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HAZLITT'S APPEAL TO READERS IN HIS DRAMATIC CRITICISM

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Many twentieth-century critics view romantic writers as overly subjective. Irving Babbitt argued in 1919, 'There is in fact no object in the romantic universe--only subject'. According to Babbitt, the romantics corrupt Aristotle's concept of *katharsis* and apply it primarily to the egocentric writer/artist and not to the reader/spectator: '*Katharsis* has been appropriated . . . to describe the relief one gets by expressing oneself freely'. Art is then reduced to self-revelation. M.H. Abrams does not go that far in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, but he characterizes Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and others as writers who refer 'to the poet to explain the nature and criteria of poetry', unlike eighteenth-century authors, who stressed the readers' concerns. Similarly, René Wellek contends that romantic theories of literature emphasize 'the mental processes and equipment of the artist: the work itself hardly enters into the discussion'. The ultimate consequence of this subjectivity, according to Frank Kermode, is that romantic writers become alienated from their public. (1) Do these remarks really apply to a critic like William Hazlitt?

This alleged subjectivity is said to lead to the lack of a clear structure in romantic writing. Hazlitt's essays, especially *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, are a frequent target for such criticism. George Saintsbury terms *Characters* 'notes' and argues that the essays are 'desultory'. Wimsatt and Brooks classify Hazlitt as an 'impressionistic' critic. Recently, these accusations have been repeated by Charles I. Patterson, Jr., who faults Hazlitt's 'fragmentary quality and incompleteness' in *Characters* and his overall 'impressionistic' stance. 'He would usually begin with an incisive statement or insight, and then a flood of associations followed, finally subsiding without in any sense concluding'. (2)

However, there has been a growing awareness among critics of the romantic writers' interest in their audience, and some attempts have been made to find coherence in their essays. According to Walter Jackson Bate, a thorough 'self-absorption' is found only 'in extreme romanticism'. He points out that Hazlitt attacks the egotism of Rousseau and praises the outgoing Shakespeare. Bate views Hazlitt and 'the majority of romantic critics' as 'strongly interested in the way in which the human mind and emotions react in creating or responding to art'. In a 1980 *PMLA* article, Morris Eaves expands Abrams' 'expressive' theory to accommodate the romantics' interest in their audience. Citing evidence from the writings of Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley, Eaves demonstrates that while these authors *begin* with art as self-expression, they move toward a conviction that readers must participate fully in the act of communication. Furthermore, critics like Peter Hoheisel have explored the 'method amid the rhetoric' of Coleridge's prose, and Richard Haven and John R. Nabholz have discussed the structure of Lamb's essays. (3)

In this study, I hope to show that Hazlitt is as concerned with the reader's responses to literature as he is with the poet's creative powers, and that this concern influences his aesthetic judgments. Hazlitt's insistence on the need for the public to become actively involved in works of imagination leads him to condemn most performances of Shakespeare's plays. Like eighteenth-century critics, Hazlitt was fascinated by Shakespeare's dramatic characters, and he continued earlier efforts to determine how they evoked the sympathy of audiences and readers. Furthermore, I will argue that Hazlitt used similar techniques in his own work: while his literary criticism appears self-indulgent and disorganized, it is in fact a carefully structured rhetoric designed to arouse the reader's sympathetic imagination. I will draw most of my examples from Hazlitt's studies of drama, especially the much maligned *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*.

The notion of sympathy occurs frequently in Hazlitt's prose, including his early philosophical writings. On the first page of *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), he argues 'that the human mind is . . . naturally interested in the welfare of others' and that it is the imagination which 'must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others'. According to Hazlitt, one must transcend the self because it 'binds' and 'deadens' the mind. The same principle is important in Hazlitt's later work. He wrote in 1820, 'This is the true imagination--to put ourselves in the place of others, and to feel and speak for them'. (4)

The drama, especially tragedy, is a unique medium for generating sympathy,

Hazlitt believes. He often praises Shakespeare's ability to create characters who evoke the sympathetic imagination of the reader or spectator. For example, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* involves the audience intimately.

What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experience, implanted in the memory as if we had known the places, persons, and things of which he treats The castle of Macbeth has a real subsistence in the mind; the Weird Sisters meet us in person on 'the blasted heath'; the 'air-drawn dagger' moves slowly before our eyes; the 'gracious Duncan', the 'blood-boulted Banquo' stand before us; all that passed through the mind of Macbeth passes, without the loss of a tittle, through ours. (IV, 186-87)

Elsewhere, Hazlitt commends Shakespeare's ability to design tragedy which 'stirs our inmost affections' and 'rouses the whole man within us' (V,6).(5)

Conversely, Hazlitt gives short shrift to plays which fail to evoke the passions and the sympathetic imagination. For example, he faults *Measure for Measure* because none of the main characters can engage the readers' 'cordial interest There is in general a want of passion; the affections are at a stand; our sympathies are repulsed and defeated in all directions In this respect, there may be said to be a general system of cross-purposes between the feelings of the different characters and the sympathy of the reader or the audience' (IV,345-46). Note the centrality of the reader/spectator in Hazlitt's argument. Similarly, he concludes his comparison of *Macbeth* and *Richard III* with a comment on their differing appeals to the sympathetic imagination. Richard is 'hardened' and 'fiendish' in his villainy, but *Macbeth* is a victim of 'passion' and 'destiny', so he appeals more to the public. We can identify with *Macbeth*'s situation; however, in the last scene of *Richard III*, 'we can only regard him as a wild beast taken in the toils: while we never entirely lose our concern for *Macbeth*; and he calls back all our sympathy by that fine close of thoughtful melancholy--"My way of life is fallen into the sear" ' (IV,193). Hazlitt seeks to distance his readers from the character of *Richard* by using subhuman images, such as the comparison of the King to an entrapped beast.

Hazlitt justifies this approach in his 1816 review of Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Literature*. Hazlitt often departs from the stance of a book reviewer to insert his own aesthetic speculations. Here, he condemns French tragedy because it is too generalized and thus frustrates the reader's identification with the heroes.

The true [dramatic] poet identifies the reader with the characters he represents; the French poet only identifies him with himself We never get beyond conjecture and reasoning--beyond the general impression of the situation of the persons We never get at that something more, which is what we are in search of, namely, what we ourselves should feel in the same situations. The true poet transports you to the scene--you see and hear what is passing--you catch, from the lips of the persons concerned, what lies nearest to their hearts;--the French poet takes you into his closet, and reads you a lecture upon it.

The *chefs-d'oeuvres* of their stage, then, are, after all, only ingenious paraphrases of nature. (6)

I have cited this passage at length because it is central for Hazlitt's dramatic theory. He repeats it in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819) and in *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820). (7) Note that Hazlitt condemns the egotism of bad writers, too.

Just as a good playwright helps the reader to identify with the characters, the best literary criticism should arouse the reader's imagination. In his essay 'On Criticism' in *Table Talk* (1821-22), Hazlitt attacks critics who show off their learning and opinions instead of grappling with the essence of a text. He calls for essays which illuminate books by 'transfusing their living principles' instead of applying stale rules of composition to 'dissecting the skeletons of works'. Hazlitt concludes,

A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work: here we have nothing but its superficial plan and elevation We know every thing about the work and nothing of it. The critic takes good care not to baulk the reader's fancy by anticipating the effect which the author has aimed at producing. (VIII, 217-18)

M.H. Abrams traces to Longinus Hazlitt's efforts 'to formulate a verbal equivalent for the aesthetic effects of the work under consideration'. (8)

Characters of Shakespear's Plays, contrary to popular critical opinion, is perhaps Hazlitt's most successful attempt to implement his theory of dramatic criticism. He highlights Shakespeare's primary effects, which enables the reader to concentrate on the most important themes and characters. Furthermore, Hazlitt tries to transfer his own enthusiasm to the reader. According to Herschel Baker, *Characters* 'exemplifies the gusto, power and passion that [Hazlitt] regards as the unique effect of art. His chief distinction as a critic lies precisely here, in his ability to perceive the imaginative truth of art and to convey the rapture that he feels'. Similarly, Joseph W. Donohue praises Hazlitt's 'total involvement in the passionate experience of art'. (9)

Leigh Hunt, a contemporary, found Hazlitt's approach an advantage for dramatic criticism. In an 1817 review of *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, Hunt praises his friend's 'general enthusiasm . . . for his author' and emphasizes 'the very striking susceptibility with which he changes his own humour and manner according to the nature of the play he comes upon; like a spectator in a theatre, who accompanies the turns of the actor's face with his own' Hunt proceeds to cite the first paragraph of Hazlitt's essay on 'Hamlet' as 'a striking specimen of the tendency . . . in this author to give himself up to his poet'. (10)

The experience of reading Hazlitt's criticism is unique because he establishes intimate bonds 1) between the reader and dramatic characters and 2) between his own sensibility and that of the reader. W.P. Albrecht lauds Hazlitt for successfully 'identifying the reader with a tragic character' in his essays. John Kinnaird finds Hazlitt's style 'freshly readable; for it

implicates the reader in the act of criticism more intimately than ever before'. (11)

In *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age* (1971), Roy Park defines Hazlitt's aesthetics as 'experiential'. The experiential response demands an imaginative openness and a capacity for deep feeling. By exercising these two faculties, an individual can transcend his own ego to sympathize with other people's experiences. As a result, one gains an appreciation of the complexity and variety of human life. Both the great writer or artist and the sensitive reader/spectator must respond in this way. Ideally, the writer helps the reader to achieve openness and insight. (12)

Hazlitt worries that the stage can impede this potential insight by oversimplifying and distorting dramatic literature, especially the plays of Shakespeare. In many chapters of *Characters*, he insists that a particular role is not or cannot be portrayed adequately in the theatre. For example, Hazlitt complains about actors who present 'caricatures' of Shylock, instead of well thought out interpretations. The critic concludes, 'The stage is not in general the best place to study our author's characters in. It is too often filled with traditional common-place conceptions of the part handed down from sire to son, and suited to the taste of *the great vulgar and the small*' (IV, 324). This argument is an extension of the remarks of earlier commentators like James Beattie and Leigh Hunt. (13)

The only works of Shakespeare that Hazlitt likes to see performed are *The Winter's Tale* and *Richard III*. Hazlitt had witnessed successful performances of these two plays. He recalls an 1802 production of *The Winter's Tale* which starred Mrs. Siddons as Hermione, John Philip Kemble as Leontes, and John Bannister as Autolycus. The critic laments, 'We shall never see these parts so acted again' While the spectator is dependent upon the cast, which may age and change, the reader's reaction to the play is independent of time and place. '. . . True poetry, like nature, is always young; and we still read the courtship of Florizel and Perdita, as we welcome the return of spring, with the same feelings as ever' (IV, 326). Similarly, Hazlitt has mixed feelings about *Richard III*. He considers it 'properly a stage play' and praises Edmund Kean's 'perfectly articulated' acting as King Richard. However, certain aspects of the character elude Kean: 'It is possible to form a higher conception of the character of Richard than that given by Mr. Kean' (IV, 298). Also, in the final paragraph of his essay, Hazlitt cites two moving lyrical speeches by minor characters in the tragedy and comments, 'We do not insist on the repetition of these last passages as proper for the stage: we should indeed be loth to trust them in the mouth of almost any actor. . . .' (IV, 303).

In *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, Hazlitt explains why he prefers to read good plays. Books 'are the nearest to our thoughts: they wind into the heart; the poet's verse slides into the current of our blood. We read them when young, we remember them when old. We read there of what has happened to others; we feel that it has happened to ourselves' (VI, 247). In other words, the act of reading stirs the mind and the sympathy of the participant, and it involves the reader more than the passive experience of witnessing a performance. In 1815, Hazlitt had criticized all productions of Shakespeare's drama, 'even by the best actors', 'because theatres neglect poetic imagery and 'minuter strokes of character'

to emphasize physical distress and other obvious claptraps.

It is only the *pantomime* part of tragedy . . . which is sure to tell, and tell completely on the stage. All the rest, all that appeals to our profounder feelings, to reflection and imagination, all that affects us most deeply in our closets . . . is little else than an interruption and a drag on the business of the stage . . . Those parts of the play on which the reader dwells the longest, and with the highest relish in the perusal, are hurried through in the performance, while the most trifling and exceptionable are obtruded on his notice, and occupy as much time as the most important. . . . Hence it is, that the reader of the plays of Shakespear is almost always disappointed in seeing them acted; and, for our own parts, we should never go to see them acted, if we could help it. (V, 222)

Despite Hazlitt's constant stream of criticism of the London stage, its managers, and its most prominent stars, he clearly loved the theatre. After commending Kean's *Romeo*, Hazlitt remarks parenthetically, '. . . Actors are the best commentators on the poets' (IV, 256). He does not recommend the abolition of dramatic performances; instead, he emphasizes that the public needs to understand the limitations of the stage as a vehicle for conveying the literary power of a genius like Shakespeare.

Not even Kean could satisfy Hazlitt in many roles. While he found Kean's portrayal of Richard III powerful, Hazlitt doubted that anyone could play *Macbeth*. 'We can conceive a common actor to play Richard tolerably well; we can conceive no one to play *Macbeth* properly, or to look like a man that had encountered the *Weird Sisters*' (IV, 194). Note that Hazlitt agreed with Thomas Whately and other eighteenth-century critics in viewing *Macbeth* as a far more complex character than Richard. (14) Similarly, Hazlitt believed that Hamlet's role was not actable (IV, 237). Although he extolled Shakespeare's skill in creating unique and believable heroines, Hazlitt discovered that most performances failed to capture these traits. 'His women are certainly very unlike stage-heroines; the reverse of tragedy-queens' (IV, 180).

Shakespeare's most fanciful characters--witches, sprites, strange beasts--are perhaps the hardest to represent. Hazlitt contends that this factor makes *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream* impossible to act. Caliban is a case in point: 'It is not indeed pleasant to see this character on the stage any more than it is to see the god Pan personated there' (IV, 239). Likewise, Hazlitt finds the witches in *Macbeth* 'ridiculous on the modern stage' (IV, 194). Hazlitt's most extensive discussion of this problem occurs in his essay on *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the second paragraph, he praises Shakespeare's 'subtlety', 'delicacy', and powers of description (IV, 245-46). These virtues are likely to be obscured by a performance. Because Shakespeare's dramas are so subtle, they are more difficult to stage than those of any other writer. Hazlitt uses images of delicate phenomena to emphasize the subtlety of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Note that only the reader can fully appreciate the delicate texture of the comedy. 'The reading of this play is like wandering in a grove by moonlight: the descriptions breathe a sweetness like odours thrown from beds of flowers'

(IV, 246). Hazlitt considers any staging of this drama a mistake, and he makes it clear that his ban does not apply only to a few awkward nineteenth-century productions. Despite Liston's fine acting as Bottom in one London extravaganza, the performance 'failed . . . from the nature of things'. The following passage, which concludes the essay, develops Hazlitt's thesis that most of Shakespeare's plays, especially his fanciful creations, must be read to be experienced adequately.

The MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand: but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled.--Poetry and the stage do not agree well together. . . . That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. Where all is left to the imagination (as is the case in reading) every circumstance, near or remote, has an equal chance of being kept in mind, and tells according to the mixed impression of all that has been suggested. But the imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impressions of the senses. Any offence given to the eye is not to be got rid of by explanation. Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage it is an ass's head, and nothing more; certainly a very strange costume for a gentleman to appear in. Fancy cannot be embodied any more than a simile can be painted; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate *Wall* or *Moonshine*. Fairies are not incredible, but fairies six feet high are so The boards of a theatre and the regions of fancy are not the same thing. (IV, 247-48) (15)

To the typical spectator, Bottom's head is merely 'strange', but for the careful reader, the same head is a 'fantastic illusion'. Hazlitt implies that the people responsible for staging *Midsommer Night's Dream* are as uncouth as the rustics who think that one can portray moonlight.

Tragedy presents different problems when produced in a theatre. Plays like *Othello* have no supernatural component; they interest the audience by arousing the sympathetic imagination, according to Hazlitt. Shakespeare stirs the imagination by enabling readers to identify strongly with his tragic heroes. Hazlitt speaks about this phenomenon from the reader's point of view, not from the spectator's. For example, Hamlet's speeches become 'as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind' (IV, 232).

The clearest statement of Hazlitt's theory of tragedy occurs in the opening paragraph of his essay, 'Othello'. Elisabeth Schneider has pointed out that he begins by re-working Aristotle's thesis that tragedy effects katharsis by evoking terror and pity. (16) Hazlitt argues that because tragedy stimulates the sympathetic imagination, it enables man to transcend his usual selfish concerns. These remarks contradict Babbitt's view that the romantics view katharsis as mere self-expression.

It has been said that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. That is, it substitutes imaginary sympathy for mere selfishness. It gives us a high and permanent interest, beyond ourselves, in humanity as such. It raises the great, the remote,

and the possible to an equality with the real, the little and the near. It makes man a partaker with his kind. . . . It opens the chambers of the human heart. (IV, 200)

Hazlitt's essay on 'Othello' seems designed to help the reader to identify with the hero. When describing how Shakespeare develops Othello's character, Hazlitt intentionally implicates his reader in the Moor's reactions by shifting from third-person pronouns referring to Othello to first-person pronouns which are plural.

It is in working his noble nature up to this extremity through rapid but gradual transitions, in raising passion to its height from the smallest beginnings and in spite of all obstacles, in unfolding the strength and the weakness of our nature, in putting in motion the various impulses that agitate this our mortal being, and at last blending them in that noble tide of deep and sustained passion . . . that Shakespear has shown the mastery of his genius and of his power over the human heart. (IV, 201-02)

The parallel construction of this long sentence also tends to merge 'his noble nature' with 'our mortal being'.

Perhaps the most striking example of Hazlitt's awareness of his readers is the essay 'Hamlet' in *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*. 'Hamlet' begins and ends with a discussion of the play's appeal for readers, and the argument is carefully structured to captivate and manipulate Hazlitt's own reading public. He catches the reader's attention at the outset with a series of clauses which imitate the rhythm and phraseology of Exodus 6:26-27. The King James Bible translates these verses in this way: 'These are that Aaron and Moses, to whom the LORD said, Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, according to their armies. These are they which spake to Pharoah king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt: These are that Moses and Aaron'. Hazlitt's slightly blasphemous adaptation catalogues Hamlet's actions and attributes as a herald does before the entrance of a royal personage. This is appropriate, of course, because Hamlet is a prince. Despite the fact that Hamlet lived around 1300, Shakespeare's great dramatic skill enables nineteenth-century readers to identify with the Dane and to 'remember' him as if he were an acquaintance.

This is that Hamlet the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after-years; he who made that famous soliloquy on life, who gave the advice to the players . . . ; he that was mad and sent to England; the slow avenger of his father's death; who lived at the court of Horwendillus five hundred years before we were born, but all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own, because we have read them in Shakespear. (IV, 232)

As in other essays which I have already discussed, Hazlitt insists on first-person plural pronouns here. This forces the reader to recall his or her own responses to the character of Hamlet. Note that the 'we' represents *readers* of Shakespeare, not spectators. In the middle of the paragraph, Hazlitt cites various phrases which would stick in the mind of someone who

knew the text of *Hamlet* well, not a casual playgoer.

The second paragraph begins by contradicting the spirit and tone of the opening passage: 'Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain'. Hazlitt wants the reader to find this sceptical statement flat and colourless after the stately, evocative cadences of the previous sentence. The reader should protest at the unfairness of such an unimaginative response. Hazlitt proceeds to challenge this empty assertion and to reassure the reader that Shakespeare's prince cannot be dismissed in this fashion. 'What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet' (IV, 232). Here Hazlitt moves rapidly from a defence of the validity of dramatic literature to the bold assertion that the readers' responses to Hamlet generate his reality. Anyone with a sympathetic imagination *becomes* Hamlet when perusing the tragedy, while a prosaic person distances himself from what he considers 'the idle coinage of the poet's brain'.

Hazlitt examines the psychology of the readers' intense involvement with Hamlet : we identify with the Prince because we have had analogous experiences. Our emotional response gives the play its validity.

This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection . . . ; he . . . whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing; . . . and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them--this is the true Hamlet.(IV,232-33)

Hazlitt's assertion that the 'play has a prophetic truth' is clearly related to the parody of Biblical language in paragraph one. Both of these heterodox passages are meant to elevate the imaginative truth of the tragedy by likening it to religious verity. Other parallels with the first paragraph are 1) the long sentence cataloging human suffering, which is structurally similar to the bulk of the opening clauses, and 2) the concluding statement, which echoes the first words of the essay. Thus, the first and second paragraphs form a large chiasmus. Both passages are designed to evoke as many as possible of the readers' first associations.

At this point, Hazlitt takes a step back to confess, 'We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces. . . . Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves ..' (IV.233). The use of 'we' here suggests that Hazlitt sees this problem as a general one: because many readers identify so strongly with the hero, it is impossible to approach Hamlet in the conventional fashion, which requires a critic to distance himself from a work of literature in order to maintain objectivity.

One may well ask, why must critics rely only on 'objective' approaches? If a tragedy's strength is its capacity to arouse the reader's sympathetic imagination, perhaps a new approach is justified. Hazlitt does not make this argument in 'Hamlet'; however, the remarks which I have quoted previously from 'On Criticism' indicate that he was consciously trying to evoke 'the

soul and body of a work' (VII, 217) by a new, sympathetic form of criticism.

Hazlitt marvels at Shakespeare's seemingly effortless ability to involve the reader in many characters' lives. 'There is no attempt to force an interest: every thing is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort . . .' (IV, 233). Unlike other writers, who stress external action, Shakespeare reveals the inner workings of his characters. If a reader is attuned to this, he can envision much more than the usual stage spectacle.

But here we are more than spectators. We have not only 'the outward pageants and the signs of grief'; but 'we have that within which passes shew'. We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very fine versions and paraphrases of nature; but Shakespeare, together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage. (IV, 233).

Unlike the French writers whom Hazlitt attacked in several essays, Shakespeare presents the reader with nature herself. However, the playwright's refusal to 'paraphrase' nature complicates the reader's job: each person must arrive at his or her own interpretation. The privilege of 'judg/ing/ for ourselves' demands a great imaginative effort.

Hazlitt tries to help the reader by stressing the unique aspects of Hamlet's character. Although 'Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be', his sensitivity, enthusiasm, and vulnerability should appeal to the reader. Like most of the romantic commentators, especially Coleridge, Hazlitt finds Hamlet's inaction intriguing. 'His ruling passion is to think, not to act: and any vague pretext that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes' (IV, 233-35).

In the sixth paragraph, Hazlitt turns to critics who had questioned Hamlet's morality. He defends the Danish prince, using arguments which anticipate those of Charles Lamb in *The Essays of Elia* (1823). Lamb protests against the behaviour of British citizens who seem incapable of imagining a world where the restrictive laws of common life cannot apply. Such people have no tolerance for certain kinds of drama, because plays often violate ordinary codes of conduct. Lamb uses courtroom imagery to satirize this frame of mind. (17) Similarly, Hazlitt points out that Hamlet's behaviour 'is more interesting than according to rules'. Furthermore, the Prince's 'very excess of intellectual refinement . . . makes the common rules of life . . . sit loose upon him. He may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much taken up with the airy world of contemplation to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things' (IV, 235-36). Hazlitt appears to direct this paragraph only to literary critics who believe that drama should be 'copied either from The Whole Duty of Man, or from The Academy of Compliments' (IV, 235). However, his arguments are also designed to challenge the thinking of any readers who may agree with this wrongheaded school of criticism.

Hazlitt gives another reason for admiring Shakespeare's characters, despite

the fact that they depart from orthodox morality: 'Shakespear was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character . . .'(IV,236). In other words, the playwright presents complex personalities, not pasteboard figures. Hazlitt mentions Queen Gertrude as an example of a complicated individual. Obviously, the more intricate the characters are, the more work a reader needs to do to understand them. Hazlitt argues that most critics have not analyzed Polonius properly. While many critics viewed the courtier as inconsistent, Hazlitt denies this allegation and contends that one must examine Polonius' motives and the different circumstances in each scene. Shakespeare's psychological insight leads him to present men whose conduct belies their intelligence.

Paragraph eight includes a paeon to Shakespeare's 'tenderness and pathos' in portraying Ophelia. In contrast, Laertes does not win the readers' sympathy at all. Hazlitt dismisses him in one sentence.

'Her brother, Laertes, is a character we do not like so well: he is too hot and choleric, and somewhat rhodomontade' (IV, 236-37). One wishes that the critic had expanded this useful observation. Perhaps Shakespeare had reasons for obstructing the reader's sympathetic identification with Laertes.

In the final paragraph of the essay, Hazlitt strongly condemns *any* performance of *Hamlet*. 'We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, HAMLET. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems hardly capable of being acted' (IV, 237). Even the best English actors could not succeed in this role. Hazlitt found Kemble too inflexible in his portrayal of the young prince, and he found Kean 'too splenetic and rash'. The part requires extreme subtlety and an awareness of the character's complexity. In order to emphasize the difficulty in acting Hamlet, Hazlitt concludes the essay with this paradox: 'He is the most amiable of misanthropes' (IV, 237).(18)

Experiments in manipulation of his readers are not confined to *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*. Hazlitt's essays on the theatre for various periodicals also reveal a self-conscious critic at work. This is especially true of those longer articles which were not written as reviews of single performances. Many of these essays exploit the possibilities of digressions. Although the digression on Ophelia and Laertes in 'Hamlet' was left hanging, Hazlitt's later excursions are coherent and well developed. He indicates in parenthetical remarks directed to his readers that he is *purposely* departing from the central topic. However, he often veils his underlying rhetorical strategy.

A good example is the third of Hazlitt's articles for *The London Magazine* (March, 1820). He begins by informing the readers that his subject will be the minor theatres and that he intends to 'give a furlough to fancy'. In the next paragraph, Hazlitt explains that he views the minor houses as 'the connecting link' between the most primitive theatre and the most elaborate stage pomp. At this point, he digresses to evoke the excitement of an individual's first experience of the theatre, usually 'a company of strolling players' performing in a barn, booth, town hall, or assembly room temporarily converted into a stage. Hazlitt de-emphasizes the importance of the theatre building and the spectacle to focus on the pleasure of

unadorned drama. He labels the stage world 'an anomaly in existence' and compares it to 'fairy revels' and a 'gay waking dream'. Under the influence of a play, the initiate's 'childish fancy' paradoxically becomes 'the only reality' (XVIII, 291-93).

Throughout this digression, Hazlitt uses first-person plural pronouns to implicate the readers and to involve them more intimately with his argument. When we first see a play, 'how glad, how surprised are we! We have no thought of any deception in the scene, no wish but to realise it ourselves with inconsiderate haste and fond impatience. . . . A new sense comes upon us, the scales fall off our eyes . . .' (XVIII, 293). By repeating 'we', 'us', 'ourselves', etc., in this passage, Hazlitt moves his readers from agreement with the uncontroversial statement, 'how surprised are we', to the radical evaluation, 'the scales fall off our eyes'.

The essay proceeds to gently caricature theatre managers as frustrated actors who travel from door to door distributing play-bills and verbal propaganda. Hazlitt finds the manager's illusions fascinating: 'he is little less happy than a king, though not much better off than a beggar. He . . . is accompanied, in his incessant daily round of trifling occupations, with a never-failing sense of authority and self-importance. . . . He is not quite mad, nor quite happy' (XVIII, 294-95). Like the person at his first play, the manager is absorbed in a world of fancy.

Actors are also transformed by their profession. Again Hazlitt stresses the imaginative involvement of each player.

The poet fancies others to be this or that; the player fancies himself to be all that the poet but describes. . . . He has discovered the true Elixir of Life, which is freedom from care Offer him twice the salary to go into a counting-house, or stand behind a counter, and he will return to poverty, steeped in contempt, but eked out with fancy, at the end of a week. (XVIII, 295-96)

Because they live in a world of imaginary splendour, the actors can transmit the magic of drama to those around them.

Hazlitt recalls one joyous actor, singing and 'heart-whole', and speculates about what has happened to the man. Hazlitt lists various possibilities--care, death, sickness, 'is he himself lost and buried amidst the rubbish of one of our larger, or else of one of our Minor Theatres?' (XVIII, 296). Clearly, this last eventuality is the worst. The word 'rubbish' jolts the reader--intentionally. This sentence concludes the four-page digression, a substantial slice of an 11-page essay. Hazlitt's descriptions of actors, managers, and playgoers should have made the reader recall his own best experiences in the magical world of drama. The reader's sympathetic imagination has been aroused, and he has fallen under the spell of the prose incantation. Now Hazlitt pulls the rug out from under his reading public by implying that both the major and minor houses violate the joyous world of the actor and are callous to his fate.

After this 'intended digression', Hazlitt criticizes the minor theatres,

where he witnessed 'the heartless indifference and hearty contempt shown by the performers for their parts, and by the audience for the players and the play' (XVIII, 297). Though he came 'determined to be pleased', Hazlitt found no satisfaction: none of his expectations was met. By digressing to emphasize the imaginative potential of theatre and then disillusioning us readers with the London reality, he forces us to undergo his own disappointment. Hazlitt purposely raises our expectations so that he can frustrate them.

Conclusion

Although Babbitt, Abrams, Wellek, and others assert that the romantics' criticism is dominated by their interest in the writer, Hazlitt's essays on drama reveal an overwhelming concern with the *reader's* responses to literature. This concern links Hazlitt with eighteenth-century critics like Hume, Johnson, Richardson, and Morgann, who explored audience reaction. Hazlitt differs from Hume and Johnson in stressing the need for one to identify with tragic heroes, instead of maintaining aesthetic distance. His favourite tragedies are those which most involve the reader in the main characters' sufferings and evoke the sympathetic imagination.

Hazlitt was fascinated by the complexity and variety of Shakespearean heroes, and he came to believe that they could not be presented adequately on stage. Only a sensitive reader could appreciate the bard's insights into the human psyche. Because Shakespeare's tragedy involves an internalization of the action, Hazlitt felt that the nineteenth-century public needed help in understanding this kind of drama. Awareness of his readers shapes the rhetoric and the overall structure of his essays. (19)

NOTES

1. Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), p.225; Babbitt, 'On Being Creative', in *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), p.18; M.H.Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp.7,134, 140 *et passim*; Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950*, II. *The Romantic Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp.203-04; Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1957), pp.vii,2, 7, 28, 160 *et passim*. The German writer, Friedrich Schlegel, was among the first to contrast his era's subjectivity with the ancient Greeks' objectivity. Unlike Babbitt et al, Schlegel felt that the modern romantic values were *superior* to those of the Greeks. Abrams and Wellek demonstrate some awareness that the romantics cannot be confined to completely subjective categories. Abrams concedes in the last chapter of *The Mirror and the Lamp* that most of the British romantics 'den[y] that the judgment of poetic value ought to be severed from the consideration of the effects on the reader' (p.328). While Wellek considers Coleridge 'almost oblivious of his audience' (II, 188), he believes that Hazlitt's essays reveal 'a constant awareness of the needs and limitations of the middle-class audience' (II, 198).
2. George Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, 3 vols. (1900-04; rpt. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons

- Ltd., 1949), III, 258; William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), pp. 493-94; Charles I. Patterson, Jr., 'Hazlitt's Criticism in Retrospect', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 21, No. 4 (Autumn, 1981), 648, 650-51, 663.
3. Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (1946; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp.143, 165; Bate, ed., *Criticism: the Major Texts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952), p.282; Morris Eaves, 'Romantic Expressive Theory and Blake's Idea of the Audience', *PMLA*, 95, No.5 (October, 1980), 797-98; Peter Hoheisel, 'Coleridge on Shakespeare: Method Amid the Rhetoric', *Studies in Romanticism*, 13, No. 1 (Winter, 1974), 15-23; Richard Haven, 'The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb', *ELH*, 30, No. 2 (June, 1963), 137-46; John R. Nabholz, 'Drama and Rhetoric in Lamb's Essays of the Imagination', *Studies in English Literature*, 12, No. 4 (Autumn, 1972), 683-703. In *The Romantic Reviewers*, John O. Hayden observes that many of the best works of Wordsworth, Lamb, Hunt, Byron, and Shelley received frequent and favourable reviews. Early nineteenth-century critics 'overwhelmingly favoured the new literature of their age'. Coleridge and Hazlitt did not fare as well: most of Coleridge's publications were damned, and Hazlitt's essays were often condemned because of his freethinking. However, 'Characters of Shakespear's Plays (1817), the Lectures Chiefly on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth (1820), Table Talk (1821-22), and Characteristics (1823) . . . enjoyed generally favourable receptions'. See Hayden, *The Romantic Reviewers, 1802-1824* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp.2, 74, 111, 215, 204. Hayden's evidence indicates that the early nineteenth-century public did not feel alienated from its best writers. José Ortega y Gasset has even gone so far as to describe romantic art in general as 'made for the masses inasmuch as it is not art but an extract from life'. He points out that the romantics' works were published in 'large editions' and were easy for the public to understand, unlike twentieth-century art. See Ortega, 'The Dehumanization of Art', in *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948 and 1968), pp. 5-6, 12, *et passim*. While this analysis is also extreme, it provides a good counterweight to Kermode's claims. Note that Ortega was no more sympathetic than Babbitt to the romantic's 'private upper-middle class emotions, his major and minor sorrows, his yearnings, . . . and, in case he was English, his reveries behind his pipe' (Ortega, p.30).
4. William Hazlitt, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1930-34), I, 1, 3; Hazlitt, 'The Drama: No. VII', *The London Magazine*, July 1820, in *Works*, XVIII, 345. All further references to the Howe edition of Hazlitt's *Works* will be incorporated into the text of this article. John L. Mahoney contrasts Hazlitt's view of the mind as active to the passive model of Hobbes and Locke. The latter viewed the mind 'as a kind of receptacle of impressions received from the world outside'. In contrast, Hazlitt's 'emphasis is on the imagination's activity, on its ability to project itself into the future, to identify with another experience, another personality'.

See Mahoney, 'The Futuristic Imagination: Hazlitt's Approach to *Romeo and Juliet*', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1974), 65. According to Mahoney, Hazlitt often attacked egotism: 'True gusto, he contends, is turned outward toward a worthy object in nature, not inward upon the self'. See Mahoney, *The Logic of Passion: The Literary Criticism of William Hazlitt* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), p.75.

5. Hazlitt was not the first to use the criteria of passion and sympathy in evaluating drama. Critics like Dryden, Rapin, and Dennis used the term 'concernment' to refer to the audience's solicitude for the heroes' sufferings. See Eric Rothstein, 'English Tragic Theory in the Late Seventeenth Century', *ELH*29, No. 3 (September, 1962), 317-19. Earl R. Wasserman traces the evolution of dramatic criticism away from the position of writers like Hume, Johnson, Descartes, and Hobbes. While Hobbes stressed self-love and the spectators' need to feel themselves at a safe distance from the dangerous plights of tragic heroes, Shaftesbury and the members of the Scottish school emphasize the audience's sympathy for protagonists and its closeness to their suffering. Edmund Burke, an English author whom Hazlitt admired, took this position. See Wasserman, 'The Pleasures of Tragedy', *ELH*, 14, No. 4 (December, 1947), 293, 297-99, 303, 305-06. Walter Jackson Bate found that the romantics were influenced by the Scottish intuitional school of moralists, which included Alexander Gerard, John Ogilvie, James Beattie, and Hugh Blair. These men believed that humans have an innate "sensibility of heart", by means of which, in poetry and drama, "we become interested for some of the persons represented, and sympathize with every change in their condition". See Bate, 'The Sympathetic Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism', *ELH*12, No. 2 (June, 1945), 153. Bate is quoting Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1759).
6. William Hazlitt, 'Schlegel on the Drama' (a review of A.W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Literature*, trans. John Black, 1815), *Edinburgh Review*, 26 (February, 1816), 98. The Howe edition of Hazlitt's *Works* incorrectly reads 'ingenius' (XVI, 90).
7. Howe comments that Hazlitt's remark on French drama here was 'first written in the course of the *Morning Chronicle* letter "On Modern Comedy" (see vol. xx.) and was repeated in the lecture "On Wit and Humour" in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (vol. vi., pp.27-8). Cf. also vol. ix., pp. 72-3' (*Works*, XVI, 424). I have also found this passage in 'On Ancient and Modern Literature' in *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (V, 205-06).
8. Abrams, p. 135.
9. Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 308; Joseph W. Donohue, Jr., *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p.324.
10. Leigh Hunt, 'Characters of Shakespear's Plays', *The Examiner*, October 26, 1817, in *Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism: 1808-1831*, eds. Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), pp. 169, 170.

11. W.P. Albrecht, *Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1965), p. 105; John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 370.
12. Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 36, 38, 48, 74, 109, 145, 161-67, 170, 194, 196.
13. In a letter to Elizabeth Montagu, Dr. James Beattie wrote, 'I have often seen Hamlet performed by the underlings of the theatre, but none of these seemed to understand what they were about. Hamlet's character, though perfectly natural, is so very uncommon, that few, even of our critics, can enter into it'. See Paul S. Conklin, *A History of Hamlet Criticism, 1607-1821* (New York: Columbia University Press/King's Crown Press, 1947), p. 65, which cites this passage. Similarly, Leigh Hunt points out that, from an actor's perspective, the Prince is a difficult role because it demands skill in both tragedy and comedy. See Leigh Hunt, 'Mr. Elliston' from *Critical Essays* (1807), in *Dramatic Essays*, eds. William Archer and Robert W. Lowe (London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 1894), p. 87. For a brief history of other reasons that critics objected to the performance of tragedy, see J.R. Heller, 'The Bias Against Spectacle in Tragedy: The History of an Idea', *The Eighteenth Century*, 23, No. 3 (Autumn, 1982), 239-55.
14. Thomas Whately, *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespere* (1785), ed. Richard Whately, 3rd edn., in *Eighteenth Century Shakespeare*, No. 17 (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1970), pp.99-100.
15. Howe observes, 'The concluding paragraph is added from *The Examiner*, January 21, 1816' (*Works IV*, 399, note).
16. Elisabeth Schnieder, *The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt: A Study of the Philosophical Basis of his Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), p. 137.
17. Charles Lamb, 'Imperfect Sympathies' and 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', *Essays of Elia* (1823), in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1903-05), II, 59-60, 63-64; 141-144, 146. These essays were first published in 1821 and 1822 in the *London Magazine*. They were revised and received new titles for the first edition of *Elia*. For a discussion of Lamb's dramatic criticism, see Janet Ruth Heller, 'Charles Lamb and the Reader of Drama', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, New Series No. 42 (April, 1983), pp. 25-36.
18. Stuart M. Tave argues in *The Amiable Humorist* that the 'amiable misanthrope' was a conventional character in eighteenth-century novels and plays. See Tave, *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 165, 276 (note No.2). However, Hazlitt is unique in applying this oxymoron to Hamlet.
19. I would like to thank Stuart Tave, Elizabeth Helsing, Perry Gethner, and Allon Fisher for their helpful comments on this essay.

THE HAZLITTS AT THE MITRE COURT 'WEDNESDAYS' IN 1808: HIDDEN
IMPLICATIONS OF A MARY LAMB LETTER

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It is a fact uniformly accepted by Hazlitt's biographers that he and his wife went down to live at Winterslow immediately after their wedding in London on 1 May 1808. Yet it was not until a year and half later, September 1809, that he was able to inform his parents, in a letter describing excursions with his recent summer guests the Lambs, that 'We are, I find, on the borders of Wiltshire and Hampshire'. (1) The remarkable tardiness of this discovery gives us pause. It seems to suggest that that summer of 1809 was the first in which he was able to explore his new home, and prompts us to take a closer look at the evidence, whereupon several puzzling features emerge, as follows.

The reiterated assertion that the couple left London on 1st May derives from the sole authority of what was said sixty years after the event by their grandson W.C. Hazlitt, who was born in 1834, four years after Hazlitt's death, and who was six when his grandmother died, viz. 'The ceremony ... was solemnized on Sunday morning, the 1st of May 1808, at St. Andrew's Church, Holborn; the married couple afterwards breakfasted at Dr Stoddart's, and then proceeded to Winterslow'. (2) This does not exactly square with two statements made earlier, by the bridegroom himself and by his son. Hazlitt said in an essay written between July and October 1823 at Winterslow, 'Here I came fifteen years ago, a willing exile', which could mean any time in the second half of 1808. (3) His son, W.C. Hazlitt's father (born 1811), declared in 1836 in the *Literary Remains of William Hazlitt*, when his mother the bride of 1808 was still alive, aged 62, 'Shortly after his marriage he went to live at Winterslow'. (4) Vague though this is, the interval between the events is clearly other than in the words 'breakfasted ... and then proceeded'; and indeed, according to the time-scale used in that brief biographical introduction by William Hazlitt the Younger, the phrase 'shortly after' may mean a period of six months, e.g. when Hazlitt was appointed parliamentary reporter (October 1812) this was 'shortly after' delivering his lectures on philosophy (April 1812). (5) The grandson W.C. Hazlitt, a slapdash writer, in *his* statement thirty years after the *Literary Remains* seems gratuitously to have assumed that 'marriage' was synonymous with 'wedding' and that 'shortly' implied hours rather than months.

Now, according to William Godwin's unpublished diary Hazlitt visited him in town on 20 May 1808, less than three weeks after the wedding, and thereafter they met from once to three times every month until 16 November, when there is a gap of nearly three months until 10 February 1809. (6) So that if we accept that the ceremony was hardly over before the couple went down to Wiltshire, we must also accept that Hazlitt, a man who had had to borrow to get married, then undertook the wearisome, costly, eight-hour coach-journey to London up to fourteen times in seven months. Mary Lamb, writing to Sarah Stoddart two years earlier, 21 June 1806, had said, 'I wish it was not such a long expensive journey, then you could run backwards and forwards every month or two'. The return fare was 32s. inside, 21s. out. (7) If this is really what Hazlitt did then anything from a fifth to a quarter of their annual income of £80 went on coach-fares alone in the first months of their

marriage (and with a child expected). But when we see that Sarah too visited Godwin on 2 September, that Sarah and Hazlitt (and Mary Lamb) dined at the Godwins' on 11 October, and that four of the meetings between Godwin and Hazlitt took place not at Godwin's but *at Hazlitt's*, it becomes increasingly plain that the Hazlitts had never left London. (8) This is borne out by the implications of the Lambs' first letter to the Hazlitts after the wedding.

It is dated 9-10 December 1808, and in it Mary says that they miss the Hazlitts' presence at the Wednesday-night gatherings: 'all the glory of the night, I may say, is at an end'. (9) Since Sarah was in Wiltshire continuously for at least six months up to 1st May she could not have attended these Wednesdays before the wedding; therefore she and Hazlitt attended, and attended regularly, after that date. Again, Mary complains of the Hazlitts' neglect: 'I hear of you from your brother but you do not write yourself, nor does Hazlitt, I beg that one or both of you will mend this fault as speedily as possible'. If Hazlitt really had been at Winterslow since May but had travelled so frequently up to town he would not have failed to call on the Lambs (in town he was always 'dropping in', in Mary's phrase), and they could not therefore have been deprived of news, so that the reproach, like the absence from the Wednesdays, must refer to the three and a half weeks that had elapsed since 16th November. Yet again, Mary asks how they like 'Winterslow and winter evenings', when they are supposed to have been at Winterslow since 1st May; that is, we are to believe that Mary allowed seven months to go by, after so signal an event as a wedding, before asking how the bride, her intimate friend whose sole bridesmaid she had been, was settling down in her new life, and also that Winterslow in cold weather was somehow a novelty to Sarah although she had spent the previous winter there. The inquiry only sounds natural (we may safely ignore the word-play) if we assume it to be elliptical for 'How do you married people find winter evenings in the country after those in town?' And yet once more: Mary says, 'I am very anxious to hear of your health. I hope, as you say nothing of your fall to your brother, you are perfectly recovered from the effects of it'. Now, if neither Sarah nor Hazlitt had written to the Lambs, nor communicated any news, nor mentioned the fall to Stoddart, how did Mary know that Sarah (who was eight months pregnant) had fallen? It sounds much as if Mary had witnessed the accident, and that it had happened in London no more than a few weeks before. Finally, a kind of postscript relating to one Noales implies that Sarah had observed him recently in ill-health and low spirits. There is no prefatory phrase of the kind one would expect after an interval of many months ('Perhaps you remember ...', 'Do you recall ...?'). Mary merely says, laconically, as of a situation her correspondent was already acquainted with and would grasp without any prompting, 'Noales has not yet got back again, but he is in better spirits'.

In addition to this letter there is one of 5 July 1808 to George Dyer on holiday in Worcestershire in which Lamb speaks of Hazlitt as though, unlike the recipient, he were still in town: 'More poets have started up since your departure; William Hazlitt, your friend and mine, is putting to press a collection of verses, chiefly amatory, some of them pretty enough'. (10)

All these apparent discrepancies fall away once we assume -- and it is the uncircumspect W.C. Hazlitt alone who stands in our way -- that the Hazlitts did not immediately on 1st May go down to Winterslow (a departure which in

any case would have implied an unaccountable hurry on Sarah's part, who had just spent at least six months there before coming up to be married) but stayed on in London, and that they finally, when Hazlitt had completed his consultations with Godwin over the *New and Improved Grammar*, and when Sarah was in immediate need of rest and quiet, went down to Wiltshire, into 'exile', soon after 16th November.

NOTES

1. *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, ed. Sikes, Bonner and Lahey, London 1979, p.112, letter of 5th November (1809).
2. W.C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, London 1867, i.164. That Stoddart provided the wedding-breakfast is plausible enough (it was he who gave his sister away), but the grandson's other comments betray his ignorance of the circumstances ('I wonder whether Elia appeared at the altar in his snuff-coloured smalls? I wonder whether Miss Lamb wore, after all, the sprig dress ...? I wonder in what way Lamb misbehaved ...?')
3. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed P.P. Howe, London 1930-4. xii.121 (*The Plain Speaker*, - the Everyman edition has the same pagination).
4. *Literary Remains of the late William Hazlitt*, London 1836, i.lv.
5. p.lix.
6. Attention was first drawn to these facts by H. Baker, *William Hazlitt*, Cambridge, Mass. and London 1962, p.169.
7. *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 7 January 1811.
8. The dates of the meetings between Hazlitt and Godwin are as follows: May 20; June 4, 6, 10; July 3, 12, 15; August 22; September 10; October 22, 29; November 4, 16. I am obliged to Lord Abinger for permission to quote from the diary.
9. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. E.W. Marris Jr., Ithaca and London 1976, ii.286-8.
10. *ib.* p.284.

Dr. Jones is at present completing a biography of Hazlitt for Oxford University Press.

NEW LIGHT ON THE LAMBS AND THE BURNEYS

Winifred F. Courtney

Author of *Young Charles Lamb 1775 - 1802*

The Burney family-- mainly the eight children of the redoubtable Dr. Charles Burney, organist and musicologist--were an extraordinary clan. For the most part, as can be seen in their voluminous correspondence, they were good writers, affectionate, cultured, intelligent, and cheerfully purposeful. Fanny, third in age (next after James) was in 1778 a sensation at twenty-five as author of *Evelina*, a novel that has survived. They descended from 'common' stock (some of their ancestors had been travelling actors), and

as they came up in the world--though only Charles Jr. ever had much money--they were conscious of this. Fanny polished her *Evelina* manuscript to be more genteel, (1) sufficiently so as to win the approval of Dr. Samuel Johnson and the Queen of England.

It was a close family and one soon known in many prominent circles. Fanny's novel and winning personality made her in youth a lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte. She willingly escaped after five years, through illness, but retained the royal affection for life. (2) Her elder brother James (later Charles Lamb's friend) was her particular favourite. Charles Jr., after expulsion from Cambridge for stealing library books, (3) lived it down to run a successful boys' school at Greenwich attended by James's son Martin (and incidentally by Charles Lamb's murdering friend T.G. Wainwright of the *London Magazine*, himself a Burney connection (4)). Ultimately, Charles became a noted Classical scholar and Chaplain to George III. (5) Of the remaining younger Burneys, five--of eleven in all--were half- and step-siblings. Youngest of these was Sarah Harriet Burney, a published novelist at twenty-six, who comes into our story, together with Lieutenant-Colonel Molesworth Phillips (widower of a favourite Burney sister Susanna), James and his wife Sarah Payne Burney (here called 'Mrs. James'), and their children Martin and Sarah (here called Sally). Sarah Harriet was the second daughter of Dr. Burney and his second wife, and younger than her half-brother James by twenty-two years.

The recent twelve-volume publication of Fanny's *Journals and Letters*, edited by Joyce Hemlow, (6) has cast new light on Lamb's particular Burney friends. James is the rough-hewn Captain of Lamb's letters; Mrs. James is at least part progenitor of 'Mrs. Battle'; to young Martin was dedicated the prose volume of Lamb's 1818 *Works*; young Sally is the bride of his essay 'The Wedding'. Molesworth Phillips appears with James in Lamb's 'Letter to Robert Southey'; Lamb addressed an admiring sonnet to Sarah Harriet in 1820. (Edward Francesco Burney of Lamb's 'Valentine's Day', the shy, brilliant artist, was James's first cousin.)

James had gone to sea as a boy of ten--for love of it(7)-- and was later a member of Captain Cook's second and third voyages to the South Pacific present at Cook's death, returning as Commander of Cook's ship the *Discoverer* in 1780. He was soon a radical Whig in politics (a 'Jacobin' to his Tory family). (8) James met the Irish Phillips on the Cook expeditions, cementing the friendship which led to Phillips's marriage to James's sister Susanna (1782). Phillips was a member of Dr. Johnson's Club (9) and considered dashing and attractive in the 1780s.

Skeletons were rife in the Burney closet for all their warm familial feeling. Phillips, after fourteen years--only nine of them happy-- with Susanna and four children, carried her off to Ireland in 1796. From 1791 he had proceeded to flirt and womanize and was known for his rages. In Ireland Susanna grew ill of consumption and was not *allowed* to visit her family until too late: she died en route home in 1800, seen only by Charles Jr., who went to meet her boat. Phillips (who had earlier separated a son from Susanna) then remarried within the year, betrayed his new wife and family openly with a mistress, and never, said Fanny, showed a sign of remorse. After her beloved sister's death Fanny refused ever to see Phillips

again. (10) But James in time resumed his friendship and introduced Phillips to Lamb. As whistplayer, Molesworth is all too easily confused with John Rickman's Parliamentary assistant Edward Phillips ('Ned'), and most of Lamb's letters refer to Ned, (11) but Molesworth's inclusion in the 'Letter to Southey' indicates that Lamb knew him well. Together they testified to James's handwriting in the proving of part of his will. (12)

How James squared his sister's treatment with friendship is a mystery: at one time he offered Phillips money to send Susanna home--it was refused. The £1,000 of mortgage money lent Phillips by Dr. Burney was never repaid; on Dr. Burney's death the family foreclosed and retrieved most of it. (13) Phillips appears in several descriptions of the Lambs' (and others') whistplaying 'evenings' as one who was fond of swapping sea stories, an amiable, burly fellow usually with a gap between waistcoat and trousers. (14) Presumably Molesworth's *charm* was again in evidence: Lamb *cannot* have known his history when he wrote of him as 'the high-minded associate of Cook, the veteran Colonel, with his lusty heart still sending cartels of defiance to old Time'. (15)

So James was odd and easy-going, known for humour, dependability, and not understanding what you said, (16) his sister Fanny's darling through thick and thin. Very thick was the period 1798-1803, just before he met Lamb, when to family horror James eloped at 48 with his half-sister Sarah Harriet, then 26. He remained in lodgings with her--exiled from the family in spite of frantic efforts to retrieve the situation--for five years. (17) In 1785 he had married Sarah Payne, a bookseller's daughter, in a match described by the doomed Susanna as one of coldness (Sarah) and warmth (James), which Susanna could not believe would succeed. (18) Though at intervals Mrs. James bore him three children, of whom Martin (1788) and Sally (1796) survived, he soon often left her. James's Royal Navy career had unaccountably ended on half-pay, also in 1785: he was never to have a ship again in spite of repeated applications. This was laid by the family to James's politics, but Hemlow has recently found in Naval records that the real reason was insubordination in 1782. (19) When James could stand his spouse no longer he would visit the elder Burneys and their one daughter at home, Sarah Harriet, who began accompanying him around and about. Old Dr. Burney soon grasped the situation and showed his intense disquiet in antagonism to Sarah H.-- who was therefore all the readier to depart with James.

James soon took Martin (now ten) to live with them, presumably while still attending Charles's school. Fanny wrote, all too prophetically, of the private scandal, 'How deep--how indelible a blot in all (James's) fairest character! How dangerous, how dreadful a precedent if he disagrees hereafter with Martin! And he *will*, I have no doubt' (20) The liaison (though Sarah H. is not known to have borne James any children) was covered by the family as a housekeeping arrangement for the separated James. It was only when James suggested that they take little Sally, whom he sorely missed, into the ménage, that Sarah Harriet, perhaps herself tiring of ostracism, decided (May, 1803) to seek a post as governess elsewhere, returning James and Martin to Mrs. James. (21) James seems to have known John Rickman during his exile: Lamb writes as early as February 1803 that at Rickman's he has first 'met a merry *natural* captain, who pleases himself vastly on once having made a pun at Otaheite in the O. language . . .' (22)

With governessing and good behaviour, Sarah Harriet was restored to favour, wrote more novels, and eventually kept house for her widowed father, (23) leaving the needy Martin an annuity in her will. She never married, but was found delightful at a 'certain age' in 1829, when Crabb Robinson met her in Italy and became her friend for life. (24) She had had a Swiss education and was clearly a very literate Burney.

And so we come to Martin, who already had a strike against him from an attack of facial paralysis at age six which left him the creature of Robert Southey's description in 1804: 'The captain hath a son--begotten, according to Lamb, upon a mermaid; and thus far is certain, that he is the queerest fish out of water The two sides [of his face] form the most ridiculous whole you can imagine; the boy, however, is a sharp lad, the inside not having suffered'. (25) He seems, nonetheless, to have been very much the victim of this tangled skein, as children so often are, as Angelica Bell was in Bloomsbury more than a century later. (26) With a mother as cool as Lamb's own, Martin was made much of by aunts and uncles, only to be torn away by a father at war with his mother and living lovingly with an aunt! A naval father without a ship, at that, though James must have occupied himself in exile with the first volume of his naval history since it appeared as he reappeared, in 1803--and went to five volumes by 1817. (27)

Children are not blind, and the confusion and unhappiness of Martin's early years must have been--were--devastating, cut off as he was even from his young sister. He read, of course, and was praised by Lamb and others for his learning, literary judgment, and integrity. If seen at all in this time of the second Phillips marriage, his uncle Phillips was also no happy model for Martin's most formative years. Later on, Mrs. James, Martin, and Sally perforce kept up with Phillips too, who (in a kind of retribution) died a wretched death in the cholera epidemic of 1832, wanting only to be buried next to his best friend, James Burney. (28)

The homecoming to Mrs. James cannot have been easy, though seven-year old Sally may have oiled the wheels--and she was all Martin was not--graceful, attractive, the darling of the flock. That summer these Burneys joined the Lambs on the Isle of Wight. In a humorous joint letter (James's and Lamb's) to Rickman, Lamb gives the impression that James was proud of his fifteen-year old son's mind but scolded him often. One has the impression too that Mrs. James was not with them, and that perhaps little Sally *was*. (29) Trouble between father and son usually surfaces in adolescence, and as time went on James was disapproving of Martin, who often appeared to others egotistical and bumptious or otherwise unlikeable, (30) with failure soon to be set as a pattern. Leigh Hunt notes that he was 'obstinate'. (31)

Students of Lamb will know the details of the Martin-Lamb relationship, which I cannot go into here. Bryan Waller Procter, who first met Lamb in 1817, wrote that Martin was 'the man whom I found at Lamb's house more frequently than any other person'. (32) How much the Lambs knew of Martin's history we cannot tell, but certainly they sensed his virtues, his lacks, his needs--especially the need for ego bolstering--and provided it with all the warmth of their generous hearts. At Lamb's Martin was admired, was central, taken seriously, and regarded as a kind of surrogate son; he clung to them with reciprocal warmth. Their friend William Hazlitt,

too, took an interest in Martin and played racquets with him into the 1820s, long after James had terminated *his* friendship with Hazlitt over an adverse Hazlitt critique of one of Fanny's novels. Martin was at Hazlitt's deathbed in 1830, writing some of the sick man's last letters. (33)

Martin helped his Aunt Fanny with her legal problems as he became a lawyer, and though she mentions one or two defections (34) she found him usually steadfast to her interests. She left him £100 annuity in her will (35)-- sorely needed, for after a stint assisting Rickman, Rickman fired him (36); Sharon Turner took him on as legal clerk and he became a barrister without any clients; he reported on Parliament for the *Times* but was never paid much for his work. (37) Crabb Robinson reports on his lack of progress-- and on Martin's tears at Mary Lamb's funeral in 1847. Robinson wrote of this occasion that Martin's presence 'added to our melancholy--indeed, he living, is a more melancholy object than Mary Lamb dead'. (38)

Martin had had yet another failure: in 1816 he secretly married the uneducated Rebecca Norton, from whom he was legally separated without issue about 1831. (39) On James's death (1821) Robinson says, 'Miss Lamb has taken Mrs. Martin Burney under her protection: but she is, at all events, a low person'. (40) The family had discovered his secret only in that year, in time for James to know of it too--just as the Navy, in view no doubt of his distinguished books on naval history, at last granted James the rank of Rear-Admiral a few months before his death. There is a revealing account in one of Fanny's new letters (1820) of Martin and his father at home, when James fell into a coal hole left open by a maid and was thought dead:

Mrs. Burney was out--but returned during this dreadful interval. She knocked at the door . . . in vain--and heard the screams & convulsive sobs of Sally, who was flung (into) a state of despondence & sorrow the most terrible, while Martin called out, to the Maid, 'You have killed my Father! you beast! you wretch! you monster! You have killed my Father!' & buffeted her out the room in a rage almost insane-- somebody, at length, opened the door to Mrs. Burney, whose good sense did not forsake her . . . she flew out herself to the neighbouring Hospital, & seized upon a surgeon, & brought him back with her. (41)

James recovered rapidly, but ambivalence and guilt clouded Martin's relations with James to the end, and he is said to have taken James's actual death, as he did every crisis, very emotionally.

Fanny fills, too, some gaps in our knowledge of Martin. In January 1823 she speaks of Martin's 'upright conduct' in returning money owed her by the dead James. 'I never saw him so unassuming in his opinions or so free from extravagant maxims I have cordially invited [him again]'. (42) And in February: 'I have seen Martin no more since I wrote, but I am told he is growing sociable and *aimable*-- -- Perhaps he has pensioned off his ill-taken Rib [i.e. wife]'. (43) In August, when Sally and her husband are also with Mrs. James, Fanny writes, 'Martin is Head of the House, though John is head of the table. They seem to go on in perfect amity all together, & nothing is ever hinted at of any 5th person [i.e. Rebecca]'. (44)

But by July 1833 all were very worried about Martin in trouble. Lamb had

had a 'dreadful letter' about him from his friend Matilda Betham ('it shakes me to pieces', said Lamb) and wonders 'if it is possible to recover M B to a state of respectability'. He advises Edward Moxon to appeal to Sally's husband--John Payne, also their cousin, and inheritor of the book business with Foss that Lamb called 'Pain and Fuss'. (45) Fanny at the same moment (26 July - 1 August, 1833) gives us the long-missing clue: 'You will wish to know more of poor M but I have heard no more myself from the *lady*, nor anything whatsoever of *him*'. Another Burney has told Fanny 'I fear it is a bad business!' (46) Hemlow supposes that Rebecca Burney may have appealed to Fanny over finances--and that Martin may be in danger of debtors' prison. This seems to be borne out by Fanny's letter of November 1833: 'But let me tell *you* the best *serious* good news . . . Martin is abroad'--the usual refuge for debtors--' has been met looking well--& dressed sprucely! This has given me *extreme* pleasure' (47) He returned to England in due course, presumably rescued.

In 1836 Sarah Harriet adds a vignette on Martin: 'The misfortune is that, carried away by a mania in favour of talents and cleverness, he has given himself up to infidel associates. . . . A more humane, generous, and affectionate nature than his has always been, I never hardly knew [*sic*]. . . . All I can add is, that he *deserves to be a Christian!*' (48)

As for Sarah Battle, Mrs. James was in time totally reconciled with her errant husband--and with Sarah Harriet, as we see in an entertaining letter to Sally about a Lamb evening to which both went together in 1821, James being ill. (49) Mrs. James is found by Fanny, returned from a long period abroad, now to be gentle and loving (50)--and she always had a taste for pretty clothes, lively good looks, and a delicate figure into age that do not quite match Lamb's tough whistplayer. But about whist she was serious: this she had in common with James, whose last published work was a treatise on the game. (51) James too became warmly affectionate with his wife, reports Fanny, who only steered clear of her brother's house when the despicable Phillips was hanging about.

Sally reaped the benefits of parental reconciliation and duly wed her cousin John Payne, who though in trade proved a good husband. Lamb reports on the wedding with his usual license, but he has caught what must have been the atmosphere--the sense of family that the Burneys gave him, who had only Mary, and the desolation of a lively daughter's leaving the household, which he relieved with humour.

Of these Burneys, then (if we except Susanna and Phillips) only Martin was catastrophe--with his impotent yearnings to be writer, lawyer, husband. Not Lambs nor Burneys together could rescue him from the fate described by Crabb Robinson: at fifty-nine the dismal creature whom no one really wants to meet. Robinson had said in 1822, after a game of whist with Martin at Lamb's.

Martin Burney I now see seldom, and have no wish to increase my intimacy with him. He wants manners to render him more agreeable and morals to make him respectable. But he is withal a very sensible though odd man, and has good qualities in the main. (52)

On Martin's death in 1852 at sixty-four, Robinson was 'disposed to think

charitably ' of him: 'He was so sharply punished for his frailties that the world need not aggravate it [sic] by severe censure
Requiescat in Pace'. (53)

Charles and Mary Lamb had done what they could. 'It shakes me to pieces', Lamb had said to Moxon of Martin's 1833 crisis, for once revealing his anxiety without humour. The Lambs gave Martin much of the happiness he had ever known, but even they could not undo what aberrant Burneys had sealed into a life.

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NOTES

1. Hemlow, 79-85
2. Fanny was, of course, Mme, Alexandre d'Arblay from 1793.
3. Hemlow, 72-6.
4. Curling, 36.
5. Hemlow, 330.
6. See Sources, under Burney. See also under Hemlow for her 1958 biography of Fanny, which summarizes much of the family information given in her fine edition of Fanny's letters and journals.
7. Hemlow, 9.
8. Burney I, 119n.
9. Johnson, 122.
10. Hemlow, 276-8, 288, 290-1.
11. Lamb Marrs I, xiv, and II, 221n. It was Ned Phillips who went to Hazlitt's at Winterslow with Lamb and Martin in 1809.
12. Manwaring, 286-7.
13. Burney VII, 242n, etc.
14. Williams, 127.
15. Lamb Works I, 230.
16. Hazlitt's 'On the Conversation of Authors'.
17. Burney IV, 205-310 *passim*, 399-400, 479-8, and see index.
18. Burney VII, 18n.
19. Burney I, 119n.
20. Burney IV, 307.
21. Burney VI, 521n.
22. Lamb Marrs II, 96.
23. Hemlow, 321.
24. Robinson, 395-6.
25. Southey, 181
26. See Angelica Garnett, *Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood*. New York: Harcourt, 1985.
27. This, his chief work, was *A Chronological History of Voyages and Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean*. He also wrote *A Chronological History of North-Eastern Voyages of Discovery* (1819) and *An Essay by Way of Lecture, on the Game of Whist* (1821: 4 eds. to 1848--Manwaring 280-1.) Excerpts from the first and last are to be found in Johnson.
28. Hemlow, 470.
29. Lamb Marrs II, 122. Marrs does not identify the 'little girl' Lamb says James had with him, but in view of what we now know about James's family reunion and his yearning for Sally, what little girl would be more likely? Mrs. James is not mentioned in the Lamb-Burney accounts to Rickman.
30. Manwaring, 305, Robinson, 36.
31. Lucas *Life*, 287.
32. Lucas *Life*, 287.
33. Howe, 333n, 425n.
34. Burney XII, 203, 333.
35. Besides the F. and S.H. Burney annuities already mentioned, Martin inherited the family house from his mother in 1832. His uncle Thomas Payne had also left him a small inheritance in 1831 (Mann 1963, 403-4). James' monetary estate was negligible (Robinson, 276).
36. Williams, 129.
37. See Robinson's itemized index entry for Martin Burney.
38. Robinson, 666.
39. Mann 1957, 176.

40. Robinson, 277.
41. Burney XI, 169.
42. Burney XI, 405.
43. Burney, XI, 416.
44. Burney XI, 444.
45. Lamb *Letters* Lucas III, 379.
46. Burney XII, 795.
47. Burney XII, 808. Lucas did not
not know of Martin's second
Continental sojourn.
48. Burney XII, 918n.
49. Manwaring, 276.
50. See Burney VII, 17, and XI,
168, among other such comments.
51. Lamb *Works* II, 333, Johnson
338-43.
52. Robinson, 282.
53. Robinson, 720.

This paper was given on April 12 1986 at the College English Association of America Annual Meeting and Conference in Philadelphia.

BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Lamb: *Selected Prose*. Ed. Adam Phillips. Penguin Classics 1985. £4.95.

It was with great pleasure that I received from the hands of our Chairman *Charles Lamb: Selected Prose* in a handsome new Penguin edition. My euphoria lasted just so long as it took me to turn the volume over and read the blurb on the back. Here perpetuated is the notion of Lamb's status as 'cultural teddy-bear'. To do Roy Park justice, he coined the expression in order to show how inadequate it was, but is such a description, before the book is even opened, likely to attract new young readers? The same condescending tone permeates the Introduction, which begins with Carlyle's contemptuous condemnation of Lamb and ends, 'It was only at the end of his life that Lamb was described by his friends as mad', offering as evidence Crabb Robinson's entry in his diary for 28 May, 1832, in which he speaks of Lamb having 'slept at Talfourds again with his clothes on. Yet in the midst of this half crazy irregularity he was so full of sensibility that speaking of his sister he had tears in his eyes. He talked about his favourite poems with his usual warmth, praising Andrew Marvell extravagantly'. Left unexplained here is the reason for this 'mad' behaviour of Lamb's. A letter of late April 1832 says, 'I have placed poor Mary at Edmonton' - at Walden House, a home for mental patients. As we know, Mary's increasingly frequent absences as her illness grew worse drove Lamb from his 'lonely hearth' to sleep at friends' houses where he could find sympathetic company. Surely it is a testimonial to his courage and 'normality' in these circumstances that he could still talk about poetry 'with his usual warmth'. Apparently the antidote to Thackeray's 'Saint Charles' is to present Lamb as an idiot.

All we are told about the editor is that he is 'an English child-psychotherapist working in New York', as though Lamb were some kind of problem child. Was there no *literary* scholar available to take his prose seriously as art? Admittedly Adam Phillips is ostensibly defending Lamb from his sentimental admirers but it is done in such an equivocal manner that the impression one carries away is of a kind of 'damning with faint praise'. For example, take this sentence: 'The sense that there was,

perhaps, something compulsively evasive about Lamb that was also indicative of a new, modern kind of sensibility goes some way to countering the legend that has exempted him from intelligent consideration'. Our editor seems to think that to-day's readers can only like Lamb if such unpopular ideas as nobility of character or pretension-puncturing non-conformity are played down in favour of a sort of shiftiness which consorts with current values. Even then it will only 'go some way' towards 'intelligent consideration'. That scholars have been giving Lamb just that for years he seems to be unaware.

John Mason Brown in *The Portable Charles Lamb*, the Viking edition published in this country by Penguin, is much more positive in his approach. While aware of the justice of certain criticisms of Lamb both in his life and work, he does not feel the need to apologize for him but presents him without sloppiness by emphasizing 'the sharpness of his mind and tongue'. 'He had a resilience unknown to noisier men and a toughness unsuspected by those who have read him sparingly..' Brown quotes one of the most telling sentences from Hazlitt: 'His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words'.

Phillips refers us to an early reviewer in the *Monthly Review* who spoke of Lamb's 'original humour; - a sort of simple shrewdness and caustic irony, such as we have occasionally known to baffle, in the shape of a simple witness, some keen-set and veteran practitioner of the law'. Despite earnest attempts to rehabilitate Lamb by denigrating his uncritical idolators, one cannot help feeling that there are still many 'keen-set' readers who do not recognize 'that dangerous figure irony' lurking amid the apparently inoffensive prose. Following Roy Park in dating the 'legend', which he rightly wishes to challenge, from the first biographies which 'revealed ... the actual harshness of Lamb's life', Phillips chooses to print the Essays first and the Letters last. Brown puts the letters of Lamb first. As he says, 'They are the easiest, the most direct approach to him, and often the best'. While recognizing Phillips' reason for his arrangement, I think Brown was right. Any reader coming to Lamb with little previous knowledge is much more likely to be 'hooked' at once by the letters, moving on from them to the essays. After all, Roy Park does go on to show how Lamb's biography is relevant to his work, as indeed is the case with most of the Romantics.

The Portable Charles Lamb and this new edition print the same number of letters (73 if I have counted correctly) but the selections they make differ a good deal. Phillips includes some key letters from the period up to 1803, which are not in Brown's edition, which is an advantage: for example (May-June '98) 'Theses Quaedam Theologicae', (15 February 1801) 'All the North of England are in turmoil', (Late February 1801) 'So, you don't think there's a Word's-worth of good poetry in the great L.B.!', (14 August 1801) 'I have a *stamina* of seriousness within me'. Yet omitted are others of equal importance included by Brown such as (8 November 1796) 'Cultivate simplicity, Coleridge...', (13 February 1797) 'I have thoughts of turning Quaker', (17 March 1800) 'I am living in a continuous feast. Coleridge has been with me ...', (17 May 1800) explaining why he cannot sleep at home with Mary 'away', (21 August 1800) concerning Dyer, 'I modestly inquired what plays he had read?' Both editions have curious long gaps. In neither are included any of Lamb's letters to Wordsworth

in 1805 about the shipwreck of his brother John. Obviously a limited selection must pose an editor almost insuperable problems and Phillips has made a fair choice here.

The same can hardly be said of the essays. *Missing*, for instance, are 'The South-Sea House', 'Oxford in the Vacation', 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist', 'My Relations', 'Mackery End', 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple', 'Dream Children', 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers', 'Blakesmoor in H - shire', 'Poor Relations', 'Old China'. That is not the end but I tire of copying out titles. What *is* there? you may well ask. Answer: twenty out of fifty-two Elia essays, not counting 'Popular Fallacies'. There are fifteen other pieces, including the essays on Hogarth, the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Wordsworth's *Excursion*, and the unpublished Review of Hazlitt's *Table-Talk*. It will be no good presenting the new Penguin *Lamb* to the Grecians from Christ's Hospital at our Luncheon, as neither of the essays on their school is in it. We must await eagerly the World's Classics edition of *Essays of Elia* and *Last Essays*, edited by Jonathan Bate, though of course that, alas! will contain no letters. There is no doubt that, as an over-all picture of Lamb's writings *The Portable Charles Lamb* was a much better buy than this Penguin, containing as that did forty-eight essays and three poems in addition to the selected letters. If this new edition is meant to supersede it, we have a very poor swap. It becomes increasingly evident that a more 'up-to-date' editing does not *necessarily* mean a better one.

Mary Wedd

Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination. By Jonathan Bate.

Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986. Pp.xvi, 276 £22.50

This is a wide-ranging, well-written, and highly intelligent study of Shakespeare's influence on the minds and works of six major English Romantic poets, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Blake, Keats, Shelley and Byron. Dr. Bate quotes Wordsworth's advice to Scott, who was editing Dryden's works, to the effect that the editor, when illustrating the influence of earlier authors, should not merely itemize a phrase here and a phrase there but should show 'where the Poet has really had essential obligations either as to matter or manner'. It is in this way that Dr. Bate himself examines Shakespeare's influence.

The starting-point of his argument is his questioning of a position adopted by more than one modern critic, namely that the Romantics are inhibited and oppressed by the achievement of their great precursors. Harold Bloom in particular has offered a Freudian interpretation of their psychological relationship with such father-figures. No sooner has one embarked on Dr. Bate's first chapter ('Shakespeare, Imagination, Romanticism') than one perceives that he is bringing much more varied evidence to bear, that his method is much more historical, and that his conclusions are likely to be much more interesting and convincing. He seizes upon the distinctively Romantic admiration of Shakespeare, not, as in the eighteenth century, for reflecting reality, but for creating life, for 'his grasp of the living principle at the heart of nature'. The 'interplay of mind and world through imagination' becomes a central philosophical idea of Romanticism. At this

same period the borrowing of expressions from Shakespeare was a much discussed issue: he was the great example, but because he was original and not imitative it was undesirable to imitate him in verbal detail.

It is upon this basis that Dr. Bate builds his study of the 'essential obligations' of the Romantic poets to Shakespeare. His approach to each of them is two-fold. First he considers their writings about poetry in general and about their own poetry, and then he considers their poetic practice: a chapter entitled 'Wordsworth on Shakespeare', for example, is followed by one entitled 'Shakespeare in Wordsworth'. Both approaches display sharp detail as well as profound reflection, and the reader is continually carried onward by this variety; although one can recognize, as one reads on, Dr. Bate's distinctive thought and expression, there is no danger of monotony.

Literary influence does, of course, presuppose a good deal of verbal borrowing, and a great many passages are analysed in detail. Some of Dr. Bate's best observations arise from this. He writes splendidly about Shakespearean allusions in Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage*,

a common tale,
By moving accidents uncharactered,
A tale of silent suffering . . .

The echo of Othello's speech to the senate both recalls the poignancy of Shakespeare's tragedy and underlines the homeliness of Wordsworth's no less pathetic and domestic story. In the same poem, the pedlar, who sympathetically recounts Margaret's suffering, 'could afford to suffer / With those whom he saw suffer'; and, as Dr. Bate shows, what is distinctively Wordsworthian about the echo of Miranda's expression (*The Tempest*, I.ii.5) is the word 'afford', reflecting Wordsworth's belief 'that only the happy man is capable of profound sympathy'. Equally excellent is his demonstration of Shelley's creative use of Shakespeare in the better parts of *The Cenci*. When Beatrice glories in the murder of her wicked father she echoes Macbeth chewing the bitter cud of Fleance's escape (*Macbeth*, III.iv.20):

I am as universal as the light;
Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock
But shakes it not.

He comments: 'The strength of these lines is that they are wholly in Beatrice's character, wholly Shellyan (who else could have written "I am as universal as the light"?), yet also provokingly allusive in the reversal of Macbeth's images'. He is just as convincing when he is taking a view of some broader question:

Shakespeare, however, was taken to be an ideal poet because he was a chameleon not an authoritarian. Paradoxically, he provided the authoritative example of Romantic irony, that kind of writing in which the authority of the author is undermined. If Shakespeare was invisible in his own works, was it right for him to be invoked as a presence in later works? That he wrote plays led to a further complication: allusion summons an author as authority, but an

allusion to a play may summon the character who speaks the lines, not the author who wrote them. Some Shakespearean allusions go badly wrong for this reason. On other occasions, however, it is a source of strength: by alluding to a line of Richard III or Iago, Romantic poets could indulge their fascination with the psychology of evil, but also implicitly distance themselves from the sentiment expressed.

And in one of the chapters on Keats the combined influence of Haydon, Hazlitt, and Kean in 'the sudden stepping up of his interest in Shakespeare' is vividly presented.

Had Dr. Bate written always thus, as Johnson says of Gray, it had been vain to blame and idle to praise him. But sometimes he overdoes things, as when he labours to multiply the common factors between *King Lear* and 'Simon Lee' ('Simon has lost one eye, while Gloucester loses two') or between 'Fear no more the heat o'th'sun' and Blake's 'Ah Sunflower! weary of time'. Sometimes - but this is rare - he loses sight of the literal meaning through his absorption in his own argument:

Another figure who might possibly be seen as a Lear of rural life is the shepherd in 'The Last of the Flock' who is stripped of his fifty sheep as Lear is stripped of his hundred knights (weeping, he carries in his arms the body of the last of his flock: a visual allusion to Lear and Cordelia?)

What the shepherd is carrying is 'this lusty lamb', who 'of all my store/ Is all that is alive' - and so the supposed visual allusion cannot stand. To me the least pleasing characteristic of the book is Dr. Bate's occasional indulgence in a showily allusive style of his own. Discussing the passage (*The Prelude*, Book XI) in which Wordsworth stood at a crossroad waiting for the horses to take him and his brother home for the holidays, during which their father was to die, he draws attention to the Shakespearean echo (*Hamlet*, I.iv.43) when all the components of the scene 'Advance in such indisputable shapes': he then concludes

because of the allusion it is indisputable that his father lies at the root of the memory. And, at another level, Shakespeare himself becomes a ghostly substitute father-figure for Wordsworth-Hamlet. Allusion has offered an intimation of the poet's immortality.

But it would be grudging to dwell on the defects of so valuable and exciting a study. Not the least of its pleasures is the richness of its evocation of the spirit of the Romantic Age. I have put on my personal reading-list William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781) in which the heroine Serena goes to a fancy dress ball as Ariel, her father Sir Gilbert going as Caliban, and her aunt Penelope as Sycorax. Dr. Bate's book also provides a continual reminder of what retentive memories readers used to have. This was partly a matter of early training. At Christ's Hospital the curriculum included memorizing and reciting passages of Shakespeare and Milton. No wonder Coleridge is presently found repeating two-and-a-half acts of his tragedy to the Wordsworths after tea. Wordsworth read *The Borderers* aloud in reply, but his head was no sieve either, for he once declared that 'with

a little previous rummaging' in his memory he could repeat several thousand lines by Pope. By a coincidence, while reading Dr. Bate's book I have been assisting a friend by reading *Kenilworth* and listing Scott's 'essential obligations' to a variety of authors, including Goldsmith, Sheridan, Fielding, Pope, Dryden, Spenser, and the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, pre-eminently Shakespeare. The whole subject of literary allusion and how it is used is an absorbingly interesting one, and it is good to see it treated with such enthusiasm and knowledge as it is treated by Dr. Bate.

T.W. Craik

University of Durham

Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver Edited by Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe. Cambridge University Press. £22.50

This book is a memorial to Pete Laver, late Librarian at Dove Cottage, Grasmere, who died of a heart attack on the way to Scafell pike at the age of thirty-six. Appropriately, the book is edited by three of our younger Romantic scholars, all of whom knew Pete well.

Sharply clear in my memory is an occasion when I was at a pleasant morning party in Grasmere and suddenly felt a change take place in the room, as though something momentous had happened. Turning round I saw that Pete had sidled in with his apparent unobtrusiveness and that half-smile that was mocking but not unkind. That was Pete, modest, iconoclastic, humorous, yet a power to be reckoned with. Many can bear witness to his exceptional ability as librarian, teacher and poet. The news of his death was greeted by all who knew him with shocked incredulity. Surely he would have been pleased with this tribute to his memory, to which so many distinguished scholars have contributed.

The book opens with an article by Thomas McFarland on 'Romantic imagination, nature and the pastoral ideal'. On the way to his conclusion that 'imagination's invocation of nature can serve to align Romantic solitude with the essentials of the pastoral ideal' (with particular reference here to 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' via 'Michael', 'The Brothers' and 'Alastor'), he affirms that 'in certain emphases of Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom, the role of nature in the Romantic sensibility is misconceived or diminished'. Such views, he says, 'cannot it seems to me be maintained either for Wordsworth or for Romanticism as such except by disregarding overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Nature was not in opposition to Wordsworth's imagination; the vision of nature was itself the richest fulfilment of that imagination'. Surely the book is worth reading for that downright judgment alone.

But there are other stimulating ways of re-seeing or reassessing old 'orthodoxies' in this volume. Jonathan Wordsworth tackles the confused and confusing subject of Coleridge's terms 'Primary and Secondary Imagination' and challenges the common assumptions that Coleridge regarded the primary imagination as secondary in importance and that his thinking here was derived from German metaphysics. Rather, calling on a native English

tradition, Jonathan Wordsworth concludes that 'The primary imagination at its highest is the supreme human achievement of oneness with God; the secondary, though limited by comparison, contains the hope that *in the act of writing* the poet may attain to a similar power'.

Kristine Dugas and Norman Fruman concentrate on the split between Coleridge's spiritual ideals and his awareness of physical depravity, both in himself and in human beings as a whole, while Molly Lefebure draws a picture of Mrs. Coleridge's indefatigable courage and humour in her 'widowed' life at ~~Greta~~ Hall. Stephen Parrish and Lucy Newlyn both write about the conflict in the relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth culminating in the poems of 1802. Both suggest a failure in Wordsworth, whom Lucy Newlyn represents as of 'entrenched literal-mindedness', to respond to 'Coleridge's increasingly confirmed symbolic thinking'. In refreshing contrast is Richard Gravil's article which, while admitting 'That Wordsworth both fostered and stifled Coleridge's distinctive poetic voice', takes issue with 'the idea that Coleridge was the weaker personality, which is in some sense assumed by all the current accounts of their relationship'. Instead Gravil finds Coleridge's imagination 'destructively dominant over his friend's' and makes a very good case for his belief.

Anyone reading the Lakeland Guidebooks, including Wordsworth's own, must be struck by the superiority of Coleridge's accounts in his Notebooks and Letters to any others. The vividness, the life and the sense of intense experience in them are sensitively illustrated and analyzed in William Ruddick's article on 'Coleridge's notes on the Lakeland Fells'.

David Erdman in 'The Otway Connection' examines the implications of Coleridge's insertion of 'Otway's self' into the final version of 'Dejection' in place of previous names; while Nicholas Roe describes the changing feelings of Wordsworth and Coleridge towards Robespierre. Though they both came to reject with loathing Robespierre's development into 'a tyrant ruling in the name of liberty', they had seen in him a man of heroic imagination who, even in his fall into the 'cool ferocity that persuaded murder', had like Milton's Satan still the traces 'Of glory obscured'.

Robert Barth compares the 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson' with 'Dejection: an Ode' and comments that while 'the word "love" (or its cognates ...) appears twenty-one times in the *Letter*, its only cognate in *Dejection* is, ironically, "loveless" in line 52'. He goes on most persuasively to argue that the theme has but 'gone underground' and that its movement is from self-love and self-pity to a more generous -hearted love without which imagination cannot live. Peter Larkin also deals with 'Dejection: an Ode', but finds in it - and particularly in stanza VI - a struggle over the term 'Imagination' as understood in Coleridge's two opposing disciplines, of poetry and theory. 'Coleridge would seem to have glimpsed in "Dejection" the possibility of collusion between an imagination-lost in poetry and an imagination-found in theory..' But 'Theory does not blend with poetry without some liability' and Larkin sees Coleridge here as 'a distracted poet' whose 'image-play leads straight out of the poem to a "bridge" with theory rather than forming any poetic logic of its own'.

Anthony Harding turns to 'Christabel', that poem that has 'eluded critical consensus'. The two parts, he believes, can be regarded as a unity if the reader sees the whole in terms not of narrative, parable or allegory but of 'Romantic mythopoesis'. The conflict is not between two 'characters' but between two elements within the individual, 'that-which-is-Christabel' and 'that-which-is-Geraldine', and 'Christabel' is essentially ... a poem about poetic utterance, depicting a state in which the inward stillness necessary for such utterance, as it is for prayer, is destroyed by disquietness of heart and self-deception..'

The book ends with a fascinating exploration by John Beer of 'The Languages of *Kubla Khan*', in which he reviews Coleridge's varied fabrics of myth, of allusion to earlier writers, to Wordsworth and to his own previous works, as well as the relationship between the inner world of images and the surface poem as a work of art. As I hope will be apparent from this account, readers will find plenty to argue with in their progress through the diverse content of this book but they can hardly fail to be stimulated by it.

Mary Wedd

OBITUARY

MURIEL CHEYNE

Her innumerable friends in the Charles Lamb Society will be grieved to learn of the death on 29th August of Muriel Cheyne. Muriel joined the Society in 1968 and, until recently, played a very active part in the affairs of the Society as partner of her husband, Angus, our former General Secretary. Members will recall the warm hospitality extended at meetings at Charles Lamb's former home in Duncan Terrace. Not long before she died, Muriel was encouraging the new owner of Colebrook Cottage to re-instate the 'Lamb Room' with the memorabilia of Lamb and the Society which so many visitors had enjoyed during the Cheynes' residence.

Charles Branchini and Madeline Huxstep attended the funeral at Golders Green as representatives of the Society and a donation in Muriel's memory has been sent to Normansfield Hospital, Teddington. We extend our deepest sympathy to the Cheyne family in this sad loss.

M.R.H.

ELIAN NOTES AND QUERIES

I am preparing a new annotated edition of *Elia and Last Essays of Elia* for Oxford's World's Classics; I have tracked down most of the quotations that eluded Lucas but *cannot* find the source of a phrase quoted towards the end of 'The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple': 'as now our stout triumvirs sweep the streets'. A free copy of the edition (to be published late in 1987) for anyone who can provide me with the source!

JONATHAN BATE, TRINITY, HALL, CAMBRIDGE.

LAMB RESEARCH IN FRANCE

Being the Membership Secretary of a literary society involved me in some interesting investigations. A request was sent to me by a member in France, Madame Micheline Cadilhac, who was writing a thesis to be read at the Sorbonne on 'Charles Lamb's style in each of its aspects in the *Essays of Elia*'. To find the information meant a visit to the Charles Lamb Library at the Guildhall - always a pleasant thing to do - and I found the items needed. As a result a letter arrived recently from Madame Cadilhac which stated, 'I am very pleased to let you know that I am going to defend my thesis at the Sorbonne in Paris on Saturday November 8th at 2 o'clock p.m.' It is a public event and any member can attend.

A copy of the thesis, which is written in French with numerous English quotations, will be presented to our Library. Along with members of the Charles Lamb Society who attended the October meeting, we shall wish her well on November 8th and we are delighted to think that Charles Lamb will be the subject of her thesis.

FLORENCE REEVES

SOCIETY NOTES

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING 4th November 1986

At this meeting, Revised Rules for the Society were adopted - probably the first full-scale revision since our foundation in 1935! The revisions do not alter the aims and general running of the Society but should improve our efficiency. When the Rules have been printed copies will be distributed in a future mailing.

The meeting could not proceed with approval of the Trust Deed (as envisaged in the notice of the S.G.M. in the 1986/7 Programme) as various matters had not been cleared with the Charity Commissioners. Notice is therefore given that this item on the Agenda is adjourned to the Annual General Meeting of the Society on Saturday 4th April 1987. Our thanks are due to Bill Ruddick for taking the chair in Dr. Wilson's and Mr. Wickham's absence and for turning what might have been a dull occasion into a positively enjoyable one!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 4th April 1987

A special mailing of the Agenda/Annual Report/Accounts for 1986 will be made in March 1987.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION LUNCHEON 9th May 1987

As members will have noticed, we have given Charles Lamb an 'official birthday' at a time of year when we hope that the snow and ice which have disrupted our gatherings in recent years will be things of the past. The price of tickets has not yet been settled, but should be similar to last year. Full details will be sent out with the A.G.M. Notice.

As the General Secretary will be abroad for the fortnight immediately preceding the Luncheon, the Chairman has very kindly offered to undertake the organization. Applications for tickets should therefore be addressed to

Dr. D.G. Wilson, O.B.E.,
9 Banham's Close,
Cambridge, CB4 1HX (Tel: 0223 322241)

and *not* to Madeline Huxstep.