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CHARLES LAMB AND SUPERNATURALISM

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Charles Lamb has attracted little comment as a supernaturalist writer, doubtless because we customarily perceive him as an author whose work exists in mid-plane between the great Romantic poets' preoccupation with subjectivity (and its frequent manifestation in lyric impulse) and Imagination, on one hand, and the succeeding drift into realism during the later nineteenth century. He has been termed a humourist, an essayist, an antiquarian, a critic, a creator of children's literature - in short, whatever is not a supernaturalist. Several commentators have touched, but only touched, upon Lamb's interests in supernaturalism; for example, Charles I. Patterson and Bill Ruddick in discussing Lamb's affinities with and theories about fiction. More recently, Joseph E. Riehl and Gerald Monsman have paid special attention to 'The Witch Aunt', from *Mrs. Leicester's School* -- a book of children's stories on which Lamb collaborated with his sister, Mary -- in tandem with a later Elia essay, 'Witches and Other Night Fears.'¹ Overall, though, any supernatural or Gothic features in Lamb's work have been minimized. Nevertheless, his writings -- from early letters (mainly to Coleridge) through the verse, *Rosamund Gray*, the plays, the criticism, and on into the essays -- include magic, evil spirits, witchcraft, the devil and allusions to works of a supernatural cast, plus well-known Gothic qualities. The repeated use of the word 'fantasy', and of its compounds, calls attention to Lamb's more-than-passing awareness of a world or emotional circumstances 'out there' as well. My central concern in the following pages is to place Lamb within a heritage of supernaturalism as it came to him through older sources and from the Gothic craze within his own era. Though by no means a Gothacist of the magnitude of Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, and their schools, Lamb nevertheless reveals affinities with writers of this stamp. Those bonds add subtle touches to his writings. An assessment of externals and internals along these lines may consequently shed new light on Lamb's artistry.

Several basic influences on Lamb's literary character undoubtedly gave impetus to his delving into the weird and ghostly. First, those favourite plays by

Shakespeare and his contemporaries - long noted as precursors of the Gothic novel proper - doubtless contributed much toward Lamb's ideas about supernaturalism in literature. His *Specimens* from Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, moreover, contain excellent, terse analyses of witchcraft in *Macbeth*, compared with plays by Middleton and Rowley.² Shakespeare's witches, in Lamb's opinion, are by far the least human or humane; Middleton's hags and Rowley's Mother Sawyer actually verge upon the comic. Shakespeare's weird sisters 'originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth's, he is spellbound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination.' The other playwrights' witches hold power over bodies; Shakespeare's control the soul: They are 'foul Anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending'; they lack 'human passions', their appearances amidst great storms and their exits accompanied by strange music imparts to them qualities of the primitive unknown - just the sort of features to spellbind the superstitious, who comprise the general run of *dramatis personae* in *Macbeth*: characters credulous, anxiety-ridden, eager for certainty and order (Park, 124-125). No humour attaches to Shakespeare's witches. Compared with the other dramatists' witches, these reveal far greater powers over human emotions, within which precincts ever lurk emotional tendencies toward irrationality and destructiveness - here delineated in all their primitive horror. Middleton's hags form transitional creatures between these quite literally mind-boggling types and the Rowleyan 'plain traditional old woman Witch of our ancestors.' The last might without great difficulty be led to a trial by ducking, thence to the stake or gallows; Shakespeare's witches, however, would never fall prey to a mere human sheriff with the poor 'power of a county at his heels.' Shakespeare's creatures are not like supposedly fearsome spirits peopling many Gothic works of Lamb's own times, calculated to 'terrify babes with painted devils,' to cite a passage about Webster, to be found several pages past those concerning the playwrights named above. (Park, 126). Instead, Shakespeare's are adult spirits, who terrify because everyone senses that such dark powers may affect any one of us.

What Lamb repeatedly deplors in general handling of supernaturalism are tendencies toward excesses and absurdities. Consistent with this outlook, he argued against the convincingness of supernaturalism as it usually appeared on stage. Citing again the witches in *Macbeth* as examples, he emphasizes that no staging can convey the genuine dramatically abstract conception of these powerful beings. '[T]errible,' though their 'hellish composition savours of the grotesque,' their primary effect influences human emotions. Consequently, rendering them in concrete form on stage, or more specifically, giving them form and bringing them too close to us in circumstances neither primitive nor unsettling, may actually impart unintended humour to these creatures. Thus Shakespeare's intentions are lost (Park, 85-101). Ironically, here, in phrasing which at least implicitly establishes a perfect Gothic context, Lamb exhorts readers to attain the uttermost degree of suspense and fear in regard to the witches by means of 'the solitary taper and the book.' These desiderata are stock props and situations in many a terror tale, from Walpole through Poe, Henry and M. R. James, and on into the paperback 'Gothics' widely marketed today. What is also implied in Lamb's observations cited above is a keen awareness of the shadowy borders dividing the plausible from the implausible, or the unknown from the known, as exemplified in juxtaposing the horrid witches in *Macbeth*'s destiny with a plain old woman who is designated a witch. In line with these comments, we may cite another, from 'New Year's Eve.' (Lucas 2,30). Since Lamb has been far more renowned for humour than for horrorifics, a significant implication may attach to the observation 'Can a ghost laugh, or shake his gaunt sides when you are pleasant with him?' Lamb's conception of visitants evidently harboured little notion of their being comic, although an exception, some humorous verse about the devil, will be discussed below.

A second probable inspiration for Lamb's supernaturalism, and one that infiltrated works by many more overt Gothicists -- Melville, Hawthorne, or Poe,

to name a few -- is another great literary favourite of his, Sir Thomas Browne. A passage of seeming affinity, section 37 of *Religio Medici*, will illustrate the connection. Centering upon the fortunes of bodies and souls after death, Browne's scientific side at first comes to the fore. His no-nonsense skepticism about Pythagorean theories regarding metempsychosis, or transmigration of human souls after death into beasts, is resounding. He adds, nonetheless, that 'apparitions, and ghosts of departed persons' are in fact devils, whose presences spur living humans to mischief, blood, and villainy, 'the very direction into which the weird sisters' prophecies speed Macbeth. Such apparitions, Browne continues, delude us into believing that 'blessed spirits' wander the earth, 'solicitous' about its comings and goings. When 'phantasmes' actually appear, in graveyards, 'charnall houses,' and churches, 'it is because those are the dormitories of the dead, where the Devill like an insolent Champion beholds with pride the spoyles and Trophies of his victory in Adam.'⁵ Browne's words are very like those chosen by Lamb to express his own variety of the supernatural.

Other inspirations of importance to Lamb are not difficult to discover. Thomas Stackhouse's *New History of the Holy Bible* included a picture of the Witch of Endor raising Saul and of Samuel's prophecy to the king, which made an undeniable mark on young Lamb. He also knew well his classical mythology, from which he unhesitatingly fashioned fairly strong diets for readers of his book on Ulysses. The encounter between the travellers and the cyclops, Polyphemus, featured particularly disgusting descriptions. Censured for them by William Godwin, who commissioned the work, Lamb defended his position on grounds of reality inherent in and integral to the legend. With equal forcibleness he reminded Godwin that the improbabilities in current works like M. G. Lewis's *Tales of Terror* or Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* did not prevent those books from achieving huge sales. Just so, Lamb waxed more eloquent years later in levelling strictures upon exaggerations and absurdities all too often potential in tales of terror. In 'Sanity of True Genius' (1826) the Gothic novels from William Lane's notorious Minerva Press are execrated because of their customary hodge-podges of 'the incoherent incidents, the inconsistent characters, or no-characters, of some third-rate love intrigue' - a biting encapsulation of the negative traits of much Gothic fiction, if ever there was one. (Lucas 2, 187-189). Admirable counters are to be found in Sir Walter Scott's novels, which dealt deathblows to 'those scanty intellectual viands [and] innutritious phantoms' from Leadenhall Street, site of Lane's operations. Far greater, in contrast, are the characters' realistic, comprehensible, 'inner nature ... [and] law of their speech, and actions,' in *The Faerie Queen*. Spenser imparts to the 'wildest dreams' an aura of everyday reality. Gothic novelists, conversely, turned mundane 'life into a dream.' Considering Lamb's own role in employing dream motifs in his essays, he might have intensified 'dream' into 'nightmare' in this comment on the Gothic. Once again Lamb opts for psychological plausibility, for character rather than characters. His wide acquaintance with Renaissance and later specimens of British drama had doubtless engendered in him a solid sense of character created on firm grounds of psychological impulse and dramatic appeal, and those traits, to be sure, did not exist in the cardboard stereotypes common in Minerva-Press thrillers. In the Lane novels we encounter figures 'neither of this world nor of any other conceivable one.' Lamb's unfavourable attitude toward Lane's wares had already been articulated in a letter of 10 July 1823, to Bernard Barton. There, contrasting probable sales for his own volume of *Elia* essays (which, he predicted, would be poor), he commented with irony that 'there is corn in Egypt, while there is cash at Leadenhall.' The financial successes realized by Lane because of eager demands for trashy sensationalism must have been particularly galling to Lamb, given both his keen response to depths in literary characterization and his first-hand knowledge and experience of distorted states of mind.

Equally consonant with his strong principles about exaggerated horrors, Lamb had relegated to children's-story categories such Gothic or near-Gothic

readings as 'The Childrer in the Wood' (a horror-ballad from Percy's *Reliques*, which Lamb also knew in a contemporaneous stage version), part of the ballad revival that stimulated explorations into irrational, destructive, and terrible areas of human psyches that would infuse Gothic novels. 'The Children of the Wood' must have held a special grip upon Lamb, though, because he repeatedly alludes to it. To nursery shelves he also consigned the 'black and beetle-browed assassin' of Mrs. Radcliffe; and the 'Shag-haired villain of Mr. Monk Lewis.' Lamb implies that the passage of years has motivated his putting away of childish things, so to speak, as either too wildly imaginative and unbridled, or too immature for grown-ups of a serious, reflective frame of mind. He darted a similar barbed shaft amidst general praise for eighteenth-century novelists like Defoe, Goldsmith, and others - who show to advantage above 'Modern novels "St. Leons" and the like.' This jab at Godwin's Gothic novel came during the craze for the horrific, and Lamb, as I have already noted, may have resented popularity of what he believed was inferior literature (Marrs, 1:266, 268). In 'The Old Margate Hoy' and elsewhere he alludes to *Gebir*, a poem from 1798, by Walter Savage Landor, that incorporated supernatural elements. The principal point of note in all of this commentary is that Lamb reveals an informed, considered thinking about Gothic and other supernatural matters. Another inescapable source for much that we know today as 'Gothic', and that Lamb had read, is the *Arabian Nights*.

Although Lamb may first have encountered that work among books he read while he was still a child -- since several versions of it were printed during the eighteenth century -- he may have found his way to it after he had reached adult years. Whenever his introduction to the work occurred, he carried memories of it with him, for example, in 'The Acting of Munden', 'The Illustrious Defunct', and 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital'. Yet another inspiration for Lamb's uses of the supernatural may have been several poems by Robert Southey. Interestingly, in close proximity with the allusion to the *Arabian Nights* in the essay on Munden just mentioned, Lamb had originally planned to insert a phrase yoking it with Southey's long narrative, and supernatural, poem, *Thalaba* (Lucas 2,397). That passage did not find its way into the final, published version, however. Southey's comic ballads about the devil also were known to Lamb, and, late in life, Lamb actually turned out a ballad that treated the devil with humour, 'Satan in Search of a Wife' (1832; Lucas 5: 111ff.,346).

What use, we may now well ask, did Lamb himself make of weird and ghostly phenomena? He commenced his literary career as a poet and friend of poets, so it is natural here to turn to his own beginnings. In a letter to Coleridge, 7 July 1796, Lamb inquired whether his friend had read Gottfried August Burger's horror-ballad, 'Leonora', or, as it came to be familiarly known, 'Lenore', translated into English in the popular *Monthly Magazine*. Oliver F. Emerson has surveyed the enormous vogue, and the many translations, of 'Lenore' among English Romantic literary circles, and Lamb's reaction is representative. His remark to Coleridge, 'if you have [read "Lenore"],' is followed by fourteen exclamation points. Lamb's precise opinion remains ambiguous, just as his own supernaturalism offers us multiple perspectives; but his additional remarks about 'another fine song' by Burger, 'The Fair Lass of Wone,' which in translation also appeared in the *Monthly Magazine*, may indicate an admiration for the German writer's poems (Marrs, 1: 41,44). Although many 'German' (read as synonymous for this word 'horror' or 'Gothic') ballads came out to titillate English readers eager for evil spirits, brutality, and other forms of sensationalism in their literary fare, only once does Lamb even draw near those territories. He translated a ballad, 'Thekla's Song,' included in Coleridge's rendering of Schiller's drama, *The Death of Wallenstein* (1800). Lamb's poem begins as if a Gothic ripper might ensure, but the conclusion veers into fairly conventional sentimentality. Lamb's verse, however, vouchsafes no impressive horror, of the variety permeating Coleridge's 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' or Southey's 'The Old

Woman of Berkeley', which Lamb praised as an 'exquisite thing of its kind', and 'God's Judgement on a Wicked Bishop', another supernatural ballad, that he found wanting.

Lamb's sole venture into novel writing, *Rosamund Gray*, supplanted any overdone Gothicism in its seduction theme with overdone sentimentality. In his plays too, Lamb generally eschewed supernatural phenomena, although a fragment, 'The Witch', was originally intended for inclusion in the tragedy, *John Woodvil* (Lucas 5: 177ff., 368). Witchcraft was evidently not to Lamb's liking in regard to the completed play, although the scene would have fitted easily into many a contemporaneous Gothic drama. The 'Stranger' who hears about the old witch's evil toward a thoughtless noble, by means of torturing his young son slowly to death, may indeed speak for Lamb himself:

I do not love to credit tales of magic,
Heaven's music, which is Order, seems unstrung,
And this brave world
(The Mystery of God) unbeautified,
Disorder'd, marr'd, where such strange things are acted.

Even within such a scene of cosmic terror, however, Lamb's wit will out. That is, in using 'acted' he reminds an audience that they are witnessing what is 'acted' before them on stage, as well as within the boundaries of the play proper, and thereby dispels dramatic illusion and in consequence diminishes the power of lurid supernaturalism at work.

Lamb's renowned essays also hold forth no small quotas of supernatural fare, and in this genre his deployments of otherworldliness show to greater advantage than in what we have examined above. 'Blakesmoor in H^{amp}shire' for example, is set chiefly in 'the remains of an old great house' overtaken by ruin. In good Gothic-novel fashion, we are presented with a 'haunted' death chamber, never entered except during daylight hours. This room prompts the narrator's 'curiosity [which was] terror-tainted', to probe into the past. Curiosity is also the besetting character trait that spurs those all-too-common personages in Gothic novels who can never seem altogether to quell their insatiable (and always 'terror-tainted') desires for opening just one more door (behind which, inevitably, lurks a threatening adversary), or engaging in one last dalliance with what is mysterious. As a result, they fall prey to agonizing physical dangers or to emotional tortures, generally of strained proportions and expressed in exaggerated language (Lucas 2: 153-157).

Lamb created greater art in 'Witches and Other Night Fears', and that in despite of his side-swipes at Gothic novels, no less, through means of what we might term a Gothic vocabulary as the vehicle for sophisticated psychological dramatics. If in this essay Lamb renders an imagination-reality theme, as most critics have seen it, he devotes considerable space to the unfolding of an eerie nightmare world, analogous to that which makes Gothic fiction of the first order. The retrospective stance here, as in other essays like 'Christ's Hospital Five-And-Thirty Years Ago', furnishes an account of supernaturalism that can distance events within the frame backward in time from readers, who presumably dwell in a rational everyday world. This technique was a hallowed device among Gothicists by the time Lamb came to use it. Within the essay proper, another 'world' dominates; one wherein nighttime fears prevail during the primary course of events. Such a locale could be as much a part of Walpole, Radcliffe, Maturin, or the works of Percy and other ballad revivalists, as it is for 'Witches and Other Night Fears'. The difference lies in Lamb's concentration upon the psychology of the narrator rather than in overwhelming us with scenic trappings. The illustration for the Stackhouse volume is mentioned once in visual terms, and thereafter, and more significantly, the narrator remembers it for its emotional

stimulation. Although the closing draws us back into the present, away from a nightmare or an incredible occurrence during times past (Lamb's manuscript reveals a contemplated different ending, which would have had the narrator awakening from a dream), the fears of long-ago and far-away (but not an improbable long-ago or vastly far-away) come alive with remarkable intensity. The retrospect in 'Witches' differs from the pleasant backward glances in many other Elia essays because Lamb's tone is changed to probe the 'dark underside of waking existence' (Miserheimer, 116; Monsman, 59). Always 'inquisitive' about witch-lore, the narrator in childhood could - in good Gothic vocabulary - not help but be '*dreadfully* alive to *nervous terrors*' [italics mine]. Agitating these feelings with 'night-time, solitude, and the dark', Elia could without difficulty be a stand-in for a character from Radcliffe, Lewis, Horsley Curties, or Poe. Emotionalism piles upon emotionalism. The picture from Stackhouse assumes dimensions akin to the mysterious, threatening animated portraits and statues in the iconography of Gothic fiction. Lamb, however, as we have noted above, allows no lapse into any slovenly Gothic tangibilities or improbabilities, which he unflaggingly condemned, to take control of his working with the picture. Equally iconographic, the 'old man covered with a mantle' (the prophet Samuel) could appeal to magazine- or novel-readers as much on Gothic grounds as on those from the Bible. Samuel also functions double-wise in this context: he is both biblical personage and the recurrent muffled figure in Gothicism who delivers mysterious, unsettling warnings. Just as the Bible and Renaissance plays often centered upon misfortunes of characters from the nobility, so Gothic fiction, as part of its legacy from older drama, initially employed as standard types a host of figures from upper social strata. Like many a Gothic tale, Lamb's essay promotes psychological planes of appeal and response within the very passages that initially give out surface sensationalism. Once again, as in Webster's play cited earlier, the gallery of devils, even those from Dante, are as nothing to the state of an individual 'spirit' (in this case a word intensifying emotionalism and intangibility which provides foundations of human psychology) dogged by the 'simple idea of a spirit unembodied following him.' Succeeded by a bolstering segment from the 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner', this section, in delineating subliminal instead of liminal, horrors, as it were, adumbrates much of what would come to permeate subsequent terror fiction, that, say, of a James, a Faulkner, or any number of other latter-day 'Gothic' writers (Lucas 2: 65-70).

Among Lamb's essays we discover what might, with slightly different workings, be just as much at home in terror fiction. In 'Christ's Hospital Five-And-Thirty Years Ago', to turn again to that piece, the speaker describes the boys' returns from day-leaves as fraught with a 'gloom from the haunting memory' of their day, which sounds very like a line from Maturin or Poe. The actual branding of a small boy for what one of his seniors imagined as an offence, could also hold rank among Gothic-novel tortures. Another schoolmate's philanthropic hoarding of food is presented in such a way that he seems a ghoul to his fellows. Condemnation of a young transgressor to solitude in a genuine dungeon at Christ's Hospital is cast in a manner reminiscent of live burials that were hallmarks in horror tales. An '*auto da fe*', conducted in punishing a still greater recalcitrant might, with few retouchings, resurface more luridly among numerous other 'Inquisition-Gothic' accounts. Master James Boyer's use of 'some devil's litany' is yet another like gambit, and one of many appearances of the devil and his workings in Lamb's writings (Lucas 2:12-11). A child's point-of-view becomes the vehicle in this essay for giving point to Gothic horrors - all the more gripping because they are inseparable from realities possible in the life of any British schoolboy. A similar blending of the eerie with the familiar occurs in 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers', when an incompetent young sweeper has been left in a chimney to shift for himself. In what amounts to good Gothic-novel rhetoric, we read in the outcome: 'It was an awful spectacle certainly; not much unlike the old stage direction in Macbeth, where the "Apparition of a child crowned with a tree in his hand, rises"' (Lucas 2:109). Such a free-association surprise resembles something on the

order of Melville's taking monotonous, and often harsh, labours of whalers and infusing them with startling supernatural undercurrents.

Lamb's use of the term 'haunt', in its various forms, to signal psychological upheavals or abnormalities, is noticeable throughout his work. A character in 'The South-Sea House' is 'haunted' by fears that he may be found a defaulter. In like manner, we find 'phantom' and its derivatives (all of which tie in with 'fantasy') as recurrent word choices. In 'The Superannuated Man', for instance, the speaker imagines a week's holiday approaching like a 'glittering phantom', and shortly thereafter suggests that he is 'haunted by lack of business acumen. Authors of small wit are stigmatized, in 'Sanity of True Genius', for imperfect creation of supernaturalism: 'Their phantoms are lawless ... For the super-natural, of something super-added to what we know of nature, they give you that non-natural' (Lucas 2: 188). These passages share a delicate balancing of what we may call Gothic-novel diction with utterly mundane occurrences - ever the way of Charles Lamb the literary artist, who delighted in collapsing barriers distinguishing rationality from irrationality. The whimsy, for which he is so famous, and which is manifest in this passage, notwithstanding, Lamb's fascination with language as the means to unfolding personality is undeniable. Therefore, phantoms must have groundings in credibility. Thus, like Edgar Allan Poe, who is far more generally credited for such techniques (but whose terrors are far different in degree), Lamb manages to make old-fashioned Gothicism perform intriguingly under his individualized renovations.

Overall, I trust, the foregoing observations emphasize how the 'gentle-hearted Charles' could muster appalling fare that might appeal to his readers while it expressed his own literary vision. Hostile though he sounded publicly when referring to the mishandling of supernaturalism and the terrific in literature - no doubt the consequence of witnessing a surfeit of such clumsiness in his own literary world - he evinced keen awareness of and readiness to use an element of the horrific when it could give vitality to his work. Cumulatively, Lamb's supernaturalism gains solidity and credibility from underpinnings in sound psychology. Like Mrs Radcliffe herself, whose works have, more and more, admitted analyses of their subtle probings into humanity's darker, at times, direr depths, Lamb, we discover, could explore like levels in personality. Later writers, among them Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, effected a recognized 'domestication' of Gothicism in terms of character and setting. Evil princes, knights, monks and abbesses were modified into characters in modern times, who tenanted equally verisimilar country houses or urban residences, which replaced haunted castles and abbeys as centres for sensationalism. Therefore, Victorian readers no longer needed to adjust to time gaps between their reading and their day-to-day lives. Lamb, however, must be credited as their precursor in using these methods. His characters and their environs are no longer the pseudo-medieval figures and locales of previous Gothic works. They are, rather, much more subtle registers for terrors because of their very ordinariness than what were to be found in Minerva-Press novels.

The child's point-of-view that informs much of those high achievements in 'Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago' and 'Witches and Other Night Fears' anticipates the untutored psyche's meeting with the unknown and the frightening -- expressed in words that could take place easily in Gothic novels, but that are in their places more symbolically functional -- in Dickens's *Great Expectations* or Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Like several of Lamb's essays, these novels include mysterious and terrifying devil-figures. Dickens's Orlick is actually termed a devil, and Pap Finn, for one among the characters in Twain's book, serves as a devil in his treatment of his son. Lamb's speaker in 'Witches and Other Night Fears' pines in the morbidity that pervades the thoughts of Pip and Huck. Many characteristics of the terror tale appear in Lamb's essay. If, as one critic calls it, D. G. Rossetti's 'Rose Mary' is 'a Gothic novel condensed in verse', then 'Witches'

may indeed be dubbed 'a Gothic novel condensed in essay-form.' Treating his material as he does, though, Lamb dispenses with simulated or real ghosts and crumbling architectural props. He replaces them with weird corridors of the mind, which offer many more possibilities for fright. In sum, then, we may take note of how Lamb often depended on the supernatural, even as he drew its fangs, for his seemingly far different kinds of works. His is no raw-head-and-bloody-bones type of supernaturalism. Rather, as is otherwise typical in his essays, he provides what may at times be whimsical, but what is always mellowed. In this manner he aligns with others who, not known in the main for ghostly writings, have carried along not insignificant traditions of and workings in horror literature, to combine it with what is generally viewed as realism. This kind of writing demonstrates Lamb's relationships with Dickens, many of those end-of-the-century authors who turned no faltering hand to some supernatural works, even though that area is not their mainstay -- Elia D'Arcy, Netta Syrett, Clemence Housman, 'Vernon Lee', Henry James, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane come readily to mind, but there are many more -- and with those whose writing careers extend into the twentieth century, for example, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Walter de la Mare, Oliver Onions, M. R. James, and Edith Wharton. Each of these writers succeeded in creating was an occasional, yet important, contribution to literature of the supernatural.

NOTES

1. Charles I. Patterson, 'Charles Lamb's Insights Into the Nature of the Novel', *PMLA* 67 (1952), 375-382; Bill Ruddick, "Beautiful Bare Narratives". Charles Lamb's Response to Eighteenth-Century Fiction', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n.s. 47-48 (1984), 158-164; Joseph E. Riehl, 'Charles Lamb's Mrs. Leicester's School Stories and Elia: The Fearful Imagination', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n.s. 39 (1982), 138-143; Gerald Monsman, *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb's Art of Autobiography* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984), pp. 55-73. A somewhat different version of this essay was read at 'Focusing on Lamb', chaired by Joseph E. Riehl, at the annual College English Association Convention, 12 April 1986, in Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A.
2. Quotations from *Specimens* come from Roy Park, ed. *Lamb as Critic* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).
3. *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 1:47-48. For citing Lamb's works in addition to those sources named above, I use *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 5 vols. (London: Methuen & Co., 1903; rpt. New York: AMS Press 1968). Lamb's letters are cited in the edition by Edwin W. Marrs, Jr. [in progress] (Ithaca, N.Y., London: Cornell University Press, 1975-1978). See also Joseph Seaman Iseman. *A Perfect Sympathy: Charles Lamb and Sir Thomas Browne* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. 31. My thinking has also taken shape from Daniel J. Mulcahy, 'Charles Lamb: The Antithetical Manner and the Two Planes', *Studies in English Literature 1600-1900*, 3 (1963), 517-542.
4. Southey did not respond to Lamb's supernaturalism with wholly kindred sympathy. His negative critique of 'Witches and Other Night Fears' appears in a review that took notice of the *Essays of Elia*, in the *Quarterly Review*, 27 (1823), 524-525. No matter what changes Southey may have contemplated, had he had opportunity to revise his notice, his negative opinion was his original thought; see Carolyn Misenheimer and James B. Misenheimer, Jr., 'Another Elia: Essays in a Minor Key', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n.s. 60(1987), 118-119. Lamb took occasion to tweet Southey about his review, commenting that Southey had actually all

his life been Satan's jester (Lucas 1:228). Matters of 'Germanism', as it made itself felt in English literary currents, and, more particularly, on the popularity of 'Lenore', may be found in my *The Gothic's Gothic: Study Aids to the Tradition of the Tale of Terror* (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. 345-356, 37-43.

5. Paul Franklin Baun, ed. *Poems, Ballads and Sonnets* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1937), pp. li, 89.

'THEREFORE YOU LOVE IT BEST':
A Reading of Coleridge's 'Lines Written at Shurton Bars'

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Coleridge's *Lines Written at Shurton Bars, Near Bridgewater, September 1795*, in *Answer to a Letter from Bristol* have never been highly valued. Although they were the first verse lines inspired by the countryside around Nether Stowey, where almost all Coleridge's memorable poetry was soon to be written, these early lines have suffered by comparison. Charles Lamb, at that time Coleridge's shrewdest critic, was typically forthright:

Certainly, Coleridge, your letter from Shurton Bars has less merit than most things in your volume; personally, it may chime in best with your own feelings, and therefore you love it best.¹

Lamb preferred the earlier *Lines Composed While Climbing The Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb, Somersetshire, May 1795* (another title of Bowles-like exactitude), and he found the poem which had been inspired at Clevedon in August 1795, *The Eolian Harp*, 'most exquisite'. Later readers have generally agreed with him. But, as usual, Lamb provides a clue for our understanding of the Shurton Bars lines, which he went on to allow had 'great merit'. This poem does indeed chime in with Coleridge's feelings, and it represents an interesting stage in his development towards the later success of the Nether Stowey Conversation Poems.

When he wrote the *Lines*, Coleridge was poised on the brink of crucial changes. A week or so later he was to marry the girl with whom he now felt in love, Sara Fricker, at 'poor Chatterton's church', St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, which happened also to be the Frickers' parish church. From boyhood onwards Coleridge had empathised with this particular Romantic Victim: both to Coleridge and his friends echoes between Lamb's 'inspired charity boy' and Wordsworth's 'marvellous Boy' must often have seemed close, and in 1794 a version of Coleridge's *Monody on the Death of Chatterton* had been published which gave its author some standing as a young poet. Although St. Mary Radcliffe may have seemed to Sara and her mother a very natural and respectable place for the coming marriage it must, surely have been charged with other personal meanings for Coleridge himself.²

The Shurton Bars lines also reflect the moment of estrangement in Coleridge's early relationship with Robert Southey. It had been on a walking tour with Southey that Coleridge had first visited Shurton in the summer of 1794. They had been to see a Jesus College acquaintance, Henry Poole, at Shurton Court and, through him, had met his radically-minded cousin Tom of Nether Stowey. Staid members of the Poole family later remembered the young men talking 'sad democratic nonsense', and certainly Pantisocratic plans were in the air. By the following summer much had happened between the two men and already their divergent natures were driving them apart. The prospect of an annuity and pressure from an uncle to persuade him to enter the Anglican Church had their effect on Southey, and a closer acquaintance with Coleridge's habits may also have helped to disenchant him. As early as June, this time on an excursion to

Tintern Abbey, there had been a quarrel between the two men, in which the two Fricker sisters (to whom they were engaged) had taken sides. When Coleridge returned from Shurton September 1795 the young men shook hands. But a few days later they were no longer on speaking terms.

Seeing it against such a backcloth may help us to identify the personal feelings which Lamb suggested the poem, chimed with. At this moment of estrangement from an anchor figure, it would have been natural for Coleridge to project his own emotional dependence upon Sara Fricker, who appears as a very clinging figure in the poem, quite unlike her natural character or her appointed role in the earlier *Eolian Harp*. And, in the very month of writing the Shurton Bars poem, Coleridge had met Wordsworth and already there seems to be a claim for a special relationship being made in the allusion to *An Evening Walk* and the footnote that accompanies it.

Any close reading of the *Shurton Bars* poem might usefully start by setting it with the *Brockley Coomb* poem and *The Eolian Harp* with which it may be seen as forming a summer 1795 triptych. The relatively slight Brockley Coomb lines seem designed as a variant on the type of poem epitomised in Bowles' Sonnets. In the Introduction to a *Sheet of Sonnets* he printed in 1796, S.T.C. claimed that the Sonnet was suited to the development of 'some lonely feeling ... but those Sonnets appear to me the most exquisite' (Lamb's praise-words for *The Eolian Harp*) 'when moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings, are deduced from, and associated with, the scenery of Nature'. In this way, Coleridge claims, a poet can create 'a sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world.' Such aspirations lay at the heart of Coleridge's own nature poetry.

The sixteen-line *Brockley Coomb* poem moves from the self-contained charm of the dell and the late eighteenth-century description piece to the edge of a larger emptiness. It closes:

Ah! what a luxury of landscape meets
My gaze! Proud towers, and Cots more dear to me,
Elm-shadow'd Fields, and prospect-bounding Sea!
Deep sighs my lonely heart; I drop the tear;
Enchanting spot! O were my Sara here!

The critical point to make is simply that, as far as the poetry has been concerned, Sara is certainly *not* there! The small successes of the poem lie in the tactile images of rock-face, yew-tree and mossy smoothness, which have helped a reader imaging the thrust of the upward climb. Such successes were hailed as Coleridge's emergent strokes of genius in the period of the Practical Critics. But they existed before that period and have survived it; they constitute just one weapon in his poetic quiver. For the poem's ending leaves us suspended over something stranger and more demanding; a large landscape of intellectual abstractions, from which the poet himself withdraws into a sigh, simply naming what is felt to be absent, a wholeness which neither landscape nor poet can supply.

Three months later, in *The Eolian Harp*, Coleridge was far more ambitious. Here the union of intellectual and material worlds has become central to the poem. And the architectonic grasp is surer. This is not simply a matter of length, since a well-poised sonnet requires such qualities also. But *The Eolian Harp*, even without its later improvements, is a well-formed whole. The generally-agreed critical reading presents it as an attempt to balance three areas of experience: the sensuous experience of the natural scene in North Somerset (scent of beanfield, murmur of distant sea, and so forth); the intellectual speculating of the poet's mind in its quest for evidence of the 'one Life' which unites sensuous and intellectual experiences (this starts at the rather banal level of *Brockley Coomb* with the easy comment upon the

jasmin and myrtle around the cottage: 'Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!' But it moves on to the more profoundly Coleridgean musings that Nature itself may be an Emblem of the creative Spirit); the third, and probably most controversial area of the poem's experience, is the poet's awareness of Sara, the 'beloved Woman' who mildly reproves his unorthodoxies and is characterised as 'Meek Daughter in the family of Christ'. Sara was not renowned for meekness and might justifiably have protested at being so described, as Charles Lamb later did at being called 'gentle-hearted Charles'. If she existed merely as an absence in the Brockley Coomb poem, here our problem is that Sara is too definite and too sentimentally-conceived a presence, too obviously a compensation device of the guilt-ridden male poet.

The *Shurton Bars* lines appeared in the 1796 *Poems* as the first of a small group of 'Poetical Epistles' immediately after a self-deprecating epigraph:

Good verse *most* good, and bad verse then seems better
 Receiv'd from absent friend by way of Letter.
 For what so sweet can labour'd lays impart
 As one rude rhyme warm from a friendly heart?

Contemporary reviewers were unconvinced. The *Analytical Review* proclaimed: 'we do not think the author very successful in this class of poetry', and the *Monthly Review* commented on these Poetical Epistles: 'their merit is not, we think, appropriate to epistolary writing, for which our author's style is little adapted. The most considerable of them, addressed to his "Sara", is rather an ode, filled with picturesque imagery'. On this hint, in the 1797 volume of his poems, S.T.C. abandoned the Poetical Epistle section altogether, and retitled the *Shurton Bars* lines simply *Ode to Sara*. But it is worth pondering his original intent.

What Coleridge's reviewers might have anticipated from the earlier title and epigraph was a familiar epistle of the kind represented by Pope's *Epistle to Miss Blount, on her Leaving the Town, after the Coronation*, (1714) where the town-based poet wittily mocks the dull country life to which his fair friend has been condemned, while lightly hinting at the world of sentimental fantasy which he and she share in their frustration. Of course, Pope's fifty-line poem is a minor masterpiece, and in terms of achievement there is little point in comparing S.T.C.'s prentice piece. However, as his epigraph suggests, his aim was not Pope-like urbanity, poised exquisitely in a public display of feeling which reveals the civil norm, just between too little emotion and too much. Coleridge's poem comes 'warm' and from the heart: its subject is the ebb and flow of youthful feelings. For such effects he believed set poetic forms might be both too difficult and too artificial. In his Introduction to the 1796 *Sheet of Sonnets* he attacked the view that a sonnet is suited to express 'a momentary burst of Passion'. And it was just this passionate area of experience which he was attempting to write about in the almost improvisational manner of the *Shurton Bars Lines*.

Nor travels my meandering eye
 The starry wilderness on high;
 Nor now with curious sight
 I mark the glowworm, as I pass,
 Move with 'green radiance' through the grass
 An emerald of light.

The *Shurton Bars* poem opens where the Brockley Coomb poem had ended, with a sense of negation and absence. And if we define more precisely the areas of experience Coleridge is denying himself here we begin to see how closely this poem also follows on from *The Eolian Harp*. The poet claims he is not exploring the metaphysical 'wilderness on high' (the second level of speculating mind evoked in the Clevedon poem?). Nor is he marking the peculiar light of the glowworm (the initial level of sensuous experience so beloved of

Practical Critics?). Instead, as the second stanza makes clear, his consciousness is with Sara (the 'beloved Woman' - that third area of awareness so problematic for Coleridge and his later readers).

It is worth noticing that Coleridge's vocabulary, while striving to find a middle style appropriate for a poetic epistle, is charged with personal significances from the very first line. The verb 'meandering' is used later to suggest the subrational workings of creative nature in Kubla's sacred river. Travelling an imaginative 'wilderness' was just what the central figures of *Cain* and *The Ancient Mariner* were to do. And, in turning to pursue minutiae with 'curious sight', Coleridge seems to enter the same dangerous mental area suggested in his 1798 quarto version of *Frost at Midnight* :

... curious toys
Of the self-watching subtilizing mind.

Following such personal Coleridgean references might lead a reader to suppose his poem begins by rejecting mental habits which were to prove some of the richest sources of his later Somerset inspirations, and that certainly seems to be one of the central problems with which the Shurton Bars poem engaged. Yet, whereas *The Eolian Harp* had presented Sara as a rather dauntingly orthodox theologian, this poem, from its beginning, gives us hints of a fuller and warmer relationship. It seems to me that the opening stanza even includes a lover's private joke which it is easy for the modern reader to miss.

Nor now with the curious sight
I mark the glowworm, as I pass ...

Remembering that this poem was written in late September, this claim is more than a little odd. Whoever would expect to mark glowworms by that late date in the English climate? A glowworm's 'green radiance' is a common enough *midsummer* sight for a good Westcountryman like Coleridge to have known better. But if this line to Sara is really a retrospective reference to the midsummer just past, when together they had visited Clevedon to find their future honeymoon home, if, in fact, it is a reference to the moment which had produced *The Eolian Harp*, then its whole reading changes. A personal playfulness enters the poem (of the kind Coleridge later exchanged with his 'Sally Pally'), which might be supported by the use of 'wafted' in line two of the second stanza, since the phrase 'wafted along on viewless pinions aery' appears as the ninth line of *The Silver Thimble*, the poem which Coleridge claimed Sara herself had written. Since he goes on to suggest at the close of Stanza Five that Sara affects him 'with *viewless* influence', some kind of play with personal allusions seems plausible here. Perhaps the main critical point to be made is that the better-known allusions of these early lines, both the generously-acknowledged quotation from Wordsworth and the unacknowledged borrowing from Samuel Rogers, may be part of a richer pattern of personal allusions, quite appropriate in an eighteenth-century familiar epistle, but far harder for the modern reader to follow.

By the close of his second stanza, Coleridge has focused on the absent Sara, but in lines which, unlike those at the close of the Brockley Comb poem, make her an active presence:

I see you all oppressed with gloom
Sit lonely in that cheerless room-
Ah me! You are in tears!

On the personal level, Coleridge is rather artfully detaching Sara here from her sister and future brother-in-law Southey. In terms of the poetical epistle he is, more interestingly, reversing the roles of town and country found in Pope's *Epistle* to Teresa Blount. The Bristol room is associated with dullness and tears; the country poet's sea-coast view offers her escape. That

imaginative contrast of Room and View which was still sustaining the late Romantic writings of Forster a century later is already being created. Sara is, again and predictably, unlike the kind of real-life figure we can glean from Molly Lefebure's recent biography, but at least she is not a figure of negative absence or disapproval. She has become a source of emotion; hers is the sensibility moved to tears - an important role in the verse of the period. By establishing his image of the Woman in tears so early Coleridge can treat problems of consciousness which occupied his finest verse later:

With cruel weight these trifles press
A temper sore with tenderness,
When aches the void within.

Answering eighteenth century questions, rhetorically posed, S.T.C. adopts an appropriate tone of quiet, generalising eloquence, and anticipates such insights into the strange flux of human behaviour as he was to offer in

Christabel. And he is already treating his subject with a tentative altruism, that imagining of another's consciousness which helped him achieve the finest of the later Conversation Poems. We are dealing here with raw prototypes of subtler writing.

Stanzas Four and Five bring the poem to its first resting place, and emphasise the generalising tendency typical of early Coleridge. His sympathetic identity with Sara expresses itself in the stage-soiled tinsel of late eighteenth-century poetry:

But why with sable wand unblessed
Should Fancy rouse within my breast
Dim-visag'd shapes of Dread?

Even here, the answering three lines wake a reader out of the kind of automatic response which such verse induces:

Untenanted its beauteous clay
My Sara's soul has wing'd its way,
And hovers round my head!

Apart from a certain facetiousness in the imagery, what exactly is the meaning here? Is the image of Sara's hovering soul the cause of Fancy's dim shapes of Dread, as the poet shares her own unhappiness? Or is the Sara image offered as an antidote to the Melancholy both of the poet and Sara herself? Syntactically these lines are ambiguous and only resolve themselves into the happier alternative with the unfolding of the fifth stanza, where it is clear that Sara has brought 'the tender Dream' and has roused 'each gentler sense':

As sighing o'er the Blossom's bloom
Meek Evening wakes its soft perfume
With viewless influence.

We are in what Geoffrey Hartman has called 'Evening Land', that poetic country which stretches onwards from the Evening poems of Gray and Collins. In evoking this minor genre Coleridge is playing with our sensibilities, as he lulls us into a mood which seems close to that which John Barrell has described at work in Collins' *Ode to Evening* :

It comes to represent that position ... from which,
withdrawn from the world, we can experience as
concord whatever, within the world, we experienced
as discord.¹²

If we read Stanza Five in that way we may do it better justice than if we read it retrospectively with the finer and more particularised sensuous evening

images of the greater S.T.C. Somerset poems in mind. The almost tautological 'Blossom's bloom' seems a limp phrase to set beside evocative scents from the bean-field. But it does its own work. The generalised Evening Scene is 'tender', 'gentler', 'meek', 'soft' and finally (perhaps with a private under-tone!) 'viewless'. By the close of the stanza we have moved into a sweetly-perfumed world of non-aggression which is almost lymphatic in its period elegance.

What follows is the first shock point of this surprising poem. Coleridge conjures up the melodramatic energy of a contrary vision:

And hark! The sea-breeze moans
Through yon reft house! O'er rolling stones
In bold ambitious sweep
The onward-surgings tides supply
The silence of the cloudless sky
With mimic thunders deep.

As in *The Eolian Harp*, Sara is an active participant in Coleridge's imagined scene. Yet, as in *Brockley Coomb*, this is also a scene she is, in a real sense, absent from. Geographically, Shurton Bars was and still is a relatively isolated spot reached by a rough track through cornfields. Its low, rocky coast catches the ebb and flow of tides which, a little further out in the Bristol Channel, can be treacherous. Looking north, upstream, looms the island of Steep Holm with Flat Holm beside it. The blue outline of the Welsh hills lies to the left, the nearer bulk of Green Down and, beyond, the coastal hills of Clevedon to the right. It was a suggestive place, rich in 'meet Emblems', as all Coleridge's Somerset settings were. Among the natural details a modern literary tourist recognises are the 'Blossom's bloom' of honeysuckle and wild flowers in the hedgerows, a 'reft house' of some former fisherman or labourer derelict among the fields, the 'rolling stones' of the pebbled West Somerset shore, the 'channell'd Isle' of Steep Holm, the sound of 'skylarks 'mid the corn', 'the sun-beam blend' of light playing across the Channel, and the changes of weather commonly encountered in this stretch of the West Country, caught in the crook of the estuary as it bends out to the Atlantic. Of course all these physical details have been translated in the poem.

For example, the sea-breeze moaning through the 'reft house' is a typical detail. Both the later *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage* were to explore the way in which derelict houses suggest human dereliction, and Coleridge was to parody himself when, in the 1797 *Nehemiah Higginbottom Sonnets*, he wrote of the 'reft house' that Jack built. But in its original *Shurton Bars* context the image is compact and suggestive. The poet is imagining himself also as potentially 'reft'. The simple use of 'moans', placed at the end of the onward-moving line, illustrates the power of S.T.C.'s mixed style, which enabled him to work from an everyday vocabulary, heightened here and there towards Miltonic sublimity, as in the final phrase of the stanza: 'mimic thunders deep'. The sweep of the stanza through its last five lines captures well the elemental power which is being described. Looking back at the 'best' lines of *Brockley Coomb* we can see what is happening here. The peaceful inland dell: 'Where broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seats' has been replaced by a dynamic tide-swept scene where the rolling stones gather in moss. And the larger metaphor such lines seek to express, the surging tides counterpointing cloudless sky in mimic thunder, seems part of Coleridge's perpetual search for patterns of correspondence in an active universe as well as being a mirror of the relationship of himself and Sara which lies at the living heart of this Epistle poem.

The lines that follow (Stanzas Seven to Ten) are certainly the dramatic climax of the poem. The reviewer in the *Monthly Review* for June 1796 described them as 'a very striking sea-piece', and the phrase suggests the kind of picturesque

sea-painting which appealed to contemporary taste. These stanzas build up their images of Watchfire and Storm through characteristic early Coleridge hyphenated epithets ('storm-vex'd', 'soul-jaundic'd', 'gloom-pamper'd', 'tempest-shatter'd') to the Tenth Stanza's nightmare vision of destructive energy:

Then by the lightning's blaze to mark
Some toiling tempest-shatter'd bark;
Her vain distress-guns hear;
And when a second sheet of light
Flash'd o'er the blackness of the night -
To see no vessel there!

This uses conventional effects of the period to produce a dramatic sequence worthy of Philip de Louthembourg's optical entertainments, in the cinematic patterning of images and the timing of the last line. The fashionable shock they are aimed to produce is similar too. Images of natural disorder are presented here as evidence of the unregenerate force within a human psyche. Such impulses are close to the shooting of the Albatross; such awareness of echoing mental disturbance and storm prefigures *Dejection*. It is tempting to see these lines, biographically, as themselves 'vain distress-guns' and the figure of the Beloved Woman as a hoped-for stabiliser to set against the self-destructive excesses of Coleridge's nature. In their original verse Epistle form they seem a blatant cry to Sara for help. Yet even there they were to be read with some sense of perspective, for they are very literary lines, and their strands of allusiveness are worth teasing out.¹⁴

Coleridge tells us that the mid-channel Watchfire:

... like a sullen star
Twinkles to many a dozing Tar
Rude cradled on the mast.

The lines are commonplace enough, but behind them lie Shakespearian echoes. The insomniac Henry Bolingbroke has asked of Sleep:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge?

The verbal parallels here suggest conscious or subconscious borrowings, but what was the purpose of the allusion? Was it simply a way of dignifying the poem by suggesting worthy antecedents to the workings of Fancy? Coleridgean defensiveness may have dictated that. But I believe a stronger thread of Shakespeare reference and relevance is to be found behind these stanzas.

The Watchfire is 'like a sullen star' and this juxtaposition of seamount and star recalls Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116*, the great affirmation of wedded love:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments ...

In his imagining of threat from *Tempest* and *Shipwreck* Coleridge was drawing upon a whole movement of Shakespearean art. Such images for both poets seemed meet Emblems for a world where Love falls victim and Chaos is come again. But in *Sonnet 116* the great counter-statement has been proclaimed. Alluding in its second line to the words of the marriage banns, the sonnet's application to

Coleridge and his Sara in September 1795 is obvious. The weighty drift of the whole celebration of True Love here is towards permanence:

... Love is not Love
Which alters when it alteration finds.

Within the natural ebb and flow of Coleridge's poem such a fixed stability remains a land-based mood beyond his sea of troubles, an ideal devoutly to be wished. In the second quatrain Shakespeare had introduced his Emblems of Love's Constancy:

Oh no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark
Whose worth's unknown although his height be taken.

The ever-fixed mark is a sea-mark or beacon and 'to take the height of a star' meant to calculate its altitude, so the star in question seems most likely to be the North Star. Such clear navigation images have a fine masculine solidity. The strength of Shakespeare's sonnet lies in his ability to state abstract generalities about ideal love through a mixture of bold images and negative assertions which must have attracted Coleridge. But in reworking these Coleridge's own poem presents them with an air of hectic Sublimity. The Watchfire on the channell'd Isle is a beleaguered 'storm-ved flame' (echoing the poet's spirit as that later flame does above the grate in *Frost at Midnight*). The scene is a vivid self-dramatization of those self-doubts which had haunted Coleridge's young mind so often already.

When, from Stanza Eleven, the poem moves back to the land-centred life of Love and Marriage, its images conspicuously fail to recreate the four-square certainties of Sonnet 116. Instead, gentler, feminine images of yielding skylark, wildflowers, tears and 'pity's dew' replace the Watchfire and star. There is a mood of withdrawal into a sheltered Clevedon cottage rather than weathering it out in mid-channel against the blast. In this movement Stanza Thirteen is critical:

When stormy Midnight howling round
Beats on our roof with clattering sound,
To me your arms you'll stretch:
Great God! you'll say - To us so kind,
O shelter from the loud bleak wind
The houseless, friendless wretch!

Such an answer to the storm may seem less bold than Shakespeare's. But it may in domestic fact make better sense. As Shakespeare well knew, large generalities can be poor protection in a pitiless pelting. As G. M. Hopkins's later Romantic agonisings put it:

... Here! creep
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind.

Coleridge, like Shakespeare, like Hopkins, turns to the natural human comfort of love. And it is here that his *Shurton Bars* lines need most urgently to be valued for what they say. Clothed in the vocabulary of late eighteenth century sentiment, the final stanzas do offer a living alternative to the destructive forces so dramatically depicted earlier. The precise embodiment of that alternative has a living flow which relates to the later, greater human statements of the mature Conversation Poems.

And from your heart the sighs that steal
Shall make your rising bosom feel
The answering swell of mine!

A living emotion, felt in the blood and felt along the heart, is being celebrated here and through its mutuality Coleridge hopes to enrich his own humanity. This and the following stanza give a very direct picture of how Sara acts as a release for Coleridge's sexuality, in images which recall the tidal movement of earlier stanzas and translate them into emblems of youthful sensuality. Evening Land, threatened by the poet's crisis of doubt and guilt, has been restored to an optimistic mood of Venus, warri, procreative, a mingling of masculine and feminine. Such scenes can make embarrassing reading. But here S.T.C. achieves his effect quite simply and directly.

The last stanza brings the poem to a close in a Brave New World of Darwin and electrical experiment:

'Tis said, in Summer's evening hour
Flashes the golden-colour'd flower
A fair electric flame:
And so shall flash my love-charge'd eye
When all the heart's big ecstasy 16
Sheets rapid through the frame.

As with the later Conversation Poems, Coleridge here comes full circle, to end in the spiral pattern of the snake with its tail in its mouth. The golden-coloured flower has replaced the glowworm and the flashing eye of the poet-lover has replaced both star and watchfire. Shakespeare's Emblems have, finally, been recreated. The image stolen from Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* has a dynamic force sufficient to match the terror of the nightmare middle stanzas, a force appropriate to Coleridge's hope in his radical marriage with his 'Democratic hoyden', Sara Fricker. It was this life, the life of humanitarian preaching and sexual liberation, which gave his immediate future its purpose. By the time he wrote the *Shurton Bars* lines and made his marriage with Sara, Coleridge's scheme for Pantisocratic experiment had foundered. Yet a year later, in 1796, he added some lines to his *Monody on the Death of Chatterton*, lines that have much relevance to the mood of his *Shurton Bars* poem. They begin the final sequence of the Chatterton piece, following a suitably elevated lament for the fate of that self-destructive genius:

Hence, gloomy thoughts! no more my soul shall dwell
On joys that were! no more endure to weigh
The shame and anguish of the evil day,
Wisely forgetful! O'er the ocean swell
Sublime of Hope I seek the cottag'd dell
Where Virtue calm with careless step may stray:
And, dancing to the moon-light roundelay¹⁸
The wizard Passions weave an holy spell!

For a time certainly the wizard Passions were to weave their spell, and the heart's ecstasy was to shoot its fair electric flame. Even if the great poems of the Somerset period were often concerned with the sea-vision and ways out of the cottag'd dell, for a time at least, the domestic ideal was to be sustained. It was surely with an optimistic sense of re-writing Chatterton's storm-blasted life in his own that Coleridge returned home to Bristol to marry his Sara at St. Mary Redcliffe Church.

.....
... I cannot write without a *body of thought* - hence
my *Poetry* is crowded and sweats beneath a heavy burthen
of Ideas and Imagery! It has seldom Ease.¹⁹

Outwardly the *Shurton Bars Epistle* or *Ode to Sara* seems a personal poem. Yet its significance for Coleridge lay also in its play of ideas. The poem's

movement between two clearly contrasted states, the quiet domesticated Fancy associated with Sara and the wild Bardic frenzy of the storm-swept isle, contains a crucial tension. In renouncing the second state was Coleridge doing violence to his essential nature as a poet? A modern reader, with the hindsight of the later life as well as *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* to draw upon, may be tempted to think so. But is that the pattern of ideas the *Shurton Bars* lines present to us?

Certainly, the mid-channel section appeals to that 'taste for the terrible graces' which led Anna Seward, the Swan of Lichfield, two years earlier, to walk the beach at Scarborough during a night storm. But such tastes were, for Coleridge, examples of a superficial understanding of the Sublime, and the product of a dangerous form of mental solitude. The whole weight of his many Notebook entries suggests that for him such solitude was to be feared. Characteristically he recognised the ability to use such solitude creatively as one of Wordsworth's strengths:

He is a man of whom it might have been said, 'It is
Good for him to be alone.'

(S.T.C., *Table Talk*)

The fine poem written on hearing Wordsworth read the 1805 text of *The Prelude* celebrated that solitary strength drawn:

'From the dread watch-tower of man's absolute self.'

But such inner security was not to be found in Coleridge's mid-channel Watchfire, and he always knew it. Again and again, his mind turned to speculate on how to unify its perceptions of life, how to rescue the observer from a universe which might seem an immense heap of little things, through patterns of organic flow or dialectic thought, seizing upon dynamic self-generative systems of polarity wherever they could be found, in Neoplatonism, German philosophy, modern scientific theory, (Objective/ Subjective, Male/Female, Sun/Moon, and so on), all seemingly analogous to the poles of electrical magnetism.

The subtlest formulations of Wholeness came later. But already, in *Religious Musings*, the poem he had begun in December 1794 and of which he was probably thinking when he wrote the December letter to Southey, Coleridge shows a clear and haunting sense of Man as potentially 'a sordid solitary being':

Feeling himself, his own low self the whole;
When he by sacred sympathy might make
The whole one Self!

(*Religious Musings*, lines 149-51)

It was against the fear of just such a kind of spiritual Orphanism that the *Shurton Bars* poem was written. By one last Shakespearean analogy, the island storm can be seen as the product of a solitary Prospero's Fancy. Its destructive, vengeful energy is opposed by a life-giving contrary, the human outgoing sympathy of Miranda. When he came to lecture on *The Tempest* Coleridge confessed:

Of Miranda we may say, that she possesses in herself
all the ideal beauties that could be imagined by the
greatest poet of any age or country.

He saw her compassion for the fraughting souls in the shipwreck as a compensatory emotion, dwelling:

Upon that which was most wanting to the completeness
of her nature -

her appropriate longing for wholeness with her fellow-beings. At the time he wrote *Shurton Bars* the admired Miranda whom S.T.C. imagined stretching out her arms to rescue the artist Prospero from his dangerous solipsism was Sara Fricker. A year or two earlier she might have been Mary Evans (as in *Lines on an Autumnal Evening*); a few years later she would have been Asra. For the impulse which unites *Shurton Bars* as a poem was central to S.T.C.'s inner nature and, literally, to his life as a whole:

... 'Tis the sublime of man
Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole!
This fraternises man, this constitutes
Our charities and bearings.

(*Religious Musings* , lines 126-30)

NOTES

1. *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* , ed. E. W. Marris (New York, 1975)i,p.17.
2. The Coleridge-Chatterton identification has been frequently noted. See, for example, *Coleridge and the Literature of Sensibility* by George Dekker (London, 1978) Chapter 2 (although Professor Dekker exaggerates the link between the two poets' schools).
3. *Collected Letters of S. T. Coleridge* , ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1956)i, pp.163-173. For a suggestion that Southey's reactions may have been occasioned by S.T.C.'s opium habits, and the bearing of this on the Sara Fricker marriage see *The Bondage of Love* by Molly Lefebure (London, 1986) pp 62-5.
4. *Complete Poetical Works of S.T.C.* , ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1912)ii, p.1139.
5. For a Practical Critic's response to early Coleridge verse see *Coleridge The Work and the Relevance* , by W. Walsh (London, 1967)p.96.
6. For a useful short survey of the poem see comments in *S.T.C. Poems* ed. John Beer (London, 1974) pp.20-2.
7. *Coleridge The Critical Heritage* , ed. J. R. de J. Jackson (London,1970) pp.32-7, gives contemporary reviews.
8. *Complete Poetical Works of S.T.C.* , ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1912)ii, p.1140.
9. *Ibid.* , i, p.241.
10. On the better-known literary borrowings here see *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Art of Allusion* by Lucy Newlyn (Oxford, 1986)p.17.
11. *P.W.* , *op.cit.*,i,p.235-6.
12. See G. Hartman, *Evening Star and Evening Land in Post-Structuralist Readings of English Poetry* , ed. R. Machin & C. Norris (Cambridge, 1987) and John Barrell on Collins in *Teaching the Text* , ed. S. Kappeler & N. Bryson (London, 1983).

13. I am indebted to Mr. John Sutherland of Nether Stowey for kindly helping to identify the precise location of Shurton Bars.
14. On de Louthembourg's 'Eidophusikon' or moving-picture show see *Art and the Industrial Revolution* by F. D. Klingender (D.Y., 1968) pp.96-100.
15. On Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 see *Shakespeare's Sonnets* by S. Booth (Yale, 1980)pp.386-7.
16. *Erasmus Darwin* by D. King-Hele (London, 1963) pp.140-2.
17. The phrase 'Democratic hoyden' for Sara Fricker is taken from *Paupers and Pig Killers*, an interesting contemporary view of Stowey life by William Holland, Parson of Over Stowey, ed. Jack Ayres (Gloucester, 1984) p.15.
18. On the possibility that these lines may have been originally written by S.T.C.'s younger school-fellow, 'Sam' Favell, see *P.W.*, *op.cit.*, i,p.68, note 2.
19. *Collected Letters*, *op.cit.*, i, p.137.
20. For such a view see *Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid* by G. Yarlott (London, 1967) pp.88-9.
21. Anna Seward is quoted in *The Sublime* by S. H. Monk (Michigan, 1960)p.214.
22. Three outstanding treatments of these aspects of S.T.C.'s thought are: *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* by T. McFarland (London, 1969), *Patterns of Consciousness* by R. Haven (Massachusetts, 1969), and *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* by J. Beer (London, 1977).
23. *Coleridge: Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. T. M. Paysor (London, 1960)ii, pp. 132-133, p.140.
24. Compare *Lines on an Autumnal Evening*, lines 19-22 with the close of *Shurton Bars*.
25. See, for example, the appeal to Asra written in 1806: 'O bring my whole nature into balance and harmony'. *Notebooks of S.T.C.*, ed. K. Coburn (London, 1962) ii, 2938.

'AND WHEN AMERICA WAS FREE': THOMAS PAINE AND THE ENGLISH ROMANTICS

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These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

(CW 1: 50)

'His name is Paine, a gentleman about two years from England - a man who ... has genius in his eyes' (CW 1: ix). So wrote the American patriot

John Adams, who would later become the second President of the United States, about the author of the dramatic lines above, the opening lines of the fiery and immensely influential essay entitled *The Crisis*, written by Thomas Paine in 1776 while he was a soldier in the army of General George Washington. That army was in retreat, disorder, in the winter of 1776. Defeat seemed near for the American revolutionary forces, undermanned, undersupplied, undernourished; many of them even facing the winter without shoes. Opposing them were the vast resources of the English army, but the immediate enemy was, in fact, much more distasteful, even insulting: Hessian mercenaries, hirelings, whose presence in the rebellious American colonies seemed to indicate that Mother England not only would not respond to American demands for reform and for more enlightened colonial policies but would not even take seriously the colonists' resorting to arms.

Thomas Paine wrote the words that I began with -- the opening lines of the first of a series of calls to armed dedication to the cause of American liberty; a series of essays, issued as sixteen pamphlets, now known as *The American Crisis* papers -- on a drumhead by campfire as he accompanied General Washington in dreary retreat south across New Jersey. The Revolution seemed lost and the enemy invincible, with the morale of American soldiers and even civilians at its lowest ebb. Something had to be done quickly, Colonel Joseph Reed wrote to Washington about this time, 'or', he said, 'we must give up the cause' (CW 1: 49).

The something to be done quickly would take two forms. The one was a stroke of military genius: on the Christmas eve of 1776, Washington and his puny army rowed across the Delaware River in the dead of a freezing snowy night to attack the drunken and holiday-celebrating Hessians in an unexpected battle that was to change the course of the war. But before the Americans got aboard their flimsy little boats to face the perils of a December blizzard, a raging and half-frozen river filled with chunks of ice, and a large hired army of unknown strength, General Washington commanded his men to be assembled on the banks of the river to hear the first public reading of Tom Paine's ringing words. 'He that stands it, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered.' The listening soldiers were roused. And Tom Paine gave them the assurance they would need that if hell, indeed, was the enemy, heaven was their ally:

I have as little superstition in me as any man living, but my secret opinion has ever been, and still is, that God Almighty will not give up a people to military destruction, or leave them unsupportedly to perish, who have so earnestly and so repeatedly sought to avoid the calamities of war, by every decent method which wisdom could invent. Neither have I so much of the infidel in me, as to suppose that He has relinquished the government of the world, and given us up to the care of devils; and as I do not, I cannot see on what grounds the king of Britain can look up to heaven for help against us: a common murderer, a highwayman, or a housebreaker, has as good a pretence as he.

(CW 1: 50-51)

The effect of such language was felt far beyond that river bank on that Christmas eve of 1776. Tom Paine's new pamphlet roused the entire continent and had a profound and transforming effect on the cause of the American Revolution. As one of those listeners wrote, 'Hope succeeded to despair, cheerfulness to gloom, and firmness to irresolution' (Cheetham, cited in CW 1: 49).

Thomas Paine, that man described as having 'genius in his eyes', was born in 1737 at Thetford, in Norfolk, the son of a Quaker father and an Anglican mother. His father was a poor corset-maker who could barely afford to send Tom to a free school where he was taught just enough to master reading, writing,

and arithmetic. From the age of thirteen, he assisted his father in the corset-making business, but at sixteen he ran away from home and went to sea to serve as a sailor on a privateer during the Seven Years' War, returning to London for a variety of subsistence jobs. He used his meagre earnings to buy books. And, no doubt led by his inherited Quakerism, he immersed himself in progressive readings and discussions on such subjects as anti-slavery, women's rights, and prison reform. But he was alert also to the lessons of the life around him. During his first thirty-seven years, spent mostly in London, 'he saw enough misery in England, enough of the contrast between the affluence of the upper classes and the poverty and suffering of the masses to influence his thinking for the remainder of his days' (CW 1: x).

Paine saw the vicious effects of the enclosure system which threw thousands of small, independent farmers into the cities and transformed them from independent yeomanry to landless factory workers and agricultural labourers. All about him he saw thousands struggling in the midst of misery and degradation to eke out an existence, and, as he later wrote, he daily passed by 'ragged and hungry children, and persons of seventy and eighty years of age, begging in the streets' of the great city (x). And he noticed, too, other things, that readers of Blake and Wordsworth and Dickens and other great voices of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries have found also so prominent in their writings - the cruel operations of the poor laws, which almost reduced workers to serfs; and the brutality of the savage criminal code, directed chiefly against the lower classes; the voicelessness of the mass of people in all decisions taken by their rulers. (In Paine's native town of Thetford, just thirty-one men were allowed a vote in the election of two members of the House of Commons [xi]).

On April 7, 1774, young William Wordsworth turned four years of age. By coincidence, that same night, Thomas Paine learned that he had lost his job in London; the authorities were incensed over his attempt to improve the status of the labouring classes in publishing a pamphlet entitled *The Case of the Officers of the Excise*. Such a troublemaker had no place in official plans for London life. A week later, Paine was forced to sell his shop and possessions to escape imprisonment for debt.

Benjamin Franklin was in London at the time, attempting to negotiate on behalf of the American colonies. Tom Paine, never short on spunk, approached Franklin and got from him a letter of introduction to Franklin's associates in Philadelphia. Benjamin Franklin wrote that Tom Paine was 'an ingenious worthy young man', despite what the authorities in London might think of him, and one who, in the right place, like Philadelphia, might make good as 'a clerk, or assistant tutor in a school, or assistant surveyor' (xi). Paine left for America to start a new life. The timing seemed ominous: just six months after his emigration, a British army stationed in Boston attacked a group of colonial irregulars who called themselves 'Minutemen', at a bridge just outside the town of Concord, Massachusetts. Ralph Waldo Emerson later wrote the famous lines, now inscribed on the monument at Concord Bridge:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to freedom's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard 'round the world.

'The shot heard 'round the world' had been fired, and war in America had begun - an English war of revolution, fought by Englishmen against the tyranny of an English king.

It would seem reasonable to expect that English war of revolution, fought on American soil but with the sympathy and support of a great many living on English soil, would have a profound effect on the literature and the poetry of the succeeding age. Particularly would such an effect seem expectable in view

of the historical and philosophical influence on the American Revolution of the so-called Bloodless Revolution, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, less than a century before in Mother England. But in fact, the American Revolution, that thoroughly English invention, that revolution made by men who then considered themselves Englishmen - Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Tom Paine - was to have a much less obvious appearance in the poetry of English Romanticism than the French Revolution of a few years later. Wordsworth could write of the Fall of the Bastille and the events which accompanied it that it was 'Bliss ... in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very Heaven!' (*Prel.* 11.108-09). But Wordsworth was six years old when the American Declaration of Independence was signed and promulgated, and eleven years old when the Revolutionary War ended and American independence was accepted by the English government. If he felt bliss over *those* events, or felt anything else, he certainly did not proclaim it in ringing lines like those in *The Prelude* devoted to France.

And yet, I shall argue that the thoughts and expressions of Wordsworth, as well as the thoughts and writings of his greatest literary contemporaries, are in fact permeated with the spirit of the American Revolution: permeated, above all, with the ideas and words of Tom Paine.

Certainly there are moments in our reading of Wordsworth when we find him expressing not mere indifference but hostility towards America and Americans. He wrote in June 1834 to his lifelong friend Henry Crabb Robinson, at a time when Robinson was contemplating emigration to America:

My dear Friend ...

Your intended expedition to the United States was news to us - and ... not altogether good news. We are rather too old to think without some pain of our friends being separated so far from us. You yourself are no longer young - and casualties as we advance are not easily recovered from. Indeed the more I look into this scheme the less I relish it - There are not many things in America which can be called sights. Niagara it is true, is a first rate one - but not worth crossing the Atlantic for - and as to American Manners and Society - we have it in so many books, that it seems as well to be contented with what may be collected from them while at ease upon ones own Sofa - or under the shade of an English Oak. (LY 2: 715)

Perhaps a similar mood guided Wordsworth, in even his younger years, to treat America, and specifically the American War of Independence, as sometimes a negative influence. In his prefatory Advertisement to the poem 'Guilt and Sorrow', the poet speaks of the 'American War' as being 'still fresh in memory' (HM 20). And it is clear that that war has had a corrupting influence on the sailor in the poem who 'to an armed fleet was forced away' (51), dragged off to an unjust conflict - 'hurried off, a helpless prey, / 'Gainst all that in *his* heart ... said nay' (53-54). But Wordsworth is not specifically being anti-American here; after all, the sailor has fought, however reluctantly, on the British side in that war, and it is war, war of any kind, regardless of noble principles of freedom and liberation, which the poet shows to be so corrupting:

For years the work of carnage did not cease,
And death's dire aspect daily he surveyed,
Death's minister. (55-57)

And, from such miserable and dehumanising experience, the sailor returns home to become a murderer and the inadvertent destroyer of his own family and all that he holds dear.

Much more pointed is the treatment of the soldier in the poem 'Ruth'. This soldier has fought in that same American Revolution, and on the American side.

Furthermore, he has done so voluntarily, and with a sense of the noble principles, the kinds of principles popularised by Tom Paine's writings. He tells Ruth of his vision of life in America:

Before me shone a glorious world -
 Fresh as a banner bright, unfurled
 To music suddenly:
 I looked upon those hills and plains,
 And seemed as if let loose from chains,
 To live at liberty. (169-74)

He knows America, her wonders and her spirit. He has fought for American independence and freedom.

[He] bore a soldier's name;
 And, when America was free
 From battle and from jeopardy,
 He 'cross the ocean came. (27-30)

He knows America, her spirit, her ideals, her beauties, and it is that knowledge which he puts into words to woo and to win Ruth:

With hues of genius on his cheek
 In finest tones the Youth could speak:
 - While he was yet a boy,
 The moon, the glory of the sun,
 And streams that murmur as they run,
 Had been his dearest joy.
 He was a lovely youth! (31-37)

Clearly this young man does not agree with Wordsworth's later judgement, expressed in that letter to Crabb Robinson, that 'there are not many things in America which can be called sights.' Instead all that the youth describes to Ruth is magic, fantasyland, irresistible:

The Youth of green savannahs spake,
 And many an endless, endless lake,
 With all its fairy crowds
 Of islands that together lie
 As quietly as spots of sky
 Among the evening clouds. (67-72)

But there is something *too* free about this young American; he is irresponsible, somehow savage and uncivilized. *His* kind of freedom turns out to be no blessing to him, and a curse to anyone, like Ruth, who comes to love him. And the suggestion can hardly be avoided that it is revolutionary America which has instilled in this young man a corrupting influence which he might never have found in a more civilised land in the Old World. Revolutionary America becomes to him what Wordsworth calls in another context 'the weight of too much liberty' ('Nuns fret not' 13). The wild and exotic and untamed American setting becomes dangerous food:

For him, a Youth to whom was given
 So much of earth - so much of heaven,
 And such impetuous blood,
 Whatever in those climes he found
 Irregular in sight or sound
 Did to his mind impart
 A kindred impulse. (123-30)

And so the wildness of America corrupts the young man and leads him to corrupt Ruth and ruin her life. And when that life is finally over, and all its suffering, it will be the settled and civilised Old World, and the Old World religion, which will mourn for her:

And when thy days are told,
 Ill-fated Ruth, in hallowed mould
 Thy corpse shall buried be,
 For thee a funeral bell shall ring,
 And all the congregation sing
 A Christian psalm for thee. (253-58)

Insofar as this poem reveals Wordsworth's attitude toward America and its Revolution, it *does* seem to be a negative attitude. Certainly, at least, it cannot be compared with the exuberance displayed by other Romantic poets when they write of the American Revolution. I'm thinking particularly here of William Blake. Blake, as Alicia Ostriker has well said, 'is the rebel *par excellence* of English poetry, who sets his face against convention and restriction of every sort, glorifies untrammelled inspiration and defends the artist's liberty, in matters of literary format as well as in his religious, political and social ideas' (7). Blake was also not only an associate but a personal friend of Tom Paine. This friendship was a matter of considerable courage for Blake, for in the years following the outbreak of revolution in America Tom Paine became the object of very particular government persecution in England. The government's attitude is perhaps understandable in view of the fact that Paine spent several years in his native land urging the importation of revolutionary principles and actions to English soil. At one point, the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, even attempted to prevent the publication of Paine's writings in England by bribing the publisher and by hiring mobs to burn Tom Paine in effigy. When Paine responded to this treatment by making an inflammatory and revolutionary speech in London to the society of the 'Friends of Liberty', a warrant was issued for his arrest and trial on charges of sedition. It was William Blake, who had attended Paine's speech and had liked what he heard, who warned Paine of his impending arrest and helped him flee the country just one step ahead of government agents.

No wonder, then, that Blake should come to write of Tom Paine as one of his heroes in *America: A Prophecy* :

The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent,
 Sullen fires across the Atlantic glow to America's shore:
 Piercing the souls of warlike men, who rise in silent night,
 Washington, Franklin, Paine ...
 Meet on the coast glowing with blood from Albion's fiery
 Prince.
 Washington spoke; Friends of America look over the Atlantic
 sea;
 A bended bow is lifted in heaven ...

 The King of England looking westward trembles at the vision.
 (3.1-7; 4.12)

Blake actually includes in this poem his own paraphrased version of the American Declaration of Independence as well as some of Paine's own revolutionary writings.

This is not, by any means, Wordsworth's style of writing, nor even his style of thinking. But in fact Wordsworth is not really all that far from Blake here. Certainly they are both separated, by a great fixed gulf, from the Robert Southey of 1821, who, as Poet Laureate, following the death of King George III in 1820, composed his tribute to that monarch. George III, of

course, was the same monarch who 'trembles at the vision' in Blake's poem, and who had been the target of the attack in the American Declaration of Independence, and who had been repeatedly called tyrant and compared to a murderer and thief in the writings of Tom Paine. He was the same monarch who had, just two years before, been branded by Percy Bysshe Shelley as 'An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King' ('England in 1819' 1). He was the same monarch whom Lord Byron, in his own *Vision of Judgment*, his delicious response to Southey's poem, called 'this old, blind, mad, helpless, weak, poor worm' (330). Southey is of an utterly different voice and opinion entirely from all these other writers, for in *his Vision of Judgment* Southey depicts the king encountering the ghost of George Washington at the Gates of Heaven, where the two men forgive each other cordially and agree that their differences had all just been a little misunderstanding - a view which Wordsworth privately ridiculed as a 'treasonable judgement' (LY 1: 23).

For Wordsworth was no Southey. The poet who in both early and late versions of *The Prelude* denounced *all* monarchy as a system of paying 'fruitless worship to humanity' (1850 10.259) could never have much admiration for such a monarch as the dull-witted George III. Even so late as at the age of 59, an age at which many suppose that Wordsworth had become a thorough Tory, he was expressing his deepest convictions to Charles James Blomfield, the Anglican Bishop of London, when he writes:

Three great conflicts are before the progressive nations:
between Christianity and Infidelity; between Papacy and
Protestantism; and between the spirit of the old *Feudal
and Monarchical governments*, and the Representative and
Republican system as established in America. (LY 2: 37)

And Wordsworth never left any doubt about where he stood on all three of these great conflicts.

Particularly on the great political issue of his time, the quest of mankind for what Thomas Jefferson called the 'unalienable' right of liberty and political freedom; Wordsworth stands, early and late, with such writers as William Blake and Tom Paine; for all of these thinkers and writers shared one profound faith in a series of divinely orchestrated and providential events which would surely lead to the universal liberation of all mankind. There may be modern historians who would disdain such a faith and its bases in historical fact, but these men -- I am thinking particularly of Paine, Blake, Byron, and, of course, Wordsworth -- had the considerable advantage of being alive at the time and present at the scene. Their faith was that the liberation of all mankind was an aspiration which developed during the Renaissance and was fuelled by the Protestant Reformation; that a crucial step in the practical achievement of that aspiration was the English Civil War and the establishment of the Commonwealth; that another crucial step, more important because having a direct effect on more nations than one -- certainly affecting America and France as well as Great Britain -- was the English Revolution of 1688; that an inevitable and direct result of *that* Revolution was that other English Revolution, the one which occurred in the American Colonies beginning in 1775 and 1776; and that the next and similarly inevitable result of all these cumulative pressures and examples was the French Revolution of 1789; and, finally, that Revolution would lead, maybe not quite so inevitably, but eventually, to the liberation of all the peoples of the earth. The culmination of this process, as Wordsworth describes it in *The Prelude*, was that contained in the vision he brought back

with him from France, that no matter what difficulties might yet accompany the births of new nations and new liberties, the end was certain:

In the People was my trust,
 And, in the virtues which mine eyes had seen.
 I knew that wound external could not take
 Life from the young Republic; that new foes
 Would only follow, in the path of shame,
 Their brethren, and her triumphs be in the end
 Great, universal, irresistible. (1859 10.11-17)

'Universal' because the culmination of this chain of revolutions would reach everywhere: 'Not favoured spots alone, but the whole Earth, / The beauty wore of promise' (11.117-18).

There is nothing naive or childish about the exuberance that Wordsworth expresses on these matters. It is easy to be cynical. It is easy to point out that this universal triumph of freedom has not yet occurred. But with the examples of Wordsworth and his great contemporaries as spokesmen for the vision, it seems to me almost subhuman to give up on it, to settle for less, to assume that what the world *is* is what it must always be. The vision surpasses the reality, certainly. But for these great writers the vision *is* the greater reality. Wordsworth speaks not of what he dreamed but what he lived, not what might barely happen someday but what 'was then':

Why should I not confess that Earth was then
 To me, what an inheritance, new-fallen,
 Seems, when the first time visited, to one
 Who thither comes to find in it his home?
 He walks about and looks upon the spot
 With cordial transport, moulds it and remoulds,
 And is half pleased with things that seem amiss,
 'Twill be such joy to see them disappear. (11.145-52)

I don't really mean, however, to defend this view of history, this Romantic notion that a wish is the same as a reality, that 'when', as Wordsworth says, 'America was free', then France would be free, and then the whole world. What I *do* want to do is explore this view a bit, observe some of the details of belief on which it is founded, and look for their source, their origin. I can warn you in advance that it will be remarkable how often that search will lead us to the door of Tom Paine, for it is Tom Paine who repeatedly shows up here, not as the greatest writer, certainly, but, on this subject of revolution and the inevitable course of history leading to 'liberty, the most *influential* writer.

In the most defiantly revolutionary of his surviving political writings, the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, written in 1793, Wordsworth goes to the heart of revolutionary discussion by observing that the very notion of monarchy is absurd and is contrary to what we know of human nature. The king himself is a victim of erroneous notions about what powers over others any man should be given or can reasonably be expected to exercise. Writes Wordsworth to Bishop Watson:

The prejudice and weakness of mankind have made it necessary to force an individual into an unnatural situation, which requires more than human talents and human virtues, and at the same time precludes him from attaining even a moderate knowledge of common life and from feeling a particular share in the interests of mankind. (Prose 1: 33)

This is exactly the sentiment expressed by Blake at the beginning of his poem entitled *The French Revolution*:

Sick, sick: the Prince on his couch, wreath'd in dim
 And appalling mist; his strong hand outstretch'd, from his
 shoulder down the bone
 Runs aching cold into the scepter too heavy for mortal grasp.
 (2-4)

But this crucial and revolutionary view of monarchical power as unnatural and ultimately corrupting had already been expressed, in much the same language, by Tom Paine in his great tract entitled *The Rights of Man*. This work, dedicated to George Washington, was published in London in 1791 as a bold statement of democratic principles and a rebuttal to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Circulated widely in England and America, it was also translated at once into French and became not only a formulation but also a formulator of the philosophy underlying the French Revolution. And this is what Paine had written there about kings and kingship:

There is something exceedingly ridiculous in the composition of Monarchy; it first excludes a man from the means of information, yet empowers him to act in cases where the highest judgement is required. The state of a king shuts him from the World, yet the business of a king requires him to know it thoroughly ... The world [monarchs] act in differs so materially from the world at large, that they have but little opportunity of knowing its true interest.

(cited in *Prose* 1: 53n)

Unlike Blake, Wordsworth never mentions Tom Paine by name. But it is clear that he had read Paine, and remembered what he read, and profited from his reading. And how could he not have done so? For Paine was read everywhere, above all by democratic thinkers. And Wordsworth consciously and very obviously quotes some of Paine's most famous remarks: 'Government is, at best, but a necessary evil' (42), writes the poet in his *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, closely echoing Paine's famous dictum: 'Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil' (cited in *Prose* 1: 60). 'Political convulsions have been said particularly to call forth concealed abilities' (49), writes Wordsworth in his *Letter*, without mentioning by name the man by whom it had been said. But he reveals his knowledge of Paine and *The Rights of Man*, where it is said in these very similar words: 'It appears to general observation, that revolutions create genius and talents; but those events do no more than bring them forward. There is existing in man, a mass of sense lying in a dormant state' (cited in *Prose* 1: 66)

But I do not mean to suggest that Wordsworth simply adopted the language and thought of Paine. It was typical of the poet to begin with an idea and then mull it over, sometimes for many years, plumbing it to the bottom. So it is with the concept of the unnaturalness of monarchy. Wordsworth must have started out with Paine's theory and statements, but he continued to ponder over it. Fifteen years after his *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, he was at work on a much larger and much more important -- because public -- discussion of these political matters. I refer, of course, to the great tract on the *Convention of Cintra*, the work which Coleridge rightly called 'the grandest politico-moral work' since Milton (*Letters* 3: 273). Wordsworth's contemplations led him to a much broader concept than that with which he started and which he had expressed in the *Letter* to the Bishop. This concept, too, was by no means original with Wordsworth, but I cannot think of anybody who has ever expressed it with more clarity, more feeling, more power. It is the realization that not just monarchical power but *all* power tends to corruption and unnaturalness.

In the *Letter* to the Bishop, he had denounced 'arbitrary distinctions' which 'exist among mankind, either from choice or usurpation', such as 'titles, ... stars, ... ribands, and garters, and other badges of fictitious superiority', but he had been particularly concerned for hereditary distinctions:

What services ... can a man render to society to compensate for the outrage done to the dignity of our nature when we bind ourselves to address him and his posterity with humiliating circumlocutions, calling him most noble, most honourable, most high, most august, serene, excellent, eminent and so forth: when it is more than probable that such unnatural flattery will but generate vices which ought to consign him to neglect and solitude, or make him the perpetual object of the finger of scorn. (1: 44)

This concern for 'the outrage done to the dignity of our nature' is typically, centrally Wordsworthian, and it is a concern which society still has not satisfactorily dealt with.

But in the *Convention of Cintra* tract the poet goes much further in his considering of the corrupting influence of power. Certainly the surrounding events of the time both oppressed and inspired him. It was inevitably dismaying to him that in 1808 and 1809, the time of the composition and publication of the tract *Concerning ... the Convention of Cintra*, once again Great Britain was to be found on the side of oppression and disregard for the concerns of a people fighting to be free. This was two decades after the fall of the Bastille, and more than three decades after Tom Paine wrote *The Crisis* on a drumhead on the banks of the Delaware River. These events had dramatically awakened thinking people in many nations. Wordsworth speaks for himself and for many others when he says in *The Prelude* :

A strong shock
Was given to old opinions; all men's minds
Had felt its power, and mine was both let loose,
Let loose and goaded. (1850 10.270-73)

And thus 'let loose and goaded', his mind arrived at a grand but paradoxical principle - that only 'an intimate association' with the great causes for which human nature strives, 'founded on the right of thorough knowledge' of human nature, can successfully direct the exercising of human power; but that being in a position of such power inevitably obstructs the obtaining of that essential knowledge of human nature. Thus, the only possible remedy is a universal and constant vigilance, a healthy distrust, a certain limiting, of those in power:

It is plain *apriori* that the minds of Statesmen and Courtiers are unfavourable to the growth of this knowledge [of human nature]. For they are in a situation exclusive and artificial; which has the further disadvantage, that it does not separate men from men by collateral partitions which leave, along with difference, a sense of equality -- that they, who are divided, are yet upon the same level; but by a degree of superiority which can scarcely fail to be accompanied with more or less of pride ... Hence, where higher knowledge is a prime requisite, they not only are unfurnished; but, being unconscious that they are so, they look down contemptuously upon those who endeavour to supply (in some degree) their want. (*Cintra* 132-33)

The real problem, as Wordsworth perceives it, lies in the unnaturalness of the exercise of power by one human being over another. The very qualities which may 'be virtues in a Man, a Citizen, or a Sage' are in fact unavailable 'to the especial culture of the Political or Military Functionary' and 'of the Civil Magistrate' (137). There is an inherent trap in the use of power, for power

corrupts, and power exercised in ignorance of human nature corrupts absolutely:

The power ... of office, whether the duties be discharged well or ill, will ensure a never-failing supply of flattery and praise: and of these -- a man (becoming at once double-dealer and dupe) may, without impeachment of his modesty, receive as much as his weakness inclines him to; under the shew that the homage is not offered up to himself, but to that portion of the public dignity which is lodged in his person. But, whatever may be the cause, the fact is certain -- that there is an unconquerable tendency in all power, save that of knowledge [of human nature] acting by and through [such] knowledge, to injure the mind of him who exercises that power; so much so, that best natures cannot escape the evil of such alliance. (137-38)

And these reasons, imbedded in this characteristically Wordsworthian alertness to both the strengths and the weaknesses of human nature, explain the disasters of history and the crises of the present. And ignorance of such principles is enough to provoke Wordsworth to high indignation. He writes in 1808 in the *Cintra* tract:

The same presumptuous irreverence of the principles of justice, and a blank insensibility to the affections of human nature, which determined the conduct of our government in those two wars *against* liberty [that is, the wars against revolutionary America in the 1770s and against revolutionary France in the 1790s], have continued to accompany its exertions in the present struggle [that is, against Napoleon's invading troops in Spain and Portugal] *for* liberty, - and have rendered them fruitless. (139)

No excuse will suffice for such behaviour, in Wordsworth's opinion. No rationalization can explain away what he calls 'such a long series of misconduct' (138):

The British government deems (no doubt) on its own part, that its intentions are good. It must not deceive itself: nor must we deceive ourselves. Intentions -- thoroughly good -- could not mingle with the unblessed actions which we have witnessed. A disinterested and pure intention is a light that guides as well as cheers, and renders desperate lapses impossible. (139)

In all these matters, though, Wordsworth displays not only a most impressive ability to derive grand political and moral systems and principles from specific events and persons, but also, at least as impressive, an ability to hold in his mind facts and details and complex pieces of knowledge arranged in coherence and understanding. He was an avid reader, and he could both incorporate and remember what he read. I have asserted that he read the writings of Tom Paine, and he kept them in his mind, considering, weighing, relishing, for decades. Paine deserved that kind of continuing attention. And it repeatedly served Wordsworth very well - for the specific piece of information that he needed to make a point, even many years later.

For example, the use by the British government of Hessian mercenaries in the American Revolution was agreed to in a treaty concluded in the fall of 1775 between the ministry of Frederick, Lord North, and several German rulers, friends and relations of King George III. Wordsworth at the time was only five years old, and he could hardly have been aware of the event, much less alert to its consequences. The hiring of these German troops to subdue the American people did produce a strong reaction in the American colonies. It is included in the list of offences by George III given in Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, written the following July, where the king is denounced for 'transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries [to America] to compleat the Works of death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with Circumstances of

Cruelty and Perfidy unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation' (cited in Lewis 94-95). But the actual consequences which derived from this hiring of the Hessian troops by British authorities, not merely the indignation it aroused, were clearly foreseen by Tom Paine at the time of his writing of *The Crisis* as he waited with George Washington on the banks of the Delaware River to cross by night and engage those mercenaries in combat. It led Americans to a determination to be independent, and in providing that strong motivation it led to the defeat of the British Army. As Paine said, 'Of all the acts of transcendent folly and wickedness perpetrated by the British Ministry, none could do more to convince the Americans of the necessity of an immediate declaration of independence than the hiring of foreign mercenaries' (1: 80).

Wordsworth read his Paine; indeed, he often seems to have the writings of Tom Paine almost by heart. And at the time of the folly of the Convention of Cintra, over thirty years later, he remembered what Paine had said. He had no great hopes, but he wanted at least to press for heightened expectations. And he wrote:

It surely ... behoves those who are in authority -- to look to the state of their own minds. There is indeed an inherent impossibility that they should be equal to the arduous duties which have devolved upon them: but it is not unreasonable to hope that something higher might be aimed at; and that the People might see, upon great occasions, - in the practice of its Rulers - a more adequate reflection of its own wisdom and virtue. (141)

But there must be no mindless folly, he insists. And the lessons of the past -- the kinds of lessons available from the writings of Tom Paine -- must not be ignored. And Wordsworth repeats, for its applications in the crisis of 1808 and 1809, the lesson taught by Paine and derived from the hiring of Hessian mercenaries to fight American revolutionaries. 'The ministers of that period', back in 1776, he says,

found it an easy task to hire a band of Hessians, and to send it across the Atlantic, that they might assist *in bringing the Americans* (according to the phrase then prevalent) *to reason*. The force, with which these troops would attack, was gross -- tangible, -- and might be calculated; but the spirit of resistance, which their presence would create, was subtle -- ethereal -- mighty -- and incalculable. Accordingly, from the moment when these foreigners landed ... - nay, from the first rumour of their destination, the success of the British was (as hath since been affirmed by judicious Americans) impossible. (140)

Such specific lessons, as Wordsworth well knew, are crucial for the practical achievement of liberty. Indeed, idealism *without* knowledge, again as Wordsworth well knew, is in the long run not only unachievable but dangerous. It too often leads the believer, the idealist, to become what the poet calls in *The Prelude* 'A bigot to a new idolatry' (12.77). The poet knew about such dangers because he had experienced them, had, indeed, gone through his own period of devotion to Godwinian abstractions during

the time, when, all things tending fast
To depravation, speculative schemes --
That promised to abstract the hopes of Man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
For ever in a purer element --
Found ready welcome. Tempting region *that*
For Zeal to enter and refresh herself. (*Prel.* 11.223-29)

The tempering influence of a writer like Tom Paine, then, was for Wordsworth, as for us, essential, for both public and personal goals. The danger in abstract idealism is its impersonality, the loss of constant awareness of the truth about human nature.

Wordsworth, like Tom Paine, lived in dangerous and often frustrating times. But both men lived also with a sense of vision, a sense that they were witnesses to a crucial early stage of the flowering of human freedom whose triumph would 'be in the end / Great, universal, irresistible' (*Prel.* 11.16-17). It is another significant link between them that both writers idolized George Washington, to whom Paine dedicated his great tract *The Rights of Man*, and of whom Wordsworth wrote in his own *Cintra* tract that he, 'the deliverer of the American Continent', was 'the honour of our own age' (56). For George Washington personified the kind of *principled*, knowledgeable action which the times and the opportunity required.

Despite, then, Wordsworth's expression of misgivings over the possibility of friends like Crabb Robinson emigrating to America, and despite his doubts over whether American scenery or American manners and society were worth a voyage across the Atlantic to see, and despite his use of the wildness of American frontier life and its wild setting as a source for the corruption of the depraved and irresponsible soldier in the story of his 'Ruth', the poet had a very warm spot in his heart for America. In *The Prelude*, he imagines himself as a child, reared as a child of nature, reared in fact in America:

as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage, in the thunder shower. (1.297-300)

And in the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* he pointed to 'the foundation of the American republic' as a turning point in the history of modern governments, the point at which, for the first time, 'the bulk' of a nation's inhabitants showed themselves capable 'of discerning their true interests' (1: 37). In truth, though the developing course of the American nation could certainly provide him with grounds for some misgivings -- such matters as the then still largely unexamined question of black slavery, or the opportunistic American siding with France in the Napoleonic Wars -- the poet was essentially a fervent admirer of the independence and republicanism of America, and often with something like the spirit of a godfather.

At mid-life, looking back over the events he had witnessed, and surely having in mind the high hopes for those years which had, decades before, been expressed by men like Tom Paine, Wordsworth indeed had his misgivings. But particularly he felt that the history of the political and military behaviour of the British government in those years was hardly reassuring, as the poet wrote:

In the course of the last thirty years we have seen two wars waged against Liberty -- the American war, and the war against the French People in the early stages of their Revolution ... The British [government] did, in all their expectations and in every movement of their efforts, manifest a common ignorance. (139)

These *were* the times, as Tom Paine had said they would be, 'that try men's souls'. Paine had predicted, and Wordsworth had lived to see the prediction fulfilled, that 'Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered.' But neither man ever utterly despaired. Neither of them ever lost either the vision of what was to be accomplished nor the vision of how to accomplish it. As Wordsworth wrote in 1808: 'Our duty is -- our aim ought to be -- to employ the true means of liberty and virtue, for the ends of liberty and virtue' (*Cintra* 139).

Tom Paine, William Wordsworth -- you should be living at *this* hour. England, America, the world, have need of you!

A lecture given at the Wordsworth Winter School, Grasmere, in February 1989.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Deirdre Coleman, *Coleridge and The Friend '1809-1810'* (Clarendon Press, 1988).

Barbara Rooke published her two-volume edition of Coleridge's *Friend* in the Bollingen *Collected Coleridge* twenty years ago, but there has been no substantial scholarly work on Coleridge's journal since then. Deirdre Coleman's study of *Coleridge and The Friend (1809-1810)* is especially welcome for filling this gap, all the more so in that she concentrates her book on the earlier version of *The Friend* whereas Rooke had based her edition on the revised version of 1818. Coleman's book is therefore, the first full-length study of the twenty-seven issues of *The Friend* published by Coleridge in 1809-1810. She pays detailed attention to the contents of the journal, and is most effective in reconstructing the philosophical and political background of Coleridge's public debut as an apologist for the Portland administration. Her analysis of the politics of *The Friend* is presented within a broader context of historical and background information, to show how the turbulence of Coleridge's personal life (especially in relation to Sara Hutchinson and the Wordsworths) underlies the conflicting aspects of his political and religious thought in the journal.

The title of Coleman's first chapter announces her overall view of *The Friend* as 'Some Unresolved Conflicts'; the first chapter itself defines her intention to untangle the 'mismanagement and failed goals', the 'muddy thinking and anxious equivocation' that ultimately disabled *The Friend*. Wordsworth and

Southey both recognised that the routine production of a journal requires a disciplined purpose which Coleridge lacked: 'he has no voluntary power of mind whatsoever', Wordsworth wrote to Tom Poole, 'nor is he capable of acting under any constraint of duty or moral obligation'. As Coleman acknowledges, this pathological inertia was exacerbated by Coleridge's opium addiction. And the success of *The Friend* was further jeopardized by Coleridge's obsessive passion for Sara Hutchinson who acted as his amanuensis until the tension caused by his feeling obliged her to leave Allan Bank in spring 1810. All of this is, perhaps, familiar enough - but this book gives the circumstances of Coleridge's emotional life a tragic immediacy in his efforts to produce copy for his journal.

Coleman argues that Coleridge's overriding purpose in *The Friend* was to reconcile politics and religion in a morally-coherent justification of the government's policy of war in Europe. After the attack on the neutral Danish fleet at Copenhagen and, more recently, the Convention of Cintra, Coleridge had picked an awkward moment to do so. And his problems were compounded by the fact that in his previous journal, *The Watchman* Coleridge had been outspoken in his criticism of the war against France. Coleman identifies a lasting tension between 'political involvement and religious withdrawal' that links

The Friend with Coleridge's years as a radical lecturer and journalist in 1795-6. To an extent this is true: political activism (lectures, speeches, journalism, campaigning) is incompatible with a life of retirement. Coleridge's writings between 1795 and 1798 show him to have been well aware of these tensions in his life as opposition spokesman and as a poet. But Coleman may perhaps underestimate the extent to which political activism and unitarian dissent were allied in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, and in Coleridge's early career particularly. When Coleridge exchanged the 'coloured Cloths' in which he preached as a unitarian and reformist on his *Watchman* tour, for an orthodox black gown, he was not acknowledging a conflict between 'outspoken politics' and 'the cover and the sanction of religion'. Religious *orthodoxy* and reformist politics might well be incompatible in 1796; but the alliance of dissent and political reform is the single explanation for Coleridge's perseverance in opposition from 1794 until 1798. Coleridge's religion was, I think, his greatest source of strength in the 'bloodless fight / Of Science, Freedom, and the Truth in Christ'.

In the case of *The Friend*, though, Coleman's account of the contradictory demands of religion and politics is extremely persuasive. Her researches into Coleridge's links with the Quakers in 1808-9, and the important presence of Quakers among subscribers to *The Friend*, are meticulous and fascinating. The Quaker Thomas Clarkson successfully published his *Portraiture of Quakerism* (1806) and *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1808) by setting-up subscription schemes in Quaker circles. Coleman shows that Coleridge's visit to Clarkson at Bury St Edmunds in July 1808 was crucial for *The Friend* the following year: Clarkson offered him a pattern for subscription publishing, and links with eminent Quakers who became subscribers to Coleridge's journal. An appendix to the book lists some 49 Quaker subscribers and a further twelve probable Quaker subscribers - as well as other known subscribers to the journal. But in 1809 Coleridge's dependence on the Quakers was to force a collision between his wish to support the British war effort and the pacifist principles of his Quaker readers. Soon after Clarkson had refused to loan Coleridge money to buy paper, the sixth issue of *The Friend* carried Coleridge's 'war-cry' against Napoleon and his insinuation that all opponents of the war were 'politically subversive'. By the twelfth issue of *The Friend*

Coleridge had 'thrown off all restraint' in an outright condemnation of the Quakers who formed a great part of his subscribers and readers:

When the fifteen millions, which form our present Population, shall have attained to the same purity of Morals and of primitive christianity, and shall be capable of being governed by the same admirable Discipline, as the Society of the Friends, I doubt not that we should be all Quakers ... But were this transfer of employment desirable, is it *practicable* at present, is it in our power? These Men *know*, that it is not. What then does all their Reasoning amount to? Nonsense.

Coleridge sustained this attack on the Quakers in subsequent issues of *The Friend* that deal with Britain's seizure of the Danish fleet in 1807 - a subject that Coleman discusses in detail towards the end of her study.

Coleridge's unhappy relationship with the Quakers in the pages of *The Friend* substantiates Coleman's initial charge of 'mismanagement' and 'anxious equivocation'. And his crude derision of Quaker principles as 'nonsense' betrays his own instability and unhappiness at this time. Beyond these immediate problems, however, *The Friend* shows Coleridge to have been working out a philosophical justification of conservatism against the abstract rights of French jacobinism - the cause of the failure of revolution in France that Coleridge traced to the influence of Rousseau. Coleman documents Coleridge's recourse to Kant, Burke and, further back, Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiasticall Politie* (1593) in establishing the foundations of his own conservative ideals. In a parallel chapter, she shows how Coleridge 'distorts' and 'misrepresents' Rousseau's *Social Contract* to further his own political argument. To do so, Coleridge exaggerates Rousseau's claim for individual rights, and ignores his accompanying insistence on 'the forces limiting and curtailing our natural freedom and independence'.

The image of Coleridge and *The Friend* that emerges from this book is not a flattering one - neither in his dealings with the Quakers nor in his efforts to justify his own position as a government apologist does he appear to advantage. And it is too easy, perhaps, to attribute these 'unresolved conflicts' entirely to Coleridge's personal circumstances. Coleman resists the temptation to do so, and - in addition to her detailed research - a great strength of the book is its honesty in treating the contradictions and waywardness of Coleridge's behaviour. And because she does not indulge Coleridge's dubious tactics - whether personal, intellectual, or political - the author of *The Friend* attains a peculiar heroism amidst a muddle of his own making.

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Patrick O'Leary, *Sir James Mackintosh: The Whig Cicero*
Aberdeen University Press, 1989, pp.ix + 226, £14.90, hardback.

Patrick O'Leary, author of the valuable study of the man who gave Lamb's talents the opportunity for their fullest flowering in *The London Magazine* in his *Regency Editor: Life of John Scott*, has now turned his attention to a man who was, for a time at least, one of Lamb's bêtes-noir; the Scottish judge, politician and man of letters Sir James Mackintosh. For most readers of the literature of Romanticism, and even for historians and researchers, Mackintosh has long been a figure on the sidelines. He blazed, brilliantly and briefly, in the full view of his contemporaries when he published his riposte to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the rapidly-written and forcefully-argued *Vindicae Gallicae* in 1791. The book had been written at Little Ealing, Middlesex (then a country retreat) where the twenty-five year old Mackintosh

and his young wife had retired to practice frugality and literary composition while waiting, like Mr. Micawber, for something to turn up. For a few years the book made Mackintosh famous and opened aristocratic doors (including that of Holland House) to him. But it did him little good financially, and a major difficulty which must be faced in studying Mackintosh's later career is the fact that it seems to consist of an infinity of fresh starts and diverse activities which never brought him financial independence and never again produced a literary or political work which has endured. A life which began beside Loch Lomond in typical eighteenth-century Scottish penury in 1765, ended in London in 1832 with the duns not far from the door. The man who had dazzled the young Hazlitt with his political lectures and held his own in intellectual London society and on the floor of the House; who had championed liberal causes and performed prodigies in improving the administration and legal practices of British India; who had become a pillar of *The Edinburgh Review* in the 1810s and '20s and was commemorated by a splendid memorial in the Whigs' Corner of Westminster Abbey, left only £863 to be divided among his five children. His uncompleted *History of England Since the Revolution of 1688* was published posthumously: his notes were passed to another, but greater, historian-unfinisher, Macaulay. Years of political activity had done Mackintosh little real service. As in the case of Sheridan, the Whigs would not trust the brilliant outsider with high office.

Patrick O'Leary's achievement in his new biography has been twofold. He shows how a disadvantaged youth rose to fame and entered brilliant company through sheer intelligence. For unlike Sheridan, Mackintosh did hold several important positions in the public service, where he achieved much which is worthy of note. But like Sheridan he was to find that brilliance could be a two-edged weapon. Like Sheridan he spent much of his career distrusted by friends and enemies alike. Charles Lamb was by no means alone when he flew at Mackintosh's reputation in the pages of *The Albion*:

Though thou'rt like Judas, an apostate black,
 In the resemblance one thing thou dost lack:
 When he had gotten his ill-purchased pelf,
 He went away, and wisely hanged himself.
 This thou may'st do at last; yet much I doubt,
 If thou hast any bowels to gush out!

Sheridan, too was reviled, but Sheridan's posthumous reputation is based securely on a clutch of supremely actable plays and a mass of brilliant recorded conversation. Mackintosh left a political tract which is inevitably bound up with the circumstances of the age in which it was written. His talk was evidently dazzling at times, but virtually none of it survives.

Yet from these difficulties Mr. O'Leary's twofold success derives. He has felt the interestingness of so much that Mackintosh did: of the causes he was involved with, the legal and political battles of the age, the company he worked in and the importance his participation held for the reformists. But he does not make extravagant claims for the personality of the man himself, whose celebrity in his own lifetime has not left enough vividly-written records (either from his own pen or those of his friends) to enable us to recreate the fascination of the man's personality, as can be done for Sheridan, or Coleridge, or Charles Lamb, or many others in the early nineteenth century. One feels that there was a certain dryness about Mackintosh; the Scottish outsider, like Boswell, who longed to be an insider but (despite his intelligence) inevitably lacked that Irish charm and cleverness which did good service for Sheridan and Tom Moore. And one also feels the impossible situation which most of the outsiders were in at that period in their relationships with the old aristocratic order. Friendship was possible, but not, ultimately, trust.

So, in the end, Sir James Jackintosh's story leaves a sense of frustration behind it. He did much, but not enough, finally, to move him from the sidelines to the centre stage of history. But Patrick O'Leary holds our interest in his story from start to finish. He tells us much that we had not known before, and connects his subject with several of the great social and political causes (and, in several cases, triumphs) of the early nineteenth century. He leaves us wishing, ultimately, that a man with evident shortcomings but also a great deal to commend him could have had a more successful later career, and as the shades closed in on him, a consciousness of having lived an easier and a happier life.

Bill Ruddick

'Alone, against the wind'.

Michael Foot, *The Politics of Paradise. A Vindication of Byron*.
(Collins, London, 1988) £17.50, hardback.

The real cause of these distresses and consequent disturbances lies deeper. When we are told that these men are leagued together not only for the destruction of their own comfort, but of their very means of subsistence, can we forget that it is the bitter policy, the destructive warfare of the last eighteen years, which has destroyed their comfort, your comfort, all men's comfort?

Byron's maiden speech in the House of Lords on the Frame-work Bill (27 February 1812) recalls the passionate condemnation of war that, eighteen years previously had fired Coleridge's political lectures at Bristol, and Wordsworth's poetry of protest in *Salisbury Plain*. It was of course the same European war that united Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Byron in opposition, specifically in their recognition that war was the 'deep cause' of misery at home. For Coleridge and Wordsworth this was apparent in the bread riots of 1795, for Byron a comparable distress was evident in the Luddites' campaign of frame-breaking around Nottingham in 1811-12. By 1812, though, Coleridge had disowned the humane politics of his youth in private letters and in the columns of *The Friend*. And in 1813 Wordsworth would become a civil servant as Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland, consolidating the links with the status quo that would be affirmed in his 1814 dedication of *The Excursion* to Lord Lonsdale. In the light of these changes, or erosions, it is hard to gainsay Michael Foot's claim that Byron is the 'true poet of the Revolution': 'in his own age and thereafter', Foot says, 'the combination of word and deed which [Byron] fashioned made his faith more potent than that of any of his great contemporaries'.

Michael Foot's *The Politics of Paradise* is the true measure of Byron's achievement as the 'poet of action' in England, Italy, Greece - indeed, as a liberating inspiration, all over Europe. He is 'the poet who cannot watch the fearful human scene without incitement to protest or revenge or perpetual Promethean counter-assault'. At the heart of Michael Foot's book is the tantalising near-miss by which William Hazlitt and Byron failed to meet. And Foot is very clear about how momentous such a meeting might have been. 'They looked out on the same revolutionary world', Foot says, 'shared many of the same intellectual excitements, devoured the same authors; they were indeed both bookworms'. But, he goes on, 'there was between them, at first sight or first reading, an imperfect sympathy which could turn to something truly fierce'. It is Hazlitt's sublime mockery of Byron in *The Spirit of the Age* - interrupted, as Hazlitt wrote to his 'derisive climax', by news of Byron's death - that initiates Foot's eloquent history of Byron's imaginative and spiritual quest 'in the cause of freedom', as a chastened Hazlitt puts it, 'for the last, best hopes of man'.

The book is structured as a biography, and it touches upon all of the major events, friendships, loves, quarrels, and writings during Byron's career. It demonstrates with especial clarity the consistency of Byron's opposition to 'the patent-age of new inventions / For killing', and his abiding contempt for 'the men of iron' - the warmongers and profiteers in the armaments industry of the day. His 'raging spirit' is continuous from the maiden speech in the Lords, to *Don Juan* - 'the greatest anti-war epic in our language', to the prophetic nightmare of nuclear war in *Darkness*:

The world was void,
The populous and powerful was a lump,
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless,
A lump of death - a chaos of hard clay.

More than any other poem, *Darkness* is a vision of the modern apocalypse - whether brought-about by nuclear warfare or exploitation of the environment by the 'iron men' of our own day.

Equally consistent, too, is the 'true Byronic refusal' to accept the defeat of the French Revolution. Like Coleridge and Wordsworth in 1795, Byron rejected the idea that 'the misdeeds of the Revolution should condemn the Revolution itself' - in other words, Burke's history of the Revolution:

Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopp'd by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts, - and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.

These lines, from Canto Four of *Childe Harold*, are the authentic voice of the British welcome for the French Revolution ever since 1789. And Foot shows how Byron mediated the spirit of 1789 to the great socialists of the nineteenth-century, to the Chartists, to Thomas Cooper, to George Julian Harney. As Engels wrote in 1845:

It is the workers who are most familiar with the poetry of Shelley and Byron. Shelley's prophetic genius has caught their imagination, while Byron attracts their sympathy by his sensuous fire and by the virulence of his satire against the existing social order. The middle classes, on the other hand, have on their shelves only ruthlessly expurgated 'family' editions of these writers. These editions have been prepared to suit the hypocritical moral standards of the bourgeoisie.

At the bicentenary of Byron's birth and the bicentenary of the French Revolution, those 'hypocritical standards' of Victorian England are once again entrenched in power - and epitomised, fittingly, by Margaret Thatcher's travesty of French and English history in Paris during July 1989. 'Mrs. Grundy rules, still, over British society'. More than anything else, Michael Foot shows how compelling, how necessary Byron's spirit is for our own times.

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SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES FROM MEMBERS

Mrs. Connie Hale

The October Bulletin contained an Obituary of this good friend of the Society. The Society has now received from her daughter, Mrs. Silver, the generous gift of a number of books and memorabilia formerly owned by Mrs. Hale or her father, Mr. S. M. Rich.

The books include works by Reginald Hine (*The History of Hitchin Vol 11; Hitchin Worthies*); Charles Lamb and his Hertfordshire; *Confessions of an Uncommon Attorney*; Frank Hallam's play "A convivial evening at Charles Lamb's"; E.V. Lucas "The best of Lamb"; an autographed copy of Edmund Blunden's "Sixty-Five" - Hong Kong 1961.

Pictures include an original drawing of Christ's Hospital, Horsham and a reproduction of a drawing of the London Christ's Hospital building. The Society is most grateful for these gifts.

CELEBRATION LUNCHEON - 10th February 1989

All members should have received with their October Bulletin an application form for tickets (price £15 each) for our annual luncheon .. indeed a number of members have already made sure of their places. If you have not already done so, please send your application as soon as possible to the General Secretary, 1a Royston Road, Richmond, TW10 6LT.

Bookish Matters. A kind note from Professor John I. Ades, whose volume of what he describes as 'sketches' formed the subject of a paragraph in the July *Bulletin* (p.107) provides the actual title of the book, which I do not think was included in the original source of my information: it is *The Pizza Plot and a Few Other Slices from Life*, published by Fithian Press in Santa Barbara, California, PO Box 1525, Santa Barbara, CA 93102, U.S.A. Professor Ades sent the information 'in case some stray Elian might like a copy'. It seems highly likely that Elians, whether stray, stay-at-home or of the Returned-Prodigal variety will do so.

While books are our subject, I am pleased to report that Claude A Prance (a member of the Charles Lamb Society since 1935, he informs me) has sent his *Essays of a Book Collector* (Locust Hill Press: same publisher as his study of E.V. Lucas, reviewed by Mary Wedd in July). The Editor is wolfing Mr. Prance's fascinating chapters down at this very moment and a review will speedily be published.

A useful-sounding projected volume is indicated by a letter received a short while since from Professor Laura Dabundo, Department of English, Kennesaw State College, PO Box 444, Marietta, Georgia 30061, U.S.A. Professor Dabundo writes as follows:

Romanticism: An Encyclopedia. Contributors are sought for Garland Press's forthcoming one-volume study of the culture, lives and times of English Romanticism. Original essays from five to twenty pages in length that treat topics drawn from all aspects of the period will be assigned according to scholarly interest, expertise, and enthusiasm. Topics will be commissioned probably spring of 1990 and due at the end of the summer.

Professor Dabundo invites scholars who would wish to be involved in the projected volume to contact her at the address given above.

Coleridge Summer Conference, 1990. The Friends of Coleridge in Somerset will hold their second summer conference at Cannington College, four miles from Nether Stowey, where Coleridge lived from 1797-98, and where Charles Lamb visited him, from July 21st to 25th, 1990. A stimulating programme of lectures has already been arranged, and proposals for conference papers are now invited. There will be a day tour to Coleridge's birthplace, Attery St. Mary, in Devon, guided by Lord William Coleridge.

Conference proposals and registrations, or further information requests, to Mr. Graham Davidson, 87 Richmond Road, Montpellier, Bristol, BS6 5EP, U.K. (Tel: 0272 426366).

The following 'small ad.' was spotted in a London paper in October 1989 by a member of the Society:

'De Beauvoir'

Balmy Plesance

Close site fashionable Victorian asylum (Mary Lamb inmate) End terrace house, 2 beds, 2 receipts. (Double aspect drawing room could provide 2 more beds), kitchen/breakfast, 60' wooded garden. Freehold £195,000.

Quite how much Mary Lamb's sad associations with Hoxton may have been hoped to add to the value of the house is unknown to us. But it is a real commentary on the changed value of money since the early nineteenth century to recall that when Mary Lamb resided at Hoxton her brother Charles's salary at the India House was rising by increments of £10 a year from a starting point of £40 in 1795. In 1827 the Lambs rented No. 87 Chase Side, Enfield, for £35 a year, plus rates.

Boiled Eggs and Eau de Vie - D. E. Wickham.

In Cremona in August I wanted a glass of tonic water. Not knowing the word, I began a complicated explanation in Italian of how the drink I desired had the brand-name Schweppes in English and the brand-name Gini in French. The waitress served me a glass of gin.

The following day in Novara I ordered a glass of tonic water and the waitress served me a glass of tonic water. (And the reason I staggered on standing up, me lud, was that the space where I was standing was uneven and confined.)

For the Record - a correction - D. E. Wickham.

CLS Bulletin, New Series No. 67, July 1989, page 108: I think we can read the careful editorial amendment 'from the Authorp/sic/) as my error for 'from the Author'). Other users of Amstrad word processors without spell-checkers will understand and sympathise. Elians will remember Charles Lamb's equivalent error, given the technology of his day - to dip his pen-nib in the wrong ink-well.