does he - like Lamb - offer a wholesale rejection of that view. His position is more ambiguous, and as he leaves his powerful philosophical poetry behind, he moves into a more tentative way of writing, offering qualifications of what has gone before:

Methinks he acts the purposes of life,
And fills the measure of his destiny
With best approved wisdom...

(the language has become formal, the diction stilted)

...who retires

To some majestic solitude; his mind
Rais'd by those visions of eternal love,
The rock, the vale, the forest, and the lake,
The sky, the sea, and everlasting hills...
But few there are who know to prize such bliss.

For a moment we are in the world Lamb disapproved of - where man, moulded by the natural forms of beauty, is felt to be elect in some way: capable of achieving a grandeur of imagination that is not possible to the city dweller. This aspect of Lloyd's response should not be underestimated. A passage in *Edmund Oliver* - belonging also, presumably, to Spring 1798 - offers a moral view of London which is the natural corollary of his claim for sky, sea and everlasting hills. 'How can a being', Lloyd writes,

How can a being who has nothing but distortion and foulness about him, acquire a fondness for moral beauty? Are narrow streets, dissonant cries, the howling of dogs, the piteous sobs of loathsome and ragged poverty, are these fit objects to discipline an immortal soul?

The rhythms are Cowperesque, but in terms of content, what the passage most nearly resembles is a letter of Coleridge's written to George Dyer in 1795:

It is melancholy to think, that the best of us are liable to be shaped & coloured by surrounding Objects - and a demonstrative proof, that Man was not made to live in Great Cities! (Griggs i, 154)

Lloyd is capable, then, of thinking in extreme Coleridgean terms, and he even breaks through for a moment into the grand Berkeleyan claims that remind one of 'Frost at Midnight':

He best performs the purposes of life,
And fills the measure of his destiny,
Who holds high converse with the present God
(Not mystically meant), and feels him ever
Made manifest to his transfigured soul. (11.80-4)

But as we have seen, Lloyd's response to London is deeply ambivalent, and it is one of the strengths of the poem that it never quite makes up its mind. Acknowledging the majesty of a life in the country, Lloyd sees it nonetheless as requiring a sacrifice, for it is difficult 'To live a lonely uncompanion'd thing / Exiled from human love and sympathies'. At the back of his mind, as he makes the phrase 'a lonely uncompanion'd thing' is a passage from Coleridge's 'Religious Musings' which he must have known well:

No common centre Man, no common sire

Knoweth! A sordid solitary thing,
 Mid countless brethren with a lonely heart
 Thro' courts and cities the smooth Savage roams
 Feeling himself, his own low Self the whole...

(ll. 148-52)

Consciously or otherwise, Lloyd is reversing the meaning of his source, and the fact that he does so reveals a great deal. Where Coleridge suggests that absence from nature causes one to be 'sordid' and 'solitary', Lloyd is suggesting that the solitude of Nature represents exile and absence. 'Therefore', he continues,

the city must detain *my* feet;
 For I would sometimes gaze upon a face
 That smiles on me, and speaks intelligibly
 Of one that answers all my hopes and fears. (ll. 90-3)

As Lloyd moves back into an affirmation of social love that reminds one of the poem's opening lines, there is a sense of circling which lies even deeper than the poem's structure. Like the ending of 'The Ancient Mariner', the last ten lines of the poem contain too explicit a formulation of orthodox 'love'. Without them, the poem is close to the form and meaning of 'Tintern Abbey', moving from the present into the past, finding in childhood a moment of intense perception, tracing its loss, seeking 'recompense' - and finally returning to the present with a deeper sense of vision. The culmination of 'London' comes at the moment, when having salvaged vision from the past, Lloyd is able to 'catch the language of [his] former heart', and return to the wonder of his childhood; but with a sense of something greater:

Nor is to me the sentiment of life
 Less acceptable, when I contemplate
Numberless living and progressive beings,
Acting the infinite varieties
Of this miraculous scene. (ll. 94-8)

The child has responded with wonderment to the *magic* of London - a magic which was felt to have some of the enchantment and glamour of an imaginary world. The 'many-colour'd equipage, and steeds / Gaily caparison'd' had belonged to the realm of romance, even if they had become a part of the child's way of seeing. But the adult is responding to London as something more palpable and vital. For Lloyd, as for Lamb, the wonderment to be felt is one of 'Joy at so much Life': the city is human, and it is humanity itself that seems a miracle.

Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, has written of Wordsworth's 'direct observation', in *The Prelude*, 'of a new set of physical and sense relationships: a new way of seeing men in what is experienced as a new kind of society...the first expression', he concludes, 'of what has since become a dominant experience of the city'. It is interesting, though, to notice how strongly Lloyd's 'London' anticipates - and even in some of its details forms the source for - Book Seven. Wordsworth's response to London altered drastically as a result of his stay there during September 1802 - a period in which he was shown the sights of London by Lamb. His 'Lines composed on Westminster Bridge' mark the beginning of this period, and also an important transitional moment. Making his opening claim, he must have been very conscious of Lamb's earlier response to the city:

Earth has not anything to show more fair;
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
 A sight so touching in its majesty...

The whimsicality of Lamb's private challenge has given way here to Wordsworth's much more serious claim for a union of tenderness and grandeur. On the surface it looks as though he has entirely changed his mind, but in effect he is not yet giving a true evaluation of the city. Wordsworth takes his cue ('Never did sun more beautifully steep / In his first splendour, valley, rock or hill.') from Dorothy's Journal entry for the 29th July 1802:¹⁸ 'It was a beautiful morning', she writes:

The City, St Paul's, with the River and a multitude of little Boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly with such a pure light that there was even something of the purity of one of Nature's own grand spectacles.¹⁹

Both Dorothy and William are measuring their response to the city against what Raymond Williams has called the 'shaping vision' of the countryside:²⁰ seeing it, to play games with Dorothy's language, through 'Nature's own grand spectacles'. In both writers, it is the pleasure of finding these opposite worlds at all comparable which gives immediacy and significance to their writing; and in both contexts, this pleasure could not exist if the light were different or there were smoke in the sky. For Charles Lamb, industrial smoke was not repellent. 'I love the very Smoke of London', he had written in January of that year, 'because it has been the medium most familiar to my vision'.²¹ But for Wordsworth it had always seemed - actually and symbolically - polluting; something that could either be used to represent the city as a place of alienation (see, for instance, the extraordinary opening line of 'To Joanna') or, if it seemed too intrusive a reminder of the actual (as in 'Tintern Abbey'), could be conveniently distanced, romanticized, edited out.²² In the context of 'Westminster Bridge' he is careful to carry over Dorothy's stress on the absence of smoke - 'all bright and glittering in the smokeless air' (l. 8), as though it is this which permits the serenity of the scene. Wordsworth's poem celebrates a moment of vision in which the real world is transformed:

This City now doth, like a garment wear
 The beauty of the morning...

he might almost have added 'a beauty not its own'. The garment, for all its apparent integration, is still external - a quality of Wordsworth's vision which transforms, and by implication conceals - London's real identity.²³ One has a sense of the scene being vulnerable, likely at any moment to vanish away like the 'baseless fabric of [Prospero's] vision' to which the poet is unconsciously alluding:

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind.²⁴

And once the transforming vision is gone, what is London? At midday for instance, with smoke against the sky and crowds flooding through the streets? Stripped of its visionary tranquillity it will wake, one suspects,

into the commercial squalor of that other famous sonnet written on this same visit to the city in September 1802:

The world is too much with us, late and soon
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.
Little we see in nature that is ours,
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.²⁵

London is less fragile an experience, in *Prelude* Book Seven, even at a moment which has close affinities with Westminster Bridge:

the peace

Of night, for instance, the solemnity
Of Nature's intermediate hours of rest
When the great tide of human life stands still,
The business of the day to come unborn,
Of that gone by locked up as in the grave;
The calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,
Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds
Unfrequent as in deserts; at late hours
Of winter evenings when unwholesome rains
Are falling hard, with people yet astir,
The feeble salutation from the voice
Of some unhappy woman now and then
Heard as we pass; when no one looks about,
Nothing is listen'd to. (1805 vii, 628-42)

Wordsworth is writing about London as a still heart, a place where repose and potential are fused; but this quality is felt in atmospheric rather than visionary terms. The scene is not likely to slip away. The 'feeble salutation' of the woman, interrupting but not quite dispelling the tranquility, is a real reminder of human suffering, not a symbolic gesture towards it.²⁶ The poet is no longer keeping a safe, moralizing distance from the London of corruption, but is fully and personally engaged in the London of Experience. 'O friend', he writes, describing the loneliness and estrangement that are part of this more personal response:

O friend, one feeling was there which belonged
To this great city by exclusive right:
How often in the overflowing streets
Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, 'The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery.' (1805 vii, 593-8)

For a moment, Wordsworth's echoic language seems to signal a return to earlier values. The voice of the conversation idiom creeps in with the reference to Coleridge, and the phrase 'great city' takes us back, through a sequence of reverberations, to 'Frost at Midnight'. But the city Wordsworth describes is not what the echo leads us to expect. It has stopped being a metaphor, and is being used, instead, to record a personal estrangement reminiscent of Lloyd's:

And I have look'd, and all has been to me
A crowded desolation! Not one being,
'Mid that incessant and perturbed throng,
Dreamt of *my* hopes or fears! ('London', 55-8)

As Wordsworth's personal engagement increases, different kinds of impressive

complication enter his writing. There is, first of all, an ambivalence of mood - for we are offered on the one hand a London of silence, darkness, estrangement, and on the other a place that embodies the 'busy hum of men'. Wordsworth has not, till this moment, valued the city for its humanness, and when he does so, he sounds like Lamb in January 1801:

The broad highway appearance, as it strikes
 On strangers of all ages, the quick dance
 Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din,
 The endless stream of men and moving things,
 From hour to hour the illimitable walk
 Still among streets, with clouds and sky above,
 The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness,
 The glittering chariots with their pampered steeds,
 Stalls, barrows, porters... (11.155-63)

But there is a further complexity, beyond the doubleness of London's face, which is to do with conscious and unconscious valuations of its power. Wordsworth seems at moments in Book Seven to have accepted Lamb's position, and to be seeing the city as a formative experience - just as crucial in moulding his imagination as the country, just as exciting as the 'changeable language' of the 'ancient hills'. As he puts it himself, not just quoting Lamb's letter to him,²⁷ but - in an astonishing reversal of 'Tintern Abbey' - adopting Lamb's parodic strategies as his own:

Shall I, as the mood
 Inclines me, here describe for pastime's sake,
 Some portion of that motley imagery,
 A vivid pleasure of my youth, and now,
 Among the lonely places that I love
 A frequent daydream for my riper mind? (11.148-53)²⁸

The Wordsworth of 1798 had been able, 'in lonely rooms', and 'mid the din / Of towns and cities' to carry with him the 'forms of beauty' from a rural world. Now, in a witty, Elian reversal, it is urban life that he looks back on, from his 'lonely places' in Cumbria - the vitality of London that nourishes his 'riper mind'. And yet this conscious acknowledgment of the city's potential (containing as it does Wordsworth's self-conscious admission to a change of mind) is not the true centre of Book Seven, nor the place where great poetry is to be found. Like Cowper, Wordsworth is at his best when he is disturbed: when the random or the chaotic unsettles his sense of order; when the alien refuses to be subdued. His confrontation with the London Beggar - whose 'fixed face and sightless eyes' (1.621) seem to admonish him 'from another world' (1.622) - is the most unaccountable, the most traumatic, of his 'spots of time';²⁹ while Bartholomew Fair offers him the exact equivalent of Cowper's 'metropolitan volcanoes' breathing darkness 'all day long' (*The Task* iii, 737-8), for it embodies a Satanic underworld to which he is drawn against his conscious will:

What a hell
 For eyes and ears, what anarchy and din
 Barbarian and infernal - 'tis a dream
 Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound!
 (1805 vii, 659-62)

But, like Cowper, Wordsworth retreats from the implications of his most imaginative writing. The last section of Book Seven is astonishing in its

apparent insensitivity to the claims that have gone before:

O, blank confusion, and a type not false
 Of what the mighty city is itself
 To all except a straggler here and there -
 To the whole swarm of its inhabitants -
 An undistinguishable world to men,
 The slaves unrespited of low pursuits,
 Living amid the same perpetual flow
 Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
 To one identity, by differences
 That have no law, no meaning, and no end - (vii, 696-705)

The passage belongs, chronologically and stylistically, back in 1800 when Wordsworth had thought of the city as a universe of death: a 'vacant commerce' with 'dead things'.³⁰ In structural terms, it represents not a falling away of vision, so much as a denial of the imaginative centre of Book Seven. But in terms of Wordsworth's real development, it is nothing of the sort. Despite its extraneous last passage, the book represents a genuine climax in his writing: a moment when he can see the city not just aesthetically, as 'the quick dance / Of colours, lights and forms', but with an awareness of things purely human. For the first time, he is responding without prejudice or condescension to the central experience of London - its own 'changeable language':

The endless stream of men and moving things...
 The comers and the goers face to face
 Face after face...

And for the first time, the random and the anarchic are allowed their full power. Lloyd and Lamb have played their part. It seems very appropriate that in the 'Extempore Effusion' of 1835 which contains those beautiful lines -

And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,
 Has vanished from his lonely hearth... (ll. 19-20)

- Wordsworth should move from the 'clouds that rake the mountain-summits, / Or waves that own no curbing hand' (ll. 21-2) to the great image of the city:

Our haughty life is crowned with darkness,
 Like London with its own black wreath... (ll. 29-30)

The smoke through which Lamb saw and valued the daily life of the city has become his lasting memorial.

Based on a Lecture given to the Society on 9 April 1983

NOTES

- 1 *The Task* i, 749; all references are to Cowper's *Poetical Works*, ed. H S Milford, (Oxford Standard Authors, 1905; reprinted 1967).
- 2 The city elsewhere in *The Task* is frequently seen as a 'prison' or 'dungeon', and city-dwellers are 'self-imprison'd in their proud saloons' (i, 413) or 'imprison'd long / In some unwholesome dungeon' (i, 436-7)
- 3 In the background, at this point, one should be hearing - or, rather, anticipating - the rhythms of Wordsworth's 'Intimations':

truths that wake,
 To perish never;
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor Man nor Boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy! (ll. 156-61)

- 4 Wordsworth must be recalling the first three lines of this passage in Book Five of *The Prelude*, when he is describing, not the city, but the opposition to a natural education which the infant prodigy represents:
- Meanwhile old Grandame Earth is grieved to find
 The playthings which her love designed for him
 Unthought of - in their woodland beds the flowers
 Weep, and the river-sides are all forlorn.
 (1805 v, 346-9)
- 5 The poem is printed at the end of this article.
- 6 See "'In city pent": Echo and Allusion in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb, 1797-1801', *Review of English Studies*, New Series xxxii, 128 (November 1981), 408-28.
- 7 Coleridge had first used the phrase in a sonnet of 1795, 'To the Nightingale': 'How many Bards in city garret pent' (l. 2), which he had echoed in 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' (1797): 'thou has pined / And hunger'd after Nature, many a year, / In the great City pent' (ll. 28-30). See *ibid*, pp.409, 424n.
- 8 *The letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W Marrs Jr (Ithaca, NY, 1975) i, 267; cited hereafter as Marrs.
- 9 See Note 6 above.
- 10 Lloyd's dedication to Southey is dated 26 February 1798. The volume came out in March or early April.
- 11 The letter is dated Wed. 9th May, 1798 (*BY*, 217): Wordsworth records the receipt of 'Charles Lloyd's Works', which must presumably mean his most recently published volume. He no doubt owned *Poems* of Coleridge, Lamb and Lloyd (1797) and was hardly likely at this date to be referring to Lloyd's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1795) or those on *The Death of Priscilla Farmer* (1796).
- 12 He had done so after all in the verse which went into Coleridge's *Poems*, 1797. Coleridge defended it - and his own - against the charge of 'querulous egotism' in the *Preface*.
- 13 As they had seemed earlier in the year, when he wrote the first poem in the volume: 'Stain not my soul with sin, ye tainted scenes / That rise around'. It is interesting to note that this poem began with the clichéd sentence 'Escap'd the jarrings of the restless crowd...' echoing the famous line of Gray's 'Elegy': 'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife', which became a catch-phrase in the 1790 s. An indication of the extent of its popularity is the number of times Bowles uses it in his *Sonnets* 1796: 'Far from the stormy world's tumultuous roar' (iv, 13); 'Long banished from the world's insulting throng' (viii, 13); 'beyond the murmurs of mankind' (v, 11).
- 14 Compare Wordsworth's childhood imaginings of London in Book Seven of *The Prelude*: 'Marvellous things / My fancy had shaped forth of sights

and shows, / Processions, equipages, lords and dukes, / The king and the king's palace...' (vii, 100-11).

- 15 Wordsworth was the only other poet at the time who *could* have written such lines. They have a strong feel of his early blank verse about them ('The Pedlar', or 'The Discharged Soldier' for instance). Lloyd had visited the Wordsworths at Alfoxden during September 1797, but only briefly when he was on a flying visit to Coleridge in Nether Stowey. There is a possibility that he may have seen draft material from 'The Pedlar', but no reason to infer that he imitated it, or was even influenced by it.
- 16 *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E L Griggs (Oxford, 1956) i, 470-1.
- 17 *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W J B Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols; Oxford, 1974) ii, 58; my italics.
- 18 Twice in the summer of 1802 Wordsworth saw this view of London from Westminster Bridge, and on both occasions he was travelling on the early morning coach with Dorothy. On 29 July, they were setting out for France to see Annette Vallon, and on 1 September they were returning from France, and entered London just after dawn in the same light. (Reed *Chronology* ii, 191). Wordsworth probably composed the poem - very quickly - within the next two days, drawing closely on Dorothy's Journal entry, of which he had presumably been reminded as they crossed Westminster Bridge for the second time. For alternative dating, see Reed *Chronology* ii, 188.
- 19 *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Mary Moorman, (Oxford, 1971), 150-1.
- 20 *The Country and the City*, 184.
- 21 *The Londoner*, No.1. Marrs ii, 57.
- 22 The 'wreathes of smoke / Sent up in silence, from among the trees' in the landscape round Tintern Abbey are - for Wordsworth the poet - signs of lonely human life:
- With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some hermits cave, where by his fire
The hermit sits alone. (11.20-3)
- But for Wordsworth the tourist - carrying Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* in his pocket - they were simply an intrusive reminder of the local ironworks: 'The country about Tintern Abbey hath been described as a solitary, tranquil scene: but its immediate environs only are meant. Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron-works; which introduce noise and bustle into these regions of tranquillity' (Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, [1782], 37).
- 23 For an examination of Wordsworth's use of clothing and incarnation metaphors, and a discussion of 'radical ambiguity' in 'Lines Composed on Westminster Bridge', see J Hillis Miller, 'The Still Heart: Poetic Form in Wordsworth', *NLH* ii, 2 (Winter 1971).
- 24 *The Tempest* iv, i, 152-6. It is interesting to notice that Lloyd, in his first impression of London also echoes these lines from *The Tempest*, and is not afraid to turn clouds into smoke: 'When first a little one I mark'd far off / The wreathed smoke that *capp'd thy palaces...*' It is

- probably pure coincidence that both poets have Shakespeare in mind.
- 25 Both poems were written during Wordsworth's initial reaction against the city in September 1802 (see Reed *Chronology*, ii, 191, 699).
- 26 Contrast, for instance, the presence of the vagrants and the hermit in 'Tintern Abbey', introduced by Wordsworth so tentatively that their actuality is left behind.
- 27 The words 'motley mystery' at vii, 148 seem to recall Lamb's phrase 'the motley Strand', used in his letter to Wordsworth of January 1801 (Marrs i, 267), quoted above, p.172. See my article, 'In City Pent', for the Shakespearian implications of the word (*op.cit.*, 427).
- 28 The line 'Some portion of that motley imagery' (150) recalls a passage written for *The Prelude* in January 1804:

I had hopes
 Still higher, that with a frame of outward life
 I might endue, might fix in a visible home
Some portion of those phantoms of conceit,
 That had been floating loose about so long...
 (1805 i, 127-31; my italics)

- 29 See Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), 303-7, for reasons why this should be so.
- 30 See *Home at Grasmere*, MS B, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, NY, 1977); ll. 808, 810.

LONDON

A Poem.

In solitude
What happiness! who can enjoy alone?
Or all enjoying, what contentment find?
 Milton.

Thou first of human feelings, social love!
 I must obey thy powerful sympathies,
 E'en though I've often found that those my heart
 Most priz'd were creatures of its warm desires,
 Rather than aught which other men less prone
 To affections swift, transforming quality,
 Might worthy deem or excellent! 5

Thy scenes,
 Thy tainted scenes, proud city, now detain
 My restless feet. 'Twill soothe a vacant hour
 To trace what dim inexplicable links
 Of hidden nature have inclin'd my soul
 To love what heretofore it most abhorr'd.
 When first a little one I mark'd far off
 The wreathed smoke that capp'd thy palaces,
 Oh what a joyous fluttering of the heart,
 Oh what exulting hopes were mine! Methought
 Within thy walls there must be somewhat strange
 Surpassing greatly any wondrous dream
 Of fairy grandeur which my childhood lov'd. 10 15

And when I heard the busy hum of men, 20
 And saw the passing crowd in endless ranks,
 The many-colour'd equipage, and steeds
 Gaily caparison'd, it seem'd to me
 As though all living things were centred here. 25
 But other feelings soon transform'd these shews
 To meerest emptiness, e'en till my soul
 Would sicken at their presence; for I've sought
 To cherish quiet musings, and disdain'd
 The idle forms which play upon the sense, 30
 Yet give the heart no comfortable thoughts.
 Yes, I have sought the solitary walk,
 Where I might number every absent friend,
 And give a tear to each: I've nurs'd my soul
 With strangest contemplation, till it wore 35
 A sad and lonely character, untouch'd
 By th' operation of external shapes.
 Yet, London, now thou'rt pleasant - 'tis e'en so!
 For I am sick of hopes that stand aloof
 From common sympathy; for I am sick 40
 Of pampering delicate exclusive loves,
 And silly dreams of rapture, that would pull
 The shrinking hand from every honest grasp,
 The shrinking heart from every honest pledge,
 Not trickt in gracefulness poetical! 45
 Sometimes, 'tis true, when I have pac'd the haunts
 Of crowded occupation, I have felt
 A sad repression looking all around,
 Nor catching one known face amid the throng,
 That answer'd mine with cordial pleasantness. 50
 I've often thought upon some absent friend,
 E'en till an assur'd hope that he was nigh
 Has made me lift my head, and stretch my arm,
 To gaze upon the form, and grasp the hand,
 Of him who lived in my wayward dream. 55
 And I have look'd, and all has been to me
 A crowded desolation! Not one being,
 'Mid that incessant and perturbed throng,
 Dreamt of *my* hopes or fears! Then have I pac'd
 With breathless eagerness; and if an eye 60
 Has met my gaze, wherein some trace remote
 Lived of one on whom my heart has lean'd,
 A gentle thrilling of awaken'd love
 Has warm'd my breast, and haply kindled there
 A dream of parted days, that so my feet, 65
 It seem'd to me, mov'd on in solitude.
 Thus can the heart, by its strange agency,
 Extract divine emotion from the scene
 Most barren and uncouth; which images
 To *him who cannot love*, who never felt 70
 That ever active warmth commingling still
 Its own existence with all present things,
 Nought beside forms, and bodily substances.
 Methinks he acts the purposes of life,
 And fills the measure of his destiny

With best approved wisdom, who retires 75'
 To some majestic solitude; his mind
 Rais'd by those visions of eternal love,
 The rock, the vale, the forest, and the lake,
 The sky, the sea, and everlasting hills.
 He best performs the purposes of life, 80
 And fills the measure of his destiny,
 Who holds high converse with the present¹ God
 (Not mystically meant), and feels him ever
 Made manifest to his transfigur'd soul.
 But few there are who know to prize such bliss. 85
 And he who thus would raise his mortal being
 Must shake weak nature off, and be content
 To live a lonely uncompanion'd thing,
 Exil'd from human loves and sympathies.
 Therefore the city must detain *my* feet; 90
 For I would sometimes gaze upon a face
 That smiles on me, and speaks intelligibly
 Of one that answers all my hopes and fears.
 Nor is to me the sentiment of life
 Less acceptable, when I contemplate 95
 Numberless living and progressive beings,
 Acting the infinite varieties
 Of this miraculous scene. For though the dim
 And inharmonious ministrations here,
 Of heavenly wisdom, may confound the sense 100
 The partial sense of man, *my soul* is glad;
 Trusting that all, yea every² living thing,
 Shall understand, in the appointed time,
 And praise the inwoven mystery³ of sin;
 Losing each hope and each propellent fear 105
 In perfect bliss; and "God be all in all!"

NOTES

- 1 The doctrine of Berkeley, of which the Author is a believer, is here alluded to.
- 2 See Hartley 'On the final Happiness of all Mankind'.
- 3 'For the *mystery of iniquity* doth already work.' *St Paul to Timothy*.

COLERIDGE ON CHILD-LABOUR REFORM

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The history of British factory legislation from its official beginning in 1802 throughout the nineteenth century has generally been regarded as a tragic course of events in which a concern for the plight of the children in the cotton mills and factories was pitted against the economic concerns of powerful factory owners and their backers.¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge joined this human rights struggle, collaboratively in 1816 and independently in 1818.² Although the corpus of his child-labour work was limited to two extant pamphlets, to several *Courier* articles (many of which

were collaborations), and to intermittent comments in his letters, all his remarks on the issue revealed his utter loathing of the conditions in the mills and the factories and his desire to arrive at a philosophical and moral solution to this dilemma. Although eminent scholars like Kathleen Coburn, John Colmer, and David Erdman have identified Coleridge as an advocate of child-labour reform, no scholar has so far dealt with his published views in any detail.³ My purpose, therefore, is to explicate his 1818 work in greater detail in order to suggest that he was a significant child-labour reformer.

Coleridge began his independent protest in February of 1818 when Peel presented to the Commons a bill to ameliorate factory conditions. According to Coleridge, Peel's strategy lacked two significant elements. In a letter to C A Tulk, 21 February 1818, he criticized Peel for failing to initiate a campaign for public enlightenment before the bill was presented officially.⁴ To make matters worse, thought Coleridge, he had made a blunder by reserving his arguments for the second or the third reading. Coleridge argued that Peel should have modified his tactics so as to be 'governed by the movements of the Opponents' (CL, IV, 841-2), a polemical method that would characterize his own 1818 pamphlets.

In order to compensate for Peel's allegedly poor showing, Coleridge sought to initiate a propaganda campaign, 'in Papers, Magazine[s] and 3 penny pamphlets' (CL, IV, 843). As John Colmer has rightly observed: 'Coleridge showed a remarkable understanding of the necessity of preparing public opinion...'⁵ Acutely aware of the role of public opinion in such a controversy, he confidently asserted that the arguments of the anti-reform faction 'might be dispatched in 3 sentences', if only he were permitted to circulate to every member of Parliament 'a $\frac{1}{2}$ of a Sheet, or a single Printed Paper' (CL, IV, 843). He also focused upon two favourite anti-reform arguments: that government had no right to interfere in labour relations, and that

(A)ll the miseries, and diseases of Soul and Body which are the inevitable consequences of a factory, in which Children from 6 to 14 work...in a foul and heated atmosphere, from 13 to 14...hours daily, are here attributed to the *last* three hours; and the first 3 years of age -
(CL, IV, 843)

To refute the ideas that 'Factory Children *are* happy and healthy', and that these evils were now in the process of being corrected by 'The increased humanity and enlightened Self-interest of the Masters themselves', he proposed to expand upon them in an essay that would rely upon medical testimony. On these grounds, the anti-reformers had avowed that 'legislative Interference' was both unnecessary and unnatural since any kind of intervention tampered with the natural growth of industry. According to Colmer, Coleridge believed that 'Manufacturers must accept State regulations', a view he had examined more thoroughly in his *Lay Sermons*.⁶

Several collaborative letters by Coleridge and by William Mudford, the editor of *The Courier*, were printed in support of Peel's measure. Erdman has stated that these letters (25, 26, 31 March 1818) were timed to elicit support for the debate that was scheduled for early April (EOT, II, 483n). For instance, in a 31 March letter - one attributed to him on the basis of style and relevance - Coleridge, using the pseudonym of Plato, composed an ironic piece advocating the anti-reformers' argument in order to reveal

them as sophistries. He affirmed that 'the Bill for the Relief of Children employed in Cotton Factories' was an impudent, pernicious, and arbitrary piece of legislation because the cotton factories were 'necessary to the comfort, health, and happiness of the children' (*EOI*, II, 484); and he continued this ironic impersonation by citing a famous anti-reformist argument: any ameliorative bill would not only 'open the door to legislative interference in other cases of free labor', but also would 'unhinge and overset the natural relations and competitions which maintain the due subordination, and social order of the State' (*EOI*, II, 485).

Having sustained the irony through a sequence of rhetorical questions that dealt with hours and the environment, Coleridge-as-'Plato' stated that fatal disorders incurred in the factories were socially beneficial in that they helped to control population. To Coleridge, this was cold-blooded utilitarian logic. As Coburn has remarked, Coleridge's advocacy of Peel's efforts was based upon the conviction that the free-labour argument was deceptive 'and that the labor of children was not free at all, that they were in fact slaves of an expanding commercial enterprise'.⁷

The ironic attack was next directed to the question of discipline in the factories and in the schools, as well as to the inhospitable conditions in the prisons, the speaker protesting that to limit a child to less than a mere twelve-hour day - a limitation aggressively resisted by the mill-owners - would be 'an act of the basest ingratitude' (*EOI*, II, 487). Coleridge was echoing anti-reform tenets set forth in 'On the Bill for Imposing Restrictions on Cotton Factories', a tract that addressed the proposed reduction of work-hours from twelve and one-half to eleven. The corporate voice of the anti-reformists argued that the

...probable effect of this arrangement is, that the time intended for instruction will be given to recreation by the very young. (p.39)

...It cannot tend to the prevention of crimes, for if their vacant time be spent in idleness, it will lead to crimes; and if in school, they will be no more beyond the reach of temptation than if it had been spent in the mill. (p.41)

...Another way in which it directly attacks the morals of those whose character it particularly professes to improve, is, that it sets the child against the parent, by telling the former that his bodily and mental welfare have been saved from the grasp of his parent's avarice only by the strong hand of an act of parliament. (p.45)⁸

These were just three of the casuistries Coleridge faced.

Having proclaimed that 'Competition is the life of trade, and trade, the sinews, bones, and muscles of the State,' Plato attempted to equate *laissez-faire* economic theory to moral freedom. In so doing, he voiced what Coleridge thought a liberal heresy: the displacement of the moral imperative of the sanctity and the autonomy of the human personality by a materialistic ethic that professed, instead, the inviolability of abstract laws and the industrial State. Contemporary critics have noted this. Coburn, for one, has observed that Coleridge used the commonplace analogy between black slaves and child-labourers, a comparison originally made by William Wilberforce, to indicate the moral, as well as the physical, servitude of the down-trodden.⁹ Astonishingly, however, the manufacturers claimed that their system actually *upheld* moral freedoms, a claim they based upon the half-truth that parents eagerly apprenticed their children

to them, accepted all terms of employment, and did so through their own free will; however, poverty left many parents little choice, a point the industrialists could not, or refused to, recognize. This dilemma was illustrated in the minutes of Peel's 23 February speech to the Commons in which several parents, having presented a petition advocating the amelioration of hours and of conditions, stated

that as from their poverty they were unable to do without the labour of their children, they were compelled to submit to the hours which the masters of the factories chose to establish. It was obvious, then that the parents themselves had no discretion or control in the business, and that the legislature alone could regulate the management of these factories.¹⁰

Yet the anti-reformists interpreted the parents' lack of 'discretion or control' and their alleged impoverishment as 'avarice' ('Restrictions', p.45); and they twisted this to read that an act of Parliament, and not an act of conscience, saved their 'bodily and mental welfare'. But, in their sophistical attempt at discrediting the parents before their own children, the anti-reformists had contradicted themselves: they inadvertently admitted that the 'bodily and mental welfare' of the children needed saving!

Warning that the prevailing fear of Luddism, or of factory violence in general, was a legitimate concern, Plato argued that the passage of a factory reform bill could start an avalanche of liberal reform (see *EOT*, II, 488). Here Coleridge mocked the anti-Jacobin extremists who equated humane and necessary reform with radicalism and with revolution. With an exaggerated fear of popular revolt, they misconstrued every public outcry as the voice of anarchy. Having approached the issue as a conservative humanist, he realized that popular unrest oftentimes resulted when basic human rights were persistently violated; however, he did not condone violent protests and unequivocally condemned mob violence, even if it appeared justified ethically.

Concerned with both the immediate and the long-range effects of utilitarianism, Coleridge reviewed the issues in two significant documents, 'Remarks...on Sir Robert Peel's Bill' (18 April) and 'The Grounds of Sir Robert Peel's Bill Vindicated by S.T. Coleridge' (24 April).¹¹ These pamphlets were integral to his propaganda campaign since they directly refuted the anti-reformist tract, 'On the Bill for Imposing Restrictions on Cotton Factories', and since they preceded Peel's most comprehensive presentation to Parliament in which he would enter 'at some length into the nature and objects of the Bill...' (Peel, I, 98-102). Coleridge's April efforts antedated by several weeks the passage of the Bill in the Commons on 30 April.

Coleridge began the 18 April pamphlet with a dismissal of the anti-reformist contention

that children from six to sixteen years of age, who are kept at work, standing, from thirteen to fifteen hours in the twenty-four, in a heated and polluted atmosphere, are healthier and happier than those who are employed in trades where said grievances do not exist (p.71).

Having ironically overstated the case to reveal its speciousness, he enumerated the four other objections: 1) 'the impropriety of legislative interference with free labor'; 2) the fear of social unrest as a result of

such legislation; 3) the fear of setting a liberal precedent; and 4) the claim that the manufacturers were themselves actively engaged in improving conditions. He set out to invalidate each premise.

Having replied to the first objection concerning the impropriety of legislative intervention in employer-employee relations, Coleridge declared that this concept had absolutely no basis in judicial history and that 'The Statute Books are (perhaps too much) crowded with proofs to the contrary' (p.173). The accuracy of this assertion was, however, doubtful since he asked Henry Crabb Robinson, in a May letter, to furnish proof of government interference 'with what is ironically called *Free Labor*?... (CL, IV, 855). Apparently, Coleridge made this assertion without having the facts at hand. Whether they were available remains to be seen; but he cited Peel's 1802 'Health and Morals of Apprentices Act' as such a precedent. According to Hutchins and Harrison, however, this was not actually a factory act even though its provisions referred to the hours, environment, and educational opportunities of the apprentices; rather, as they have explained, the 1802 measure (which in itself proved ineffective) was merely an extension of the Elizabethan Poor Law.¹² At any rate, it was the effect of such a measure, and not its origin or cause, that was important to Coleridge, for he believed that commercial prosperity in the modern age could be ascribed, not to *laissez-faire* policy, but rather to government intervention and control.

Coleridge stressed the children's suffering and stated that, unless conditions were modified, 'discontent in the sufferers' was assured. And he also attacked the sophistry that, because absolute amelioration was unlikely, no action whatsoever would be helpful. On the contrary, limited amelioration, he thought, was both necessary and possible. Perhaps having tired of the opposition's contorted logic, he declared that,

Generalities are apt to deceive us. Individualise the sufferings which it is the object of this Bill to remedy, follow up the detail in some case with human sympathy, and the deception vanishes (p.177).

More than one critic has highlighted Coleridge's genuine humanitarian sympathy towards these victims.¹³ Yet it would take more than sympathy - and more than the cogent reports, medical testimonies, statistics, and eye-witness accounts - to overcome the anti-reformist *bloc*, whose evasive physicians attempted quite successfully to thwart the reformers in the Lords.

Coleridge believed that the fourth objection to the Bill - that 'the good sense and humanity of the masters' would prevail - was groundless, if not ludicrous (pp.177-8). Since 1800, he wrote, 'The time and quantum of the labor extorted from the children has been unceasing,' while factory conditions continued to worsen. But despite the overt hypocrisy and intransigence of the opposition, this document was structurally and rhetorically impressive. Colmer has commented that this piece was a polemical gem, in which 'a wealth of concrete detail,' in his words, revealed the anti-reformists' 'cold calculating self-interest' and 'thorough disregard for the sufferings of others'.¹⁴

In a letter to William Mudford written prior to the publication of 'The Grounds of Sir Robert Peel's Bill Vindicated...', he again referred to anti-Jacobinism and expressed his optimism that the 'cause' of child-labour reform, over which legitimate witnesses 'have been deputed to watch ... is likely to be victorious' (CL, IV, 852-3). Indeed, the facts and the

witnesses seemed altogether incontrovertible. One of those to have testified on behalf of the children was a 'Dr. Symmonds' (*sic* 'Simmons'), who would figure prominently in Coleridge's second pamphlet as a medical authority who would denounce factory conditions unequivocally. The bulk of the evidence marshalled for the second pamphlet was medical. These testimonies were published that spring under the title, 'Information concerning the state of the children employed in cotton factories, printed for the use of the members of both Houses of Parliament' (London: J Gleave, 1818), a document to which Coleridge had access. In some detail, Dr Simmons described the child-labour syndrome:

The persons employed in Cotton Factories are confined in an atmosphere polluted by their own respiration - by effluvia from their own bodies - by impurities thrown off from the cotton, and floating in the room - and by the lights, which besides consume a large quantity of respirable air. In this situation, so little calculated for much bodily exertion, the spinners are kept in a state of continued activity which necessarily produces fatigue; and by daily repetition, this fatigue becomes excessive, and the vigour of the body is gradually exhausted: hence the diseases of spinners are the most part diseases of debility. It must also be observed, that when thus enfeebled, they are more readily susceptible of the impression of the occasional causes of disease, which produce topical affections of various kinds, sometime acute, but chiefly of a chronic nature. Even in this state, the same lengthened activity is still persevered in until the system is no longer able to support itself. (pp. 17-18)¹⁵

Undoubtedly familiar with this and other medical reports, Coleridge asserted that, 'the *general* results of the employment of children, in the manners stated to [the physicians], must be greatly and *radically* detrimental to their health.' He continued to write that

...the consequences to be expected would be - stunted growth, debility, rickets, scrofula, mesenteric obstructions, in short, all the various diseases that arise from impaired digestion and pulmonary derangement, in *many*. (p.181)

Having therefore characterized the witnesses for reform as authoritative and respectable members of the community, Coleridge sketched a subtle picture of the opposition, being certain not to denounce them outrightly as self-interested exploiters. Rather, he cautiously suggested to the public and to Parliament that it was necessary to be on guard, 'in receiving the testimony of men...on a point in which they can only be regarded as witnesses in their own cause' (p.184) - a point he illustrated through a discrepancy in the published anti-reformist evidence. Mr Sandford, a delegate for the Master Spinners, asserted that the children received one hour per day in which they enjoyed a meal outside of the mills; yet, in the Minutes of the Committee, explained Coleridge, a reference to one of the mills cited by Sandford showed quite the contrary: the children were permitted to dine at home one hour, one day *per week*; moreover, they were obliged to work and to eat *at the same time*, or they would forfeit their meal-time altogether (p.185).

Coleridge would react sardonically to the eventual passage by the Lords of the enlarged Cotton Factories Regulation Act of 1819 because this version would prove to be an even weaker and more ineffective version of its 1818 prototype (EOT, II, 484n). His faith in the triumph of rational argument

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and human sympathy over the iniquity of child-labour abuse was not to be rewarded in his lifetime.

NOTES

- 1 For an historical survey of British factory reform legislation, I am indebted to B L Hutchins and A Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 3rd ed. (1903; rpt. New York: Augustus M Kelley, 1968), pp. 14-29. Other works to which I am indebted include J L and Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, ed. Asa Briggs (1925; rpt. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 125-68; T S Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830* (1948; rpt. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), pp.78-83; and E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1959), pp.331-49. A useful selection of period documents is available in *English Historical Documents, 1783-1832*, eds A Aspinall and E Anthony Smith (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp.723-46. Coleridge's fellow Romantics were acutely aware of the conditions in the mills and factories and of the adverse effects they had on the physical and mental well-being of the children. No doubt Coleridge was influenced by Wordsworth's 1814 verse-lamentation for the factory child in *The Excursion*, VIII, 306-34 [*The Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969)]. The most well known prose-lamentation and satire of child abuse during this period was Lamb's 'In Praise of Chimney Sweepers' (1822) [in *Works*, ed. E V Lucas, 4 vols (London: Methuen, 1903), II].
- 2 David V Erdman has noted, in his prefatorial remarks to 'Children in the Cotton Factories' [in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays on His Times in 'The Morning Post' and 'The Courier'*, ed. David V Erdman, 3 vols (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), II, 483n, Vol.III of his *Collected Works*, eds Kathleen Coburn and Bart Winer, 17 vols Bollingen Series LXXV (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969-).], that Coleridge was following the factory amelioration issue as early as 1816 when he published a collaborative essay on the subject. But his independent work began in 1818.
- 3 See Kathleen Coburn, ed., *Inquiring Spirit*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p.19; John Colmer, *Coleridge: Critic of Society* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp.45-6, 149-51; and Erdman, *EOT*, II, 483n. In his brief, but incisive discussion, Colmer outlines the background of the controversy, cites several supplementary Coleridge letters, and highlights two major issues in the pamphlets.
- 4 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Letters*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956-71), IV, 841-2; hereafter cited as 'CL'.
- 5 Colmer, p.149.
- 6 Colmer, p.151.
- 7 Coburn, *IS*, p.19.
- 8 The major anti-reform arguments can be reviewed in 'An Inquiry into the Principle and Tendency of the Bill now pending in Parliament for imposing certain restrictions on Cotton Factories' (London: Cradock, and Joy, 1818), pp.37-50; rpt. in *The Factory Act of 1819, (1818-1819). Six Pamphlets*, ed. Kenneth Carpenter (New York: Arno, 1972).

- 9 See Coburn, *IS*, p.19. Wilberforce made this allusion in a speech to the Commons, 17 February 1818, a fact noted by the Hammonds, p.165. Coleridge drew his humanistic ethic entirely from Kant. For his famous distinction between 'persons' and 'things', he referred to Kant's 1783 *Groundwork of a Metaphysic of Morals* [See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of a Metaphysic of Morals*, ed. and trans. H J Paton, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp.95-9, 112.] and used it recurrently in his philosophical and journalistic prose. See, for instance, his *Friend*, ed. Barbara E Rooke, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), II, 125, Vol.IV of his *Collected Works*; *EOT*, II, 393; and his *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p.15, Vol.X of his *Collected Works*.
- 10 Sir Robert Peel, *The Speeches of the Late Sir Robert Peel, Bart., Delivered in the House of Commons, 1810-1850*, 4 vols (London: George Routledge, 1853; rpt. New York: Kraus, 1972), I, p.92, hereafter cited as, 'Peel'.
- 11 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Remarks by S.T. Coleridge on Sir Robert Peel's Bill' and 'The Grounds of Sir Robert Peel's Bill Vindicated by S.T. Coleridge', in *Coleridge at Highgate*, by Lucy E Gillman Watson (New York: Longmans, Green, 1925), App. I, pp.171-80, 181-7, respectively. Both texts are reproduced in *IS*, pp.351-65; and a facsimile of the 'Remarks' pamphlet is reprinted in section ii of *The Factory Act of 1819*. I have used the Watson texts.
- 12 Hutchins and Harrison, p.16.
- 13 Colmer, p.46.
- 14 Colmer, p.46.
- 15 See 'Extracts from Evidence taken before Committees of the House of Lords, 1818' (Manchester: J Gleave, Deansgate, 1819), pp.20-72; rpt. in *The Factory Act of 1819*, pamphlet iv, pp.1-72.

RECONSIDERING DOROTHY WORDSWORTH

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What follows is a bit digressive and relatively informal. It might more properly be called 'Dorothy Wordsworth: Facts and Problems' (with more of the latter than the former) or 'Notes toward a Reconsideration of Dorothy Wordsworth': but my choice of wording probably indicates well enough that the matters which follow are in flux. So I will leave my title as 'Reconsidering Dorothy Wordsworth' and just add the focus of a sub-title: 'A Genius for the Trivial'.

Also, in what follows I propose to take advantage of the fact that I am not a specialist in English Romanticism and to speculate more broadly (some may say *wildly*) on my subject and to define some areas for possible exploration of Dorothy Wordsworth's art. I wish to approach the subject *not* from the usual context of Dorothy's being a useful and contributory member of a creative circle in which she had a strong, if comparatively minor, voice, but rather from the traditions in which she works: the journal and travel book traditions especially. For her notebooks are not all of one kind. Some are personal records, logs of events; others are travel

books with elaborated descriptions. All participate in autobiographical traditions ranging from regional social history to personal revelation. Scholars are only now evolving tools for examining autobiography and travel literature generically. Principally the findings have come in studies of individual keepers of diaries, notebooks, or journals. Thus, we are beginning to have studies of Pepys or Samuel Sewall, of Emerson or Byron; or in travel literature, of D H Lawrence and Thoreau.

My focus grows out of an interest in autobiography as art, of travel literature as a kind of autobiography, and out of recent experiences in teaching courses in women's studies. Because of these preoccupations I have worked through some rather teasing fancies and prejudices. Let me take only one of these: might it not be true - I speculated before going back to reread Dorothy Wordsworth - that she was an artist who had not been allowed to blossom in her own right because of the stronger and rather overbearing personality of William to whose genius she was the necessary and even *willing* victim? That is, might she not be a paradigm for women's liberation, an object lesson such as some have taken Zelda Fitzgerald to be, Zelda who struggled to find herself in dance, painting, and literature only to find herself in fact in a mental hospital because of her unsuccessful competition with Scott Fitzgerald? What I found, upon rereading Dorothy Wordsworth was somewhat more complicated than this.

I

First of all let me note again that Dorothy is most typically thought of as an integral part of a creative circle, a rather bohemian one, as a creative co-partner to William and to Coleridge. Analogues between descriptive passages in her journals and passages in the poetry of the other two are not infrequent. One notion is that the notebooks contain the germ, the *donnée* in Henry James' phrase, for the poetry. Mary Moorman, however, has suggested that the journal entries may be, indeed usually *are*, themselves echoes of the men's poetry - rather than the reverse. 'Dorothy's Journal', she writes (*William Wordsworth: A Biography*, p.343),

which she began to keep in January at Alfoxden, is full of echoes of Coleridge's poetry, even as he was then daily writing it, as it is also of her brother's. Some have even surmised that her own descriptions inspired his, and though this is probably not so, save perhaps in one instance, the impression given is of one experience of delight mutually shared with great intensity and actuality...

One may note in Mrs Moorman's edition of the *Journals* that analogues are noted without any judgment about the direction of the flow of influence.

Indeed, the same biographer casts a cold eye on Dorothy's influence as a whole when she suggests (pp.344-5) that

...Dorothy had not a creative intellect, and while believing profoundly in her brother's genius she could not advise, suggest, or criticize from an intellectual point of view. Wordsworth needed some other kind of reciprocation, something more challenging, masculine, and stimulating, someone who could disagree as well as encourage, someone with whom it was possible to have intellectual communion.

This someone whose advent Mrs Moorman is about to proclaim is, of course, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

But, for the moment, let us leave these biographical and psychobiographical

speculations. I shall return to them at the end; but the bulk of my paper will be an attempt to consider Dorothy as an artist in her own right.

II

Dorothy Wordsworth has seldom been taken seriously as a writer, except insofar as her writings help illuminate the works and lives of William and Coleridge. (I am aware of the very good reasons why this has been so, and no reason more telling than the fact that they are, more often than not, the subject matter of her most frequently read work.) There was, however, an attempt in 1940 to distinguish her as a separate, unique voice by Hyman Eigerman in *The Poetry of Dorothy Wordsworth*. Eigerman's book consists of passages from the journals, re-lined as free-verse poems. It also contains a 'Foreword' by Hoxie N Fairchild which claims Dorothy 'is amazingly like the best of Imagist poets'. I am not at all sure that this is a correct assessment of her talent; nor do I find the example of the book itself wholly convincing, though I do admire the implicit seriousness with which the writer is for once treated. Occasional passages of the journals do shine with clarity when taken out of context and strike one, almost, with a brilliance of good haiku. For example, we read,

The moon shone
Like herrings in the water.

Even here, though, the comparison is expressed rather than implied. Other groupings are striking in isolation where they might have been muted in their notebook context:

The columbine
is a graceful
slender creature;
A female seeking retirement,
and growing freest,
and most graceful
Where it is most alone.

Yet these (the best, in my opinion, for the case Eigerman wants to make) are hardly sufficient to launch the view, as Fairchild does, that we can now see Dorothy Wordsworth as an important minor poet of the period. His opinion, however, is couched in terms of approbation with which few would disagree. He says, 'I do not know of a keener or more loving eye, a more responsive heart, a gentler, purer, truer utterance than hers'. Yet even with their combined high praises, the reasons of Eigerman and Fairchild suggest that Dorothy was a poet *despite* herself, and that she needs the help that they provide in order to clarify her talent and help us to see it.

Certainly few who have read the opening pages of Dorothy's first journal, written at Alfoxden, can fail to recognize the poetic sensibility. Despite the familiarity of the passage, I will not apologize for quoting from it.

ALFOXDEN, 20th January 1798. The green paths down the hillsides are channels for streams. The young wheat is streaked by silver lines of water running between the ridges, the sheep are gathered together on the slopes. After the wet dark days, the country seems more populous. It peoples itself in the sunbeams. The garden, mimic of spring, is gay with flowers. The purple-starred hepatica spreads itself in the sun, and the clustering snow-drops put forth their white heads, at first upright, ribbed with green, and like a rosebud; when completely opened hanging their heads downwards, but slowly lengthening their slender

stems. The slanting woods of an unvarying brown, showing the light through the thin net-work of their upper boughs. Upon the highest ridge of that round hill covered with planted oaks, the shafts of the trees show in the light like the columns of a ruin.

(*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, a new edition edited by Mary Moorman, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p.1.)

The passage is considerably more studied, more self-conscious, than her writing typically is. The use of simile is relatively infrequent in her work, though she occasionally uses it memorably. Consider the image of Dorothy on her first tour of Scotland, going to sleep in the Highlander hut, while 'the hens were roosting like light clouds in the sky...?' (*The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, I, edited by Ernest de Selincourt, p.276). But the preciseness of Dorothy's eye and poetry of her descriptions needs no belabouring.

Before examining two of the journals more closely, may I just make some observations concerning Dorothy's method of composition, a subject not without its problems: Mary Moorman tells us,

She did not write up her journals every day, but usually every third or fourth - sometimes with longer gaps - so that slips of memory were easily made. (*Journ.*, viii)

Readers of these works will recall the occasional very telegraphic style and days on which she can recall nothing that happened. Yet in *Recollections of a Tour in Scotland, A.D. 1803*, Dorothy Wordsworth claims she took no notes 'from laziness, and still more because it was inconvenient'. Further, in a letter to Mrs Clarkson, she confides:

By the Bye, I am writing not a journal, for we took no notes, but *recollections* of our Tour in the form of a journal, you will be amused with it for our sakes, but I think journals of Tours except as far as one is interested in the travellers are very uninteresting things. Wretched, wretched writing! I can hardly read it myself.

(November 13, 1803)

Succeeding generations have not especially agreed with her evaluation of her composition. (She might, one supposes, almost be talking about 'home movies'.) But, though I suppose it will sound blasphemous, the *Tour* is often dull and heavy going, for readers who know the earlier journals. De Selincourt has, it is true, pronounced this work her masterpiece, and it has been in print longer than her other writings. Besides the mystery of how the work got written - one possible explanation is Dorothy's gathering up of her long letters written while on the tour, though many of the daily entries are in excess of three thousand words in length - the quality of writing and the kind of observations Dorothy makes is worth some attention. The lack of selectivity is especially noticeable: all things seem equally interesting and valuable to her; she is equally interested in recalling whether the room she stayed in at some anonymous hut is to the right or left of the entrance as she is in recording dramatic encounters with other travellers or with Walter Scott. One feels, in fact, she has little sense of drama or of overall perspective. True, there are passages of exceptional brilliance, but the book as a whole is rather general and blurred in execution.

On the other hand, the *Tour* tells us a great deal about Dorothy's imagination. This work was one that was destined by her for a wider

audience, not only the manuscript circulation which it achieved but perhaps even publication. My own feeling is that the writing suffers from self-consciousness quite as much as it does from the distance placed on events.

The tour of Dorothy, William, and Coleridge moves from Keswick up the River Clyde to Glasgow, and winds about up in the Highlands before leading to Edinburgh and down. They see Burns's grave, many castles, the area associated with Rob Roy, and Coleridge leaves the group. They see and compare the Lochs with their own Cumbrian waters, come around to Edinburgh, Sir Walter Scott and, finally, home. The journey is rather clockwise, if one imagines a Salvador Dalí clock, slightly melted.

Dorothy is repeatedly offended by the dirt and disarray she finds in Scotland and she matches the generality of her view of the tour with a more precise earlier memory. At one point, for example, she writes,

...When we came among the houses I regretted even more than last night, because the contrast was greater, the slovenliness and dirt near the doors; and could not but remember, with pain from the contrast, the cottages of Somersetshire, covered with roses and myrtle, and their small gardens of herbs and flowers. (I, 251)

Indeed, one is tempted to conclude from the tour that Dorothy was in a sense unable to leave home, somewhat like the gauche American tourist who insists on comparing Helvellyn with the Rockies. When Dorothy and William move to the area around Loch Lomond, Dorothy writes '...it is not mountainous; nor had we passed any hills which a Cumbrian would dignify with the name of mountains'. (I.245) There will always be an England?

She later does better by the mountains of the Highlands, noting:

I cannot attempt to describe the mountains. I can only say that I thought those on our right (for the other side was only a continued high ridge or craggy barrier, broken along the top into petty spiral forms) were the grandest I had ever seen. It seldom happens that mountains in a very clear air look exceedingly high, but these, though we could see the whole of them to their very summits, appeared to me more majestic in their own nakedness than our imaginations could have conceived them to be, had they been half hidden by clouds, yet showing some of their highest pinnacles. They were such forms as Milton might be supposed to have had in mind when he applied to Satan that sublime expression -

His stature reached the sky. (I.331f)

The passage is distinctive in its concentration on the landscape - albeit with the Milton reference - and lacks what we find in most Romantic writers, a quality I can best describe as an ego-investment which demands self-dramatization. Compare, for example, the reaction of Henry David Thoreau to Mt Ktaadn on the first of his Maine travels: I choose Thoreau because his journey is in some ways analogous to Dorothy Wordsworth's and he, too, draws on Milton in an hour of descriptive need.

In the most dramatically intriguing passage of 'Ktaadn' Thoreau makes his way to the summit alone. He seems to be in a 'cloud factory' and occasionally glimpses a 'dark, damp crag to the right or left'. 'It reminds me', he says

of the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was the Caucasus and the rock where Prometheus was bound. AEschylus had no doubt visited such scenery as

this. It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits. Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more lone than you can imagine.

I must abridge this description, but Thoreau, too, calls on Milton and his description of Satan's voyage through Chaos.

Not only is there self-dramatization but a different sense of the otherness of nature. He finds himself treading on ground of an awe-inspiring holiness:

Perhaps I most fully realized that this was primeval, untamed, and forever untameable *Nature*, or whatever else men call it, while coming down this part of the mountain... Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhand-selled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made for ever and ever, - to be the dwelling of man, we say - so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can. Man was not to be associated with it. It was matter, vast, terrific, - not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or be buried in, - no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there - the home, this, of Necessity and Fate.

Dorothy is more typically interested in the thing itself, in itself, and for itself. She is oftener content to describe and let the meaning, or lesson; or significance take care of itself. True, she strains toward the comparisons one must make to bring matters around to a wider audience, when she writes the *Tour*. It is this sense of self-consciousness and obligation to a circle of readers that causes a shift in the quality of much of the *Tour*.

In a note left between Parts II and III of the *Recollections*, the writer suggests that composition of the work presented difficulties. She says,

April 11th, 1805. I am setting about a task which, however free and happy the state of my mind, I could not have performed well at this distance of time; but now, I do not know that I shall be able to go on with it at all. I will strive, however, to do the best I can, setting before myself a different object from that hitherto aimed at, which was, to omit no incident, however trifling, and to describe the country so minutely that you should, where the objects were the most interesting, feel as if you had been with us. I shall now only attempt to give you an idea of those scenes which pleased us most, dropping the incidents of the ordinary days, of which many have slipped from my memory, and others which remain it would be difficult, and often painful to me, to endeavour to draw out and disentangle from other thoughts.

The finer grain of her writing is seen in the earlier notebooks where she is more natural, writing as she was for herself, often for William, and occasionally with the understanding that Coleridge would be a reader of her work.

In these, Dorothy's home movies, the reader may perceive, as in the earlier work, a more modern sensibility than either Wordsworth's or Thoreau's.

Dorothy tends to avoid metaphor and simile, as well as the moral reflection almost ever-present in nineteenth-century prose and poetry. She, typically, neither draws a lesson from her encounter with a beggar or a mountain; nor does she use such an event as a pinnacle from which to launch her ego. She might have felt quite at home among the Objectivist poets of recent times and with Whitman who, without moral reflection, could celebrate the common, the ordinary, for its own sake. But then she felt at home where she was.

III

The Grasmere Journals - even in their mutilated and fragmentary state - for some pages have been ripped out and at least one volume is missing from the texts we have - are, to my mind, by far the most interesting writings that Dorothy Wordsworth has left us. This group of papers, taken as a whole, has a slightly submerged narrative structure which arises probably not consciously on the writer's part but through the emotional intensity she felt and because of the focus of her thoughts. What we have is not emotion recollected in tranquillity, but emotion barely hidden and, though unanalyzed, sometimes entirely open.

The portion we have of the *Grasmere Journals* opens with Dorothy in tears as William and John set off to visit Mary Hutchinson on 14 May 1800, and the sequence stops shortly after William's marriage to Mary on 4 October 1802. Four notebooks chronicle something over two years at Dove Cottage. The climax takes place in one, headlong entry spanning the events of some two and a half months, from late July through the first week in October 1802.

It may seem extravagant to talk of the *Grasmere Journals* as possessing a unity and force not attending the other works of Dorothy Wordsworth. But, then, I am not the first to make the claim. F W Bateson in *Wordsworth: A Re-Interpretation* (1954) spoke of these notebooks as very dramatic indeed:

Behind the comings and goings, the daily details of weather and William's latest poem, a drama was being enacted that often comes near to tragedy. (156)

By the end of the book, Bateson has seen William 'cutting loose' from Dorothy - a process he describes as 'ruthless' and in terms of Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia. (203) While I do not read these *Journals* in quite so exciting a way as Bateson, I do find a narrative structure of significance behind the journal descriptions. What gives structure to the work arises from within and develops organically. By this, I do not mean to claim that every word, sentence, or even every entry has significance in a direct sense to the unfolding plot. Descriptions of a throwaway sort - if viewed in relation to the main theme - do fulfil a pacing, a timing, function and make the speeded-up climax all the more poignant.

The first of the *Grasmere Journals* then opens with Dorothy in tears at the journey of William and John to see Mary Hutchinson:

May 14 1800 / Wednesday/. Wm. and John set off into Yorkshire after dinner at ½ past 2 o'clock, cold pork in their pockets. I left them at the turning of the Low-wood bay under the trees. My heart was so full that I could hardly speak to W. when I gave him a farewell kiss. I sate a long time upon a stone at the margin of the lake, and after a flood of tears my heart was easier. The lake looked to me I knew not why dull and melancholy, and the weltering on the shores seemed a heavy sound. I walked as long as I could amongst the stones of the shore. The

wood rich in flowers. A beautiful yellow, palish yellow flower, that looked thick round and double, and smelt very sweet - I supposed it was a ranunculus - Crowfoot, the grassy-leaved Rabbit-toothed white flower, strawberries, geranium - scentless violet, anemones two kinds, orchises, primroses. The heckberry very beautiful, the crab coming out as a low shrub. Met a blind man, driving a very large beautiful Bull and a cow - he walked with two sticks. Came home by Clappers-gate. The valley very green, many sweet views up to Rydale head when I could juggle away the fine houses, but they disturbed me even more than when I have been happier.

On the same day, Dorothy aids the first of a continuing procession of beggar women, abandoned or widowed, alone or with semi-starving children; and on this same day of William's departure, she juxtaposes news of a burial with the concluding outcry of the entry: 'Oh! that I had a letter from William!'

Besides the strand which runs through the journals on beggar women and poverty is one on birds and the trials and tribulations of building and maintaining nests. One may say that Dorothy records birds because they are there, because they make up a part of her day; but the entries here, unlike those of the tour, are highly selective and often telegraphic in style. Moreover, as Dorothy reveals, she intends keeping the journal 'because I shall give William pleasure by it when he comes home again'. With such the case, one may at least suspect that entries such as that for 17 May 1800, have point and resonance beyond mere description. 'The Skobby sate quietly in its nest,' she writes, 'rocked by the winds and beaten by the rain.' Also revealing are notations that while in deepest melancholy, Dorothy choses *Timon of Athens* to read. When no letters from William arrive, often as not, Dorothy has a headache; when a joint letter from William and Mary comes, she takes to her bed with a bad headache. William returns after two weeks; their reunion, she confides to her journal, lasts until 4 a.m.

This period is followed by what many readers, including Bateson and de Selincourt, have termed the happiest months in Dorothy Wordsworth's life. Coleridge is a frequent visitor, even walking over Helvellyn one night, she tells us, to read 'Christabel' to the Wordsworths; and William is writing his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. The notebooks record the meeting with a leech-gatherer and William's struggles with 'Michael'.

In the second of the extant Grasmere notebooks, another strand joins the narrative. Mary comes to Keswick and then on to Grasmere for an extended visit lasting from late October 1801 until late January 1802 (almost three months). Among other observations recorded is Dorothy's criticism of Mary's walking abilities: 'Mary's feet sore', we read; and, later, 'Mary fell many a time'. An interesting pronoun slip occurs when Dorothy writes 'he' instead of 'I' in the following passage:

After dinner I felt myself unwell having not slept well in the night so, after we had put up the Book cases which Charles Lloyd sent us I lay down. I did not sleep much but I rose refreshed. Mary and William walked to the Boat house at Rydale while he was in bed. (p.67, my emphasis)

Returning in this notebook to an earlier motif, Dorothy reflects on the lack of generosity of a Mr Walker in refusing to take care of his family.

Immediately after Mary leaves, William writes to Annette Vaillon and,

evidently, there are strained relations between Dorothy and William; for Dorothy makes some extremely infrequent critical comments on his actions. Also, in a seemingly pointed way, she chooses *Paradise Lost* for reading.

A few days later, Dorothy adds a revealing and quite extended entry to her journal. The date is 31 January 1802:

...We walked round the two lakes. Grasmere was very soft and Rydale was extremely beautiful from the pasture side. Nab Scar was just topped by a cloud which cutting it off as high as it could be cut off made the mountain look uncommonly lofty. We sate down a long time in different places. I always love to walk that way because it is the way I first came to Rydale and Grasmere, and because our dear Coleridge did also. When I came with Wm. 6½ years ago it was just at sunset. There was a rich yellow light on the waters and the Islands were reflected there. Today it was grave and soft but not perfectly calm.

What begins in loving nostalgia on this excursion concludes, in the writer's report of it, as symbolic action:

The sun shone out before we reached Grasmere. We sate by the roadside at the foot of the Lake close to Mary's dear name which she had cut herself upon the stone. William...cut at it with his knife to make it plainer. We amused ourselves for a long time in watching the Breezes some as if they came from the bottom of the lake spread in a circle, brushing along the surface of the water, and growing more delicate, as it were thinner and of a paler colour till they had died away. Others spread out like a peacock's tail, and some went right forward this way and that in all directions. The lake was still where these breezes were not, but they made it all alive. I found a strawberry blossom in a rock. The little slender flower had more courage than the green leaves, for *they* were but half expanded and half grown, but the blossom was spread full out. I uprooted it rashly, and I felt as if I had been committing an outrage, so I planted it again. It will have but a stormy life of it, but let it live if it can.

In her nervousness over her fate, out of the conflicting feelings of concern about William's happiness and fears about her own security, Dorothy Wordsworth has employed the wild strawberry, as she did the Skobby on her nest, symbolically. (Interestingly, the cover illustration for the Oxford *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* is an uprooted wild strawberry plant.)

Two days later finds the Wordsworths reading on in *Paradise Lost*:

After dinner Wm. worked at The Pedlar. After tea I read aloud the 11th Book of *Paradise Lost*. We were much impressed and also melted into tears. The papers came in soon after I had laid aside the Book - a good thing for my William.

It is in Book XI that Adam and Eve learn through Michael that mankind may hope for redemption ultimately, but that they themselves must no longer dwell in Paradise.

A few days later, Dorothy reads some of Ben Jonson's short poems aloud to William; these poems, she says, 'were too *interesting* for him, and would not let him go to sleep... There is one affecting line in Jonson's epitaph on his first Daughter

Here lies to each her Parents ruth,
Mary the Daughter of their youth

At six months end she parted hence
In safety of her Innocence.

(DW's emphasis)

Even if one discounts this or that piece of evidence, the pattern of the Grasmere notebooks is obsessive, or very nearly so. The predominance of Dorothy Wordsworth's concerns for the fate of beggar women, for uprooted birds and plants, for the funerals of women, and of her symbolic identification with them can scarcely be doubted. Nor can her strategies for coping with her doubts and anxieties be denied as symbolic outlets, ways for an intelligent, a normally 'other-directed' and very kind woman to get some control of the concerns she felt for herself. Also, since we know that William read her journals, and occasionally Coleridge also, the entries serve not only as a direct means for communication back to herself and William, but also as an indirect or symbolic means of communicating (and perhaps for exorcising) her underlying emotional state.

At the end of the second notebook, William leaves for a two-day visit to see Mary Hutchinson. The leave-taking is, this time, neither bitter nor sorrowful, seemingly. But, while William is gone, Dorothy writes, 'I slept in William's bed, and I slept badly, for my thoughts were full of William'. She sleeps badly again the following night; then, William returns:

Tuesday 16th. A fine morning but I had persuaded myself not to expect William, I believe because I was afraid of being disappointed. I ironed all day. He came in just at Tea time, had only seen Mary H. for a couple of hours between Emont Bridge and Hartshorn tree. Mrs. C[larkson] better. He had had a difficult journey over Kirkstone, and came home by Threlkeld - his mouth and breath were very cold when he kissed me. We spent a sweet evening. He was better - had altered the pedlar. We went to bed pretty soon and we slept better than we expected and had no bad dreams. (p.92)

On 4 March of that year, William makes a brief journey to Keswick. Dorothy writes:

Wm. has a nice bright day. It was hard frost in the night. The Robins are singing sweetly. Now for my walk. I *will* be busy, I *will* look well and be well when he comes back to me. O the Darling! Here is one of his bitten apples! I can hardly find in my heart to throw it into the fire. I must wash myself, then off - I walked round the two Lakes crossed the stepping stones at Rydale Foot. Sate down where we always sit. I was full of thoughts about my darling. Blessings on him. I came home at the foot of our own hill under Loughrigg. (p.97)

Dorothy returns from a walk, on 8 March, to find a letter from Mary Hutchinson:

Found a very affecting letter from Montague also one from Mary - We read Montagu's in walking on. Sate down to read Mary's. I came home with a bad head-ach and lay down. I slept but rose little better. I have got tea and am now much relieved. On Friday evening the moon hung over the Northern side of the highest point of Silver How, like a gold ring snapped in two and shaven off at the ends it was so narrow. Within this Ring lay the circle of the round moon, as *distinctly* to be seen as ever the enlightened moon is. William had observed the same appearance at Keswick perhaps at the very same moment hanging over the Newlands fells. (p.99)

Then, for a few days, something of the idyllic relation that formerly

existed between sister and brother seems to recur. Once again Dorothy acts as Muse for a poem, this time 'The Butterfly'. They read together and together, seemingly, they decide on a momentous series of events:

Monday [March 22, 1802] A rainy day. William very poorly. Mr. Luff came in after dinner and brought us 2 letters from Sara H. and one from poor Annette. I read Sara's letters while he was here. I finished my letters to M. and S. and wrote to my Br. Richard. We talked a good deal about C. and other interesting things. We resolved to see Annette, and that Wm should go to Mary. (p.105)

Nevertheless, despite the appearance of unanimity, Dorothy appears quite stricken when she receives a joint letter from Mary and William on 12 April - the day before William returned. She does not comment on the contents except indirectly:

Monday 12th. Had the mantua-maker. The ground covered with snow. Walked to T. Wilkinson's and sent for letters. The Woman brought me one from Wm and Mary. It was a sharp windy night. Thomas Wilkinson came with me to Barton, and questioned me like a catechizer all the way. Every question was like the snapping of a little thread about my heart I was so full of thoughts of my half-read letter and other things. I was glad when he left me. Then I had time to look at the moon while I was thinking over my own thoughts. The moon travelled through the clouds tinging them yellow as she passed along, with two stars near her, one larger than the other. These stars grew or diminished as they passed from or went into the clouds. At this time William as I found the next day was riding by himself between Middleham and Barnard Castle having parted from Mary. I read over my letter when I got to the house. Mr and Mrs. C. were playing at cards.

Tuesday 13th April. I had slept ill and was not well and obliged to go to bed in the afternoon - ... (p.108)

Near the end of this, the third of the Grasmere notebooks, occurs a somewhat outré bit - at least to modern sensibilities it seems so. Dorothy and William have been out walking:

We then went to John's Grove, sate a while at first. Afterwards William lay in the trench under the fence - he with his eyes shut and listening to the waterfalls and the Birds. There was no one waterfall above another - it was a sound of waters in the air - the voice of the air. William heard me breathing and rustling now and then but we both lay still, and unseen by one another. He thought that it would be as sweet thus to lie so in the grave, to hear the *peaceful* sounds of the earth and just to know that our dear friends were near. The Lake was still. (p.117)

The feeling that unifies these Journals, and which began with Dorothy in tears at William's departure to visit Mary Hutchinson, reaches a peak with the marriage in the fourth and final Journal of the Grasmere series. This book records the visit to Annette (albeit obliquely), chronicles more wandering beggar women, and shows concern over the blown-down nests of swallows:

When I rose I went just before tea into the garden. I looked up at my Swallow's nest and it was gone. It had fallen down. Poor little creatures they could not themselves be more distressed than I was. I went upstairs to look at the Ruins. They lay in a large heap upon the

window ledge; these swallows had been ten days employed in building this nest, and it seemed to be almost finished. I had watched them early in the morning, in the day many and many a time and in the evenings when it was almost dark I had seen them sitting together side by side in their unfinished nest both morning and night. When they first came about the window they used to hang against the panes, with their white Bellies and their forked tails looking like fish, but then they fluttered and sang their own little twittering song. As soon as the nest was broad enough, a sort of ledge for them they sate both mornings and evenings, but they did not pass the night there. I watched them one morning, when William was at Eusemere, for more than an hour. Every now and then there was a feeling motion in their wings, a sort of tremulousness and they sang a low song to one another.

(Friday, June 25th)

Finally, although the passage leading up to William and Mary's marriage is doubtless familiar, I would like to quote it:

We stayed in London till Wednesday the 22nd of September, and arrived at Gallow Hill on Friday 24th September. Mary first met us in the avenue. She looked so fat and well that we were made very happy by the sight of her. Then came Sara, and last of all Joanna. Tom was forking corn standing upon the corn cart. We dressed ourselves immediately and got tea - the garden looked gay with asters and sweet peas. I looked at everything with tranquillity and happiness - was ill on Saturday and on Sunday and continued to be during most of the time of our stay. Jack and George came on Friday Evening 1st October. On Saturday 2nd we rode to Hackness, William Jack George and Sara single, I behind Tom. On Sunday 3rd Mary and Sara were busy packing. On Monday 4th October 1802, my Brother William was married to Mary Hutchinson. I slept a good deal of the night and rose fresh and well in the morning. At a little after 8 o'clock I saw them go down the avenue towards the Church. William had parted from me upstairs. I gave him the wedding ring - with how deep a blessing! I took it from my forefinger where I had worn it the whole of the night before - he slipped it again onto my finger and blessed me fervently. When they were absent my dear little Sara prepared the breakfast. I kept myself as quiet as I could, but when I saw the two men running up the walk, coming to tell us it was over, I could stand it no longer and threw myself on the bed where I lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing anything, till Sara came upstairs to me and said 'They are coming'. This forced me from the bed where I lay and I moved I knew not how straight forward, faster than my strength could carry me till I met my beloved William and fell upon his bosom. He and John Hutchinson led me to the house and there I stayed to welcome my dear Mary.

(pp.153-4)

Mary Moorman notes that two sentences from this passage are erased:

(1) I looked at everything with tranquillity and happiness - was ill on Saturday and on Sunday and continued to be during most of the time of our stay.

(2) I gave him the wedding ring - with how deep a blessing! I took it from my forefinger where I had worn it the whole of the night before - he slipped it again onto my finger and blessed me fervently.

What is one to make of this sort of evidence? I do not much care to make a story of latent incest, as some readers have suggested may be the case, but

whatever the emotions going through Dorothy Wordsworth's head - and we will never know precisely what they were - they seem to centre on fear of change and to exhibit doubt and possessiveness. Anxiety is uppermost in her mind and, even if this bird or that book is discounted in the train of linked and resonating significances, one is still left with a piece of writing which contains an almost submerged but tightly unifying dramatic thread. Perhaps it is too much to call this series of notebooks a psychological novel, but if it is not one it has, nonetheless, the power, continuity, and psychic energy of one. The feeling that William was almost the sole audience, that the notebooks are a long letter written for and to him, makes the work no less interesting, certainly.

IV

Elizabeth Hardwick is right, when she notes in *Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature* (1974), that Dorothy Wordsworth 'could not, would not analyze'. But one may question the rest of Hardwick's conclusion:

This failure to inspect character and motive incapacitates her for fiction; her lack of a rhythmical ear, her lack of training, and her withdrawal from the general, the propositional, and from questioning made it impossible for her to turn her love of nature into poetry. In her journals there are brief vignettes, good mimicry of countryfolk, but there are no real people - especially she and William are absent in the deepest sense. (p.156)

On the contrary, I would suggest that it is precisely 'in the deepest sense' that she and William are present, and that out of her tensions and grief she has given us, albeit in a less self-conscious way than say Anais Nin, a sharply detailed psychological portrait. We perceive Dorothy's presence in the most seemingly trivial details. Ernest de Selincourt says, in a context which makes the pronouncement a little less harsh, 'William had not her [Dorothy's] genius for the trivial'. There is a kind of rough justice in the remark. Margaret Willy, in her British Council pamphlet on *Three Women Diarists* quotes Katherine Mansfield's outrage at the obtuseness of William Knight's evaluation of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*. In his edition of the journals (1897), Knight had commented that they

contain numerous trivial details...but there is no need to record all the cases in which the sister wrote 'Today I mended William's shirts,' or 'William gathered sticks,' or 'I went in search of eggs,' etc.

After quoting his editorial comment in *her* journal, Mansfield adds, tartly, 'There is! Fool!'

Not only do we get a poignantly detailed portrait of Dorothy in her journals, but, as others have remarked in various ways, William was permitted to stay in touch with the common (or the 'trivial') because of Dorothy's unanalytical recording. Let me close with two final quotations from Dorothy Wordsworth. The first, from *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, might serve as an image of what we feel upon reading Dorothy Wordsworth:

The greatest charm of a brook or river is in the liberty to pursue it through its windings; you can then take it in whatever mood you like; silent or noisy, sportive or quiet. The beauties of a brook or river must be sought, and the pleasure is in going in search of them; those of a lake or of the sea come to you of themselves. (I, 234)

The second is a 'trivial' entry in the last of the Grasmere notebooks: 'My tooth broke today. They will soon be gone. Let that pass. I shall be beloved - I want no more.' This was indeed her portion, to be beloved during her lifetime and over a hundred years after her death. But I am convinced we must give over the notion of a 'blocked artist' sacrificed to the ego and talent of William Wordsworth. She was an anchor for his imagination, and at times a sail as well, providing him a foundation in the common and the usual - in the trivial - out of which William could make the ordinary extraordinary, and *in* which she could live, participate, and grow in the knowledge of and satisfaction with her role. Moreover, she left us some writing of great intensity and beauty. If she was a brook and not a lake, it should be remembered that we need and cherish brooks, too. She was in the best sense of the word an 'amateur', one who loves, and who can doubt that she had a very real genius for the trivial?

Revised from a lecture given to the Summer Conference on Wordsworth and the Romantics at Ambleside, 28 July 1975

OBITUARY

ANGUS CHEYNE

Angus died peacefully on 22 April 1984 in St Bartholomew's Hospital, London. His friends were never far from his thoughts, nor was the Charles Lamb Society.

Angus applied to join the Society in April 1968; in April 1970 he took on the daunting task of succeeding Ernest Crowsley as Honorary General Secretary. For the next nine years he added lustre to this office in furthering the aims of the Society in a multitude of ways - not least in his welcome to the many visitors to 'Lamb's House' in Duncan Terrace. His incumbency included the Lamb Bicentenary Celebrations in 1975 and members were delighted to greet him (as one of our Vice-Presidents) at the Birthday Celebration Luncheon in February this year. During his Secretaryship he never failed to provide a stimulating annual programme of winter lectures and summer visits.

We acknowledge our great debt to him in keeping the Society alive and flourishing so that we can look forward to our 50th Anniversary Celebrations in 1985 with confidence.

The Society was represented at his funeral by Madeline Huxstep and Charles Branchini. A donation (instead of flowers) has been sent on behalf of the Society to the Rahere Association of St Bartholomew's Hospital.

We send our loving thoughts and sympathy to Muriel and his family.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the Annual General Meeting of the Society, held this year on 12 May, we mourned the loss of our much-loved former Hon. General Secretary, Angus Cheyne, and paid tribute to his memory in a few minutes' silence.

After the adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts, Officers and members of the Council were elected. Mr Ledwith, retiring as Vice-Chairman and Christ's Hospital Representative, was warmly thanked for his service in these offices and for taking on that of Auditor for the coming year. Mrs

Huxstep will serve as Christ's Hospital Representative and Mr David Wickham has kindly agreed to take on the post of Vice-Chairman. Mmes Canter, Irwin and Wickham replaced retiring members of the Council.

It was reported to the meeting that our tenant, Mrs Tickle, is leaving Button Snap and that the Council and the Trustees are considering future plans for the cottage.

Repairs to books in the Charles Lamb Society's Library at the Guildhall continue and a sum of £300 was allocated for this purpose for each of the years 1984 and 1985, in addition to donations made for that specific end.

The Hon. General Secretary presented the 1984/5 Programme, which will be included in this *Bulletin*, and the meeting expressed its appreciation of all her hard work on our behalf.

NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

APOLOGY

We are very sorry that, in spite of all our care, a mistake in the date of the Coleridge reference on page 135 of the last *Bulletin* slipped through. Members will have realized that it should have been 1833, in Coleridge's *Table Talk*.

BUMPER BULLETIN

We wish to express warm gratitude to kind members who have made special donations to help cover the cost of this commemorative *Bulletin*. The financial position of the Society makes us necessarily cautious about such pleasant extravagances.

YOUNG CHARLES LAMB 1775-1802

We are delighted to be able to report that Mrs Courtney's book is now in paperback, published by Macmillan Press, London, £7.95 and New York University Press, \$15.

NOTES FROM MR D E WICKHAM

(Archivist of the Clothworkers' Company)

TALFOURD AND THE CLOTHWORKERS' COMPANY

Two further connections between the Elian circle and the Clothworkers' Company, twelfth of the 'Great Twelve' London livery companies, have emerged since my articles on Thomas Massa Alsager and George Dyer in the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, New Series Nos 35 and 38 respectively.

- 1 Thomas Noon Talfourd, the executor and first biographer of Charles Lamb, married Rachel, eldest daughter of John Towill Rutt (1760-1841), the Unitarian politician and man of letters, who was Master of The Clothworkers' Company for the year 1816-17. He is noticed at length in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and In Prance's *Companion*.
- 2 The Court of The Clothworkers' Company recorded, at its meeting on 1 March 1826, that counsel's opinion had been taken from Messrs Tindal, Talfourd and Mayne.

Early in 1827 the Court noted that Mr Common Serjeant and Mr Talfourd had been retained as counsel by the Company during arbitration over the value of the Company's land in East Smithfield which was required for the building of St Katherine's Docks.

In the following year the Company was concerned with a matter involving rental income and the Court followed the course of action 'recommended by Mr Talfourd'.

TALFOURD, FRIENDS, AND BINDING HISTORY

I recently bought a presentation copy of Talfourd's *Tragedies*, to which are added a few *Sonnets and Verses*, published by Moxon in poetically small octavo in 1846.

It is inscribed 'Mrs H F Leddwalls [?] with the best respects & regards of T N Talfourd August 1847'. The recipient's surname is not entirely clear and may have been corrected by Talfourd.

1 To quote the necessary new form of the old adage, the name is 'not in Lucas, not in Prance': does it mean anything to anyone?

An article by James S Dearden in *The Book Collector* for Summer 1968 notes (page 159) that, when John Ruskin's youthful poems were collected by his father in 1850 and printed for private circulation by W H Harrison of Spottiswoode & Shaw, the elder Ruskin referred to two bindings. These were a 'Lady like Binding according to Binders notions' (green cloth with a lyre embossed in gilt on the top cover and in blind on the lower, and all edges cut and gilt) and another binding 'in the way I believe you [Harrison] prefer' (purple cloth with the lyre in blind and the edges uncut and ungolded). Dearden concludes on minimal evidence that the green and gilt copies were intended for presentation to ladies, while those in purple and blind were for men.

My Talfourd is bound in green leather with a lyre in gilt on both top and bottom boards and with all edges cut and gilt. It was presented to a lady.

2 Whether or not this is known to be standard practice, readers may like to check their books of c. 1850 and of the less commercial kind for such coincidences of colour and inscription.

A PORTRAIT OF SAMUEL SALT?

The friend and benefactor of Charles Lamb and his father entered the Middle Temple in 1741 so we may assume that he was born about 1720. *The Dictionary of National Biography* gives no date of birth and says only that he died in 1792.

No.61 in a recent exhibition of 'The City's Pictures' at Barbican Art Gallery showed 'The Ceremony of Administering the Mayoralty Oath to Alderman Nathaniel Newnham in Guildhall, 1782'. The engraved key identified the man numbered 113 in the painting as 'Salte, Samuel'. No other details were given but there, tucked into the bottom left-hand corner of the picture and on a scale large enough to be inspected as a portrait, was a bewigged figure of about 60 in a dark (blue?) coat with brass buttons.

I did not then remember the plate of 'Samuel Salt modelled in wax by John Lamb' near the beginning of certain editions of Lucas' *Life* but the

prominent nose might be recognizable if the two likenesses could be confronted.

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!

The publisher's ticket inserted in (my copy of) Vol. I of the 1870 Moxon edition of *The Complete Correspondence and Works of Charles Lamb; with an Essay on his Life and Genius by Thomas Purnell, aided by the recollections of the Author's adopted daughter* reads:

CAUTION

THE ONLY COMPLETE WORKS OF LAMB.

It cannot be too frequently repeated that THE ONLY complete and correct editions of the above are published by MESSRS. MOXON. Others, though cheaper in price, are IMPERFECT, and consequently USELESS.

SWINBURNE AND LAMB

Mr Michael Hosking the book dealer, who works from The Golden Hind Bookshop at Deal, published his Catalogue 22 in June 1983: 3407 items from 'David Garnet O.B.E. - A Writer's Library'.

I managed to obtain the 1883 first Ainger edition of *The Essays of Elia* inscribed 'R. Garnett from the Editor'. This was Dr Richard Garnett (1835-1906), Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum.

Mr Prance says (*Companion*, pages 318-19) that A C Swinburne was a lifelong lover of the early dramatists and attributed his interest in them to reading Lamb's *Specimens* at Eton. I was therefore disappointed to miss Hosking's Item 487: the catalogue entry is here transcribed for the record:

487. LAMB, Charles: *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets...with notes.* 2 volumes. 1849 Edward Moxon. The verso of the fly-leaf of volume 1 has the pencil inscription: *Mr. Gosse in his edition of the Letters of Algernon Swinburne says that this (the 2 volume) edition of Lamb's 'Specimens' came into Swinburne's hands in his 13th year. I bought the book in its present (morocco) binding at Sotheby's 1916. R.S. Garnett. The fly-leaf has a printed label The Swinburne Books/Sotheby's 1916/From the Serendipity Shop 46 Museum Street W.C.* Bookplate 2 in each volume. 12mo. Full morocco, slightly rubbed. £35.

R S Garnett was Robert Singleton Garnett (1866-1932), son of Richard Garnett and uncle of David Garnett.

Bookplate 2 was the one designed for David Garnett by Reynolds Stone on copper.

DATES

The following sesquicentennial commemorative activities are planned for the

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remainder of this year.

Summer Conference at Dove Cottage 28 July-11 August will include papers on Lamb and Coleridge. Enquiries to Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SG. Exhibition entitled 'Coleridge - Poet and Explorer 1772-1834' is already on at the Grasmere and Wordsworth Museum.

Day Conference at Cambridge 'Charles Lamb, The Romantic Movement and Cambridge' organized by the Charles Lamb Society 22 September. Enquiries to Dr D G Wilson, 9 Banham Close, Cambridge CB4 1HX.

The Crowsley Memorial Lecture Professor Tom Craik on 'Lamb's Tales from Shakspear' at the Mary Ward Centre, Queen Square, London WC1 6 October.

Christ's Hospital Celebrations

Celebration of Coleridge with a programme of readings at 4.20 pm and a lecture at 7.30 pm Tuesday, 27 November.

Celebration of Lamb with a programme of readings at 4.20 pm and a lecture at 7.30 pm Thursday, 29 November.

Celebration of Leigh Hunt (Bicentenary of his birth) with a programme of readings at 4.20 pm and a lecture at 7.30 pm. Tuesday, 4 December.

There will also be an exhibition on 'Christ's Hospital in the late eighteenth century' and a Choral Evensong in the style of the period in the School Chapel.

Further details from the Box Office, the Arts Centre, Christ's Hospital, Horsham. Telephone: Horsham 52709.

Exhibition at the Guildhall Library (home of the Charles Lamb Society's Library) to commemorate Charles Lamb December 1984 to February 1985.

Next year we hope to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the *Charles Lamb Society* by a day conference at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution. Further information will appear in future *Bulletins*. Provisional date 11 May 1985.

BULLETIN

As this is a double number, there will be no *Bulletin* in October. The next will be in January 1985.

Members will observe that we are working towards a house-style and it will help us very much if contributors will be kind enough to approximate to it as far as possible.

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