The Charles Lamb Society was founded on 1 February 1935 at a meeting at Essex Hall in The Strand. Its first President was Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Today, the Society aims to advance the study of the life, works, and times of Charles and Mary Lamb and their circle; to preserve for the public a collection of Eliana (currently held at Guildhall Library, London); and to stimulate the Elian spirit of friendliness and humour.

The Society holds a series of events each year in London, including lectures, study days, and a Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon. The Society also publishes the biannual peer-review journal, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin.* For further information please contact the Chairman, Nick Powell (nrdpowell@gmail.com).

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The Charles Lamb Bulletin

Autumn 2014

New Series No. 160

'Let us cultivate the Elian spirit of friendliness and humour'

PUBLISHED BY
THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY

MARY LAMB, 'ON NEEDLE-WORK': A BICENTENARY CELEBRATION
LAMB SOCIETY DAY CONFERENCE
Swedenborg Hall, 20-21 Bloomsbury Way, London, WC1A 2TH
Saturday 29 November 2014

10-10.30 Coffee, followed by Elian Reading and Welcome by Chair

10.30-11.30 **'ON NEEDLE-WORK': CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

'A necessary part of a woman's duty'? : Learning to Sew in the Long Eighteenth Century
Dr. Bridget Long (University of Hertfordshire)
'Brought Up to the Needle: The Culture of Schoolgirl Samplers'
Rosanne Elizabeth Waine (Bath Spa University)

11.45-12.45 **'ON NEEDLE-WORK': CREATIVE CONTEXTS**

'Women's work: the cases of Mary Delany, Mary Lamb, and Emily Dickinson'
Felicity Roberts (King's College, London)
'The Fishmonger, the Mantua Maker and the Madness of Mary Lamb
The Hon. Dr. Jocelynne Annette Scutt (University of Buckingham)

1-2.30 Lunch at local restaurant at participants' own expense

2.30-3.30 **THE LAMBS AT WORK AND PLAY**

'"Positive Leisure": Time and Play in the Writings of Mary Lamb'
Prof. Jane Aaron (University of South Wales)
'"Another needle, / This works untowardly": Charles Lamb and Women's Work'
Dr. Samantha Matthews (University of Bristol)

3.30-4 Tea

4-5 **READING AND EDITING MARY LAMB**

"One likes to have one copy of every thing one does": Charles Lamb's copy of 'On Needle-Work'
Dr. Tom Lockwood (University of Birmingham)
'Pattern and the Romantic Imagination'
Dr. Jane Moore (Cardiff University)

Everyone is very welcome to this event; there will be a charge of £5 for the full day.
Please register with Felicity James, fj21@le.ac.uk Tel: 07812478727

The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

New Series, No. 160, Autumn 2014

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'Oxford in the Vacation'

Margareta Eurenius Rydbeck

Editor's Note: Some readers will remember Margareta's essays on Christ's Hospital, printed in the Bulletin for July and October 2002. It is with great pleasure that we are able to print more of her work on the essays of Elia in this and forthcoming issues.

Margareta's interest in Lamb was kindled by a selective translation of the Elian essays (*Essayer av Charles Lamb i översättning och med inledning av Sigfrid Lindström,* 1952). Her interest in the Lambs can be traced back to 1953, when she received a copy of the *Essays of Elia* as a birthday present from her father. At that time she was studying Classics and took an M.A. in Latin, Greek, Ancient History and Classical Archaeology. She then taught Latin and Greek at different grammar schools in the south of Sweden. In the late 1960s she added English to her M.A. by writing an essay on the allusive technique of Dorothy L. Sayers in *Busman's Honeymoon*. In 1975 she was awarded a scholarship for writing a doctoral thesis in English Literature. Her old interest in Lamb presented itself as a natural choice of subject. Her teacher at Lund University, Professor Claes Schaar, accepted willingly Lamb's essays as subject for her thesis. The title of her thesis had also been chosen, with an appropriate quotation from Lamb: '*"Books Think For Me"*. Lines of Argument and Allusive Technique in Charles Lamb´s *Essays of Elia'*. Changed circumstances and, eventually, illness prevented Margareta from presenting her work to the Faculty of Arts at Lund University. Enough remains, though, of her work to interest friends of Lamb's essays.

Ill health prevents her for continuing with her research, though her husband, Lars Rydbeck, a Greek philologist at the University of Lund in Sweden, has been working to prepare the texts of Margareta's work. He has received invaluable assistance from two friends who must be acknowledged here: Dr Lis Christensen, Copenhagen, who reads and corrects every text carefully; and Therese Karlsson, BA, who digitalizes Margareta´s pre-computer manuscript version. In this, and in future issues, of the Bulletin we are delighted to be able to print Margareta's work on a number of the essays of Elia.

'I was not trained in Academic Bowers'

This essay, published in the *London Magazine* in October 1820, but dated 5 August the same year, was probably written after a visit that Lamb paid to Cambridge in the summer of 1820. Thus the title is misleading in more than one respect, for not only did Lamb have Cambridge and not Oxford in mind, the place where he had seen the 'Lycidas' MS, which, with its many *variae lectiones* shook his faith in the absolute inspiration of great authors,[1] and where George Dyer, the friend who is portrayed in the essay, belonged; even more important is the fact that the essay is autobiographical, touching upon two of Lamb's tenderest spots: his glorious days at Christ's Hospital and his frustrated dreams of a university career. Finally, a feigned visit to the Bodleian library is merged with the portrait of George Dyer, the Amicus Redivivus of the 1823 essay.

Lamb's veneration for 'antiquity' with its 'wondrous charm' in general, and old books in particular, is mirrored in the vocabulary, seemingly influenced by the old authors. There is an abundance of would-be allusions, vague elusive echoes; and there are also about twenty 'certain' allusions, ranging from quotations, set off by quotation marks, italics, and the like, to allusions hidden in the text. Still more tantalizing are those words and passages which are distinguished by quotation marks but which have failed identification. There are several old-fashioned words, such as 'agnize', 'arraign', and 'arride'. The influence of one of Lamb's favourite authors, Sir Thomas Browne, is shown in his use of the Baroque *stile coupé*, the seventeenth century's harbinger of the stream-of-consciousness. Here I will not restrict myself to the allusions proper, but I shall consider also hidden allusions, whether they be literary or not.

The essay begins with an apostrophe to the 'Reader', who is compared to a connoisseur of art, accustomed to looking for the name of the artist. Lamb refers to the fact that the name of the engraver is to be found in the corner of a print, followed by the Latin *sculpsit*. He turns a supposed question "Who engraved /this print/?" into a question in Latin, *quis sculpsit*,[2] thus subtly defining his readers as educated people, interested in art and able to understand and use Latin.

The next paragraph contains a phrase which looks like an allusion: '[...] a votary of the desk – a notched and cropped scrivener – one that sucks his sustenance [...] out of a quill.'[3] 'A votary of the desk' is, however, Lamb's own phrase, which has, in its turn, become a well-known quotation, recorded in ODQ. Another happy wording with the same allusive ring is 'the enfranchised quill', which has become a household word in Lamb literature. 'A votary of the desk' sounds nobler than 'a clerk'; it suggests devotion, dedication to some occupation without mercenary interest. Having found this embellishing synonym, Lamb is prepared to admit that he belongs to the 'self-same college'; and it is interesting to observe that he (or his sub-conscious mind) chooses the word 'college' with its academic connotations. Rather defiantly, Lamb 'confesses' that he *is* a clerk, but he uses words reminiscent of Shylock's snappy retort to the Duke in the trial scene:

---

[1] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb,* ed. EV Lucas, 6 vols (Methuen, 1903), II, 10.
[2] Lucas, *Works,* II, 7.
[3] Lucas, *Works,* II, 7.

> You'll ask me why I rather choose to have
> A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
> Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that
> But say it is my humour – is it answer'd? (IV, I, 39-42)

Though the Shakespearian echo may seem rather faint here – only the words 'it is my humour' connect the texts to the eye – I find the parallel striking. In both cases we have men who seem to prefer something of less value when they could have done much better. And the spirit of defiance must be taken into consideration as a connecting link.

Three instances of a curious use of asterisks appear in the next paragraph.

> In the first place ******* and then it sends you home with such increased appetite to your books ***** not to say that your outside sheets [...] do receive into them [...] the impression of sonnets, epigrams, *essays*. [---]
> It/ the enfranchised quill/ feels its promotion. **** [...] So you see [...] the literary dignity of *Elia* is very little [...] compromised in the condescension.

Lamb uses asterisks in 'New Year's Eve' (first printed in *The London Magazine* in January 1821) when characterizing Elia, but there the stars serve as substitutes for single words that are not too difficult to supply.[4] In other essays asterisks are used instead of suppressed names (instead of an initial and a dash). There is, however, one essay published, and presumably written, at the same time as the present Elia essay, where Lamb twice uses asterisks in the same manner: an essay on Thomas More that appeared in the *Indicator* in December 1820. This device, so sparingly used by Lamb, one would usually connect with Sterne's technique in *Tristram Shandy*. Considering Lamb's well-known admiration for Yorick's creator, one is entitled to regard this use of asterisks as an imitation of Sterne that comes close to an allusion and contributes to the humorous effect in a delicate situation: the 'man of letters' has to gloss over the fact that he is, after all, bound to trivial work for several hours six days a week. Not until he returns home is his literary ability properly 'enfranchised'.[5]

Aware of having exaggerated the excellence of his employment conditions, Lamb admits that one might easily find that his life as a clerk at the India House has some drawbacks. But he expresses it in a rather cryptic way. 'Not that [...] I would be blind to certain flaws, which a cunning carper might be able to pick in this Joseph's vest.'[6]

The allusion is fairly easy to recognise; Lucas gives the reference to *Genesis* xxxvii. The biblical text has another word for Joseph's garment, 'coat', but as 'vest', according to OED, is 'a loose outer garment worn by men in Eastern countries or in ancient times', one cannot doubt the correctness of Lucas' identification. But while it is easy to understand that a fault-finder might 'pick holes in a garment' *or* in

[4] Probably taboo-words: drunkard, wine/liquor and the like. Lucas, *Works*, II, 28.
[5] Though we know that much of the company's time was used for Lamb's private literary purposes.
[6] Lucas, *Works*, II, 8.

Lamb's life at the India House, it is more difficult to see why Lamb chose this particular expression.

> *cf. Genesis* xxxvii: 3 ff.
> Now Israel/ Jacob/ loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him. [...] And Israel said unto Joseph [...] Go, I pray thee, see whether it will be well with thy brethren, and with the flocks; and bring me word again. [...] And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat of many colours, that was on him; And they took him and cast him into a pit [...] And his brethren [...] sold Joseph to the Ishmealites [...] and they brought Joseph into Egypt. [...] And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father [...].

Usually, it is possible to follow Lamb's train of thought with some certainty; not so in this case. Only a conjecture offers itself, but Lamb's love of the precise word is a guarantee that he was aiming at *something*. Perhaps it is another way of saying: 'There is really no need for envy in this case. The first Joseph's vest made his brothers envy him, and was the cause of his temporary ruin. The coat *I* have draped myself in is not all that excellent or flawless.'

When exemplifying the less pleasant aspects of office life, Lamb resorts to an elaborate combination of punning and allusions: 'And here I must leave to [...] regret the abolition and doing-away-with altogether, of [...] the *red-letter-days*, now become, to all intents and purposes, *dead-letter-days*.' Through Trollope's *History of Christ's Hospital*, quoted in Lucas' commentary, we know that thirty-two religious holidays were kept at Christ's, except 'the birthday of the King and Queen, and the Prince and Princess of Wales: and the King's accession and coronation.'[7] The holidays were indicated in the calendar by a red letter; hence 'red-letter-days'. And when Lamb's employment at the Indian House began, the number was quite liberal. A change had taken place in 1820, and it is pretty clear what Lamb is thinking of the new order of things, though, for obvious reasons, he could not say so straight out.

'Dead-letter-days' is the result of Lamb's punning on the juridical meaning of *dead letter*, the original meaning of which is to be found in the New Testament. *Dead letter* means (OED 1b) 'a writ [...] which is or has become practically without force or imperative'. 'But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.' (*Rom.* vii, 6) And 'Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' (2 *Cor.* iii:6) The former red-letter-days had changed, earlier in the year, into ordinary working days, when Lamb had to work, among other things, with letters, perhaps even 'dead letters'.

[7] Lucas, *Works*, II, 317.

'Red-letter-days' form a link to Christ's Hospital, where they played an important part in his life, and he remembers again the long list of saints commemorated at his old school. The same saints had with 'consolatory interstices, and sprinklings of freedom, through the four seasons' also brightened his early days at the India House.

> There was Paul, and Stephen, and Barnabas –
>
> Andrew and John, men famous in old times –
>
> -we were used to keep all their days holy, as long back as I was at school at Christ's.[8]

The saints enumerated, with the exception of Stephen,[9] are all to be found in Trollope's list, which also confirms Lamb's grudging comment on the 'clubbing together' of St. Jude and St. Simon on one day (Lucas, *Works*, 8, lines 27-31); they were both honoured on 28 October. The line that is separated by dashes from the context (line 20) is, as Lucas suggests, an adaption of a line in *Paradise Regained*, II, 7: 'Meanwhile the new-baptiz'd, who yet remain'd / At *Jordan* with the Baptist [...]" (11.1-2). "I mean *Andrew* and *Simon*, famous after known / With others though in Holy Writ not nam'd" (11.6-8). "Began to doubt, and doubted many days,"' (1, 11). 'John' has replaced 'Simon', and 'famous after known' has become 'men famous in old times', which is, if anything, a *lectio facilior*, but Milton's rhythm and metre remain. The well-read Lamb quoted from memory, and often inaccurately.

Lamb's memory is now turned back towards Christ's Hospital, but at the same time the good old days serve to remind him of his present changed conditions. Past and present are insolubly intertwined. Even the word 'clerk' is ambiguous, and its juxtaposition to 'scholar' points directly to Lamb's life-long trauma: as his impediment of speech made it impossible for him to become a clergyman, he was not allowed to go to the university; instead he became a clerk. Both 'clerk' and 'clergyman' derive from *clericus*, which in the Middle Ages was almost synonymous with 'scholar', *scholaris*, as practically only the future clergy studied at the universities; they also worked for kings and noblemen as notaries and secretaries. Once Lamb had been a scholar, at Christ's, he had had hopes of becoming a clergyman, now he is a clerk: 'These were bright visitations in a scholar's and a clerk's life – far off their coming shone.' (Lucas, *Works*, 8, lines 32-33) This is, as Lucas shows, another Miltonian allusion, to *Paradise Lost* VI, 767-768: 'Attended with ten thousand Saints / He onward came, far off his coming shone.' Again, Lamb has adapted the original to suit the new context. While Milton's 'he' is no less a person than Messiah, sent by God to conquer Satan and his angels, Lamb changes 'his' to 'their', referring to the holidays. Perhaps the 'Saints' of line 767, lurking in his memory, contributed to this grammatical change, as the holidays were 'saint's-days', too. Very pious people might find the implied comparison between Messiah and a school-boy's or a clerk's, holidays irreverent. But this was a risk that Lamb fairly often took, gaining a humorous effect through the blending of high and low.

[8] Lucas, *Works*, II, 8.

[9] The omission of the saint from the list is probably due to the fact that his day came within the Christmas holidays, fifteen in all.

Lamb admits that he has come a long way from his former state of initiated scholar. And it is interesting to note that he chooses a word whose etymological meaning is '(standing) outside the temple':[10] "Now I am little better than one of the profane." (Lucas, *Works*, 8, lines 36-37) Lucas draws attention to the possible parallel in Falstaff's outburst in front of Prince Hal: 'Now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked.' When one considers this sentence in a somewhat wider context, the attribution seems very probable: '*Falstaff*: O thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal – God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked.' There is, indeed, much that speaks in favour of Lucas' assumption. In both texts we have a man who has 'fallen' from a higher position to a lower one. There is an almost verbatim correspondence, and the only word in Lamb that differs, 'profane', has, according to OED, also the meaning 'characterized by disregard or contempt of sacred things [...] irreverent, [...] wicked'. And finally, there is the word 'saint', which seems to connect Shakespeare with Lamb here, though it appears outside the line which Lamb alludes to. When Lamb now strikes a more humble note, it is as if he has realized that he has over-stepped the mark with the criticism implied in the allusions, and he disclaims the right to question the good judgement of his employers, or 'to arraign the wisdom of [his] civil superiors' The 'wisdom of my superiors' sounds like an allusion, but as far as I can judge, it is only a cliché or matrix, where the words 'my superiors' can be changed to 'a learned man' (Ecclesiastes), 'the just' (St. Luke), 'the ancients' (Bacon), or 'a great minister' (Junius). One could say that Lamb alludes to the traditional way of expressing reverence for authority.

Stating that he is 'plain Elia' and no great ecclesiastical writer – 'no Selden, nor Archbishop Usher', Lamb takes the step over to Oxford and brings the reader with him into 'the heart of learning, under the shadow of the mighty Bodley' (Lucas, *Works*, 9, lines 1-2). In the next paragraph he exposes his day-dreams about life as a student in a university town, without sentimentality or false humility. He is both serious and jesting. In the following paragraph he takes on the character of a visitor touring the different colleges, a visit that makes his imagination jump back through the centuries and meet Chaucer's; an ordinary college cook assumes the form of a manciple, 'the chief of a college commissariat', as noted by Lucas (*Works*, II, 311), who also notes that both a cook and a manciple were among Chaucer's pilgrims.

This imaginary tour through colleges and ages leads up to the rightly famous apostrophe to antiquity, which constitutes a kind of climax in the essay. The address is built up as a paradox: what is antiquity to us was yesterday's 'today, modern and therefore uninteresting, when compared with its own antiquity':[11] 'When thou *wert*, thou wert not antiquity – then thou wert nothing, but hadst a remoter *antiquity* [...] to look back to with blind veneration; thou thyself being to thyself flat, jejune, *modern*!' (Lucas, *Works*, II, 9, lines 32-36) Then follows an allusion to Sir Thomas Browne, as Lamb mentions in a note printed both in the *London*

[10] The Latin adjective *profanus* is composed of *pro*, 'in front of, outside', and *fanum*, 'temple'.

[11] In the same way as one walks on a floor that is also the ceiling of the room underneath.

Magazine and in the 1823 *Elia*: 'What mystery lurks in the retroversion? or what half Januses are we, that cannot look forward with the same idolatry with which we for ever revert!' The note reads: 'Januses of one face. – Sir Thomas Browne.' (lines 36-38)

> *cf. Christian Morals*, III, Section 22.
> In seventy or eighty years a Man may have a deep Gust of the World, Know what it is, what it can afford and what 'tis to have been a Man.[---] He is like to be the best judge of Time who hath lived to see about the sixtieth part thereof. Persons of short times may Know what 'tis to live, but not the life of Man, who having little behind them, are but Januses of one Face, and know not singularities enough to raise Axioms of this world: but such a compass of Years will show new examples of old Things, Parallelisms of occurrences through the whole course of Time and nothing be monstrous unto him, who may in that time understand not only the varieties of Men, but the varieties of himself, and how many Men he hath been in that extent of time.

I have quoted Browne at some length here, because I think the passage alluded to is essential to our understanding of how Lamb might use his allusive technique. He writes 'half Januses' and gives the reference 'Januses of one face' and the source. But he does not explain what a Janus is, any more than Browne did. He presumes, probably rightly, that his readers will know that the Roman god Janus was represented with two faces, one looking to the past and one to the future – as the same door opens to two rooms (*cf* Latin *ianua*, door). Now Lamb applies Browne's words in a way that gives them a meaning different from what they had in their context. Browne says that persons who are still young and have 'little behind them' are 'Januses of one face': they cannot draw solid conclusions from their meagre experience about what to expect from the future. But with Lamb the expression takes on a different meaning, signifying people who are too reverent in their attitude to the past and, therefore, do not value the future enough. Here, in a way, Lamb seems to be polemicizing against himself and his own 'idolatry' of antiquity, with its 'wondrous charm'. To sum up: Browne says that a man without vast experience, at least sixty years old, is a 'Janus of one face'. Lamb applies this to men who, looking to the past, undervalue the present and the future. Implicitly he also criticizes his own 'blind veneration' for the past, but with words which, in their original context, were used about persons who lacked enough knowledge of past times through the mere fact that they were young. Browne's 'Januses of one face' knew too little of the past, Elia's 'half Januses' idolized it too much. It is rather remarkable that, in the following paragraph, he turns again to antiquity and, addressing it, plays on the literal meaning of 'dark', as used in 'dark ages'; and he objects to the implicit insinuation that our precursors fumbled in the dark: did not the sun rise for them, too? Even if he criticizes its idolaters, he obviously does not want to sneer at antiquity itself.

For Lamb, antiquity was to a large extent synonymous with old books, as 'repositories of mouldering learning'. He now takes the short step into the Bodley of 'old Oxenford', not as a student, but rather as a visitor or antiquarian, admiring the books as objects of venerable age, too sacred for him 'to handle, to profane'. When he talks of the 'Bodleians', it is not quite clear whether he is thinking of the

books or the human inmates of the Bodleians; the OED gives no guidance at this point; it does not record the plural of the word. 'It seems as though all the souls of all the writers that have bequeathed their labours to these Bodleians, were reposing here as in some dormitory, or middle state.' (Lucas, *Works*, II, 10, lines 6-9) 'Dormitory' is used in the now obsolete, adjectival meaning 'tending to or causing sleep; drowsy'. 'Middle state' seems to refer to the conception of sleep as a mediatory stage between life and death. It might even turn out to be another reference to Browne. And many people have testified to the 'dormitory' effect of a library, old or now. The whole passage balances on a thin edge between bathos and the ludicrous, but Lamb is saved from being too serious through the humorous reference to the Garden of Eden: 'I seem to inhale learning, walking amid their foliage; and the odour of their old moth-scented coverings is fragrant as the first bloom of those sciential apples which grew amid the happy orchard.' (lines 10-13) It is an elaborate conceit, starting with 'foliage' and operating through 'odour', '-scented', 'fragrant', 'apples', and 'orchard'. Nothing could be further away from each other than a fragrant garden and a dusty library, but to Lamb they are on a par. Both 'sciential' and 'happy orchard' are reminiscent of Milton, though there is no complete identity of words.

> So saying, from the Tree her step she [Eve] turnd
> But first low reverence don, as to the power
> That dwelt within, whose presence had infus'd
> Into the plant sciential sap, deriv'd
> From Nectar, drink of Gods. (*Paradise Lost*, IX:834-838)

> On Earth he first beheld
> Our two first Parents, yet the onely two
> Of mankind, in the happie Garden plac't,
> Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love, (*Paradise Lost*, 111:64-67)

> I who e're while the happy Garden sung,
> By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
> Recover'd Paradise to all mankind (*Paradise Regained*, I:1-3)

Sciential means, according to OED, 'pertaining to knowledge or science'. While the 'sciential sap' in the Miltonian context stood for knowledge in general (though forbidden), it takes on the different meaning of 'pertaining to science' in Lamb. As *orchard* is but a more specific word for garden, stressing the fact that fruit is grown there, it is obvious that 'happy orchard' is synonymous with the Garden of Eden.

Old books and MSS come within the same compass, and Lamb admits that his reverence for the souls of all the writers now resting in their winding-sheets is extended to the original written copies and even surpassed by his anxiety not to disturb their repose: 'Those *variae lectiones*, so tempting to the more erudite palates, do but disturb and unsettle my faith.' (lines 15-16) The expression *variae lectiones* alludes to the philological scholar's attempts at establishing the best version of a classical text, and leads naturally over to Porson, the Regius Professor of Greek in

Cambridge (1758-1808), whose fame rests, among other things, on his emendation of texts.[12]

One may speculate on the reasons for Lamb's pretended aversion to MSS, as we know from extant Elian manuscripts that he was a scrupulous craftsman, who revised his sentences and exchanged words to gain exactness of word and improve his style.[13] In the *London Magazine*, Lamb appended a note[14] explaining his dislike for MSS: he had, in Cambridge, seen the MS of Milton's 'Lycidas', and been shaken in his belief in the author's inspiration. He 'had thought of 'Lycidas' as a full-grown beauty – as springing up with all its parts absolute', like an Athena. Instead he had seen 'fine things in their ore, interlined, corrected, as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable [...] as if inspirations were made up of parts [...]'. The curious thing is that most of the Elia drafts that have been saved from destruction look just that way: 'interlined', 'corrected'. It is not unusual to find Lamb's attitude that inspection destroys illusion echoed by Lamb scholars.

The cryptic words 'I am no Herculanean raker' (lines 16-17) call for explanation. Lucas explains them as 'no disturber of the ashes under which Herculaneum, at the foot of Vesuvius, was buried', but I think one could and should go further. A *raker* is 'one who rakes' (OED), i.e. a person who works with, or figuratively, is a rake. But why *Herculanean*? It is pertinent to call attention to the fact that English scholars had been prominent instruments for the publication of the papyri (entire scrolls or fragments) found in the famous library of Villa Suburbana in Herculaneum. The first collection of these papyri was published between 1762 and 1808, and the work was still in progress when the Oxford essay was written. A circumstantial piece of evidence that 'Herculanean raker' is to be interpreted *in bonam partem* is the fact that Wordsworth's poem 'September, 1819' (published 1820) contains some lines in homage of the English scholars busy with further studies of 'Herculanean lore', which implied the unrolling of the papyrus scrolls.

> O ye, who patiently explore
> The wreck of Herculanean lore,[15]
> What rapture! could ye seize
> Some Theban fragment, or unroll
> One precious, tender-hearted scroll
> Of pure Simonides.
>
> That were, indeed, a gentle birth
> Of poetry; a bursting forth
> Of genius from the dust:
> What Horace gloried to behold,
> What Maro loved, shall we enfold?

[12] Another indirect "proof" that Lamb is talking about Cambridge, not Oxford. Porson was still of current interest at the time when this essay was written, as his literary remains were published posthumously over a long period (until 1843). Two volumes appeared in 1820.
[13] Barnett, 128f.
[14] Lucas omitted the note from the text, as it was not reprinted in the 1823 *Elia*, but he included it in his commentary (*Lucas* II, 311). Lamb's Swedish translator, Sigfrid Lindstrom, inserted it in the text after "the elder repose of MSS".
[15] This is, by the way, the first instance of the word recorded in OED.

> Can haughty time be just? ('September, 1819', vv. 49-60)

Looked at in this light, the words take on a meaning other than that which Lucas' interpretation gives them. It is not so much a question of not disturbing the peaceful ashes of a buried city as not being one of those who 'unroll / One precious, tender-hearted scroll'. It is, in fact, another way for Lamb of putting 'I am no philologist', thus forging a link to those who are - a Porson, a Dyer. A certain, though oblique reference to Porson follows directly: 'The credit of the three witnesses might have slept unimpeached for me.' (lines 17-18) *Cf.* 1 *John* v, 7: 'For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.' Lucas (*Works*, II, 312) gives the background: it had already been argued that v, 7 was an interpolation; Archdeacon Travis had said it was genuine, but Porson proved it was not. As a result the revised version omits it. But such niceties were of no interest to Lamb.

With Porson are linked the initials G. D., which stand for George Dyer, an unworldly and eccentric man dedicated to the sort of life Lamb might have wished to lead: among books in a University town.[16] Older than Lamb by twenty years, he had been his friend for a long time. He, too, was educated at Christ's Hospital, but unlike Lamb, he was a Grecian and afterwards entered a college in Cambridge. Though not a philologist like Porson, he spent much time in the copying of Greek authors. His outer appearance was that of a shabby book, in need of a new binding: 'He stood as passive as one [a book] by the side of one of the shelves. I longed to new-coat him in Russia, and assign him his place. He might have mustered for a tall scapula'. (lines 22-24) When Lamb says that he 'longed to new-coat' his friend 'in Russia', he is ambiguous, as Russia is elliptic both for Russia leather, which is the more common sense, and Russia linen; in the latter sense it is recorded in 1798. Thus the humorous characterization of Dyer as a book that needs a new binding covers the delicate statement that his shabby looking friend ought to have a new linen coat and be assigned 'his place', perhaps another word for a situation at the University worthy of his qualifications. Such a statement could not have been made in direct words; but those who were initiated would recognize the implied double meaning without taking offence; those who were not in the know would pass it over. The comparison to 'a tall Scapula' which, as Lucas points out, is the name of 'a tall copy of Johann Scapula's Greek Lexicon', serves both ways: it lends further force to the image of Dyer as a book but it also says that Dyer equals Scapula in erudition.

The rest of the essay deals with Dyer, who is described as 'commuting' between Clifford's Inn and 'the seats of learning', the University. Clifford's Inn is characterized as a true 'asp's nest', where Dyer sits nevertheless, 'in calm and sinless peace': 'Clifford's Inn [...] where, like a dove on the asp's nest, he has taken up his abode, among an incongruous assembly of attorneys, [...] vermin of the law, among whom he sits, "in calm and sinless peace"'.[17] (lines 27-31) Lucas supplies the reference to *Paradise Regained* iv, 425, where Milton says about Christ that he sat

[16] He appears here and there in the essays, and "Amicus Redivivus" of 1823 is entirely devoted to that fatal day when Dyer was almost drowned in the river Cam.
[17] The quotation marks are Lamb's own.

'unappall'd in calm and sinless peace', but I prefer to quote a few lines more from the context.

Paradise Regained, IV: 401 ff.
Our Saviour meek and with untroubl' mind (401)
After his aerie jaunt, though hurried sore,
Hungry and cold betook him to his rest, [...]
The Tempter watch'd, and soon with ugly dreams (v. 408)
Disturb'd his sleep; and either Tropic now
'Gan thunder, and both ends of Heav'n, the Clouds
From many a horrid rift abortive pour'd
Fierce rain with lightning mixt. (v. 412)
[...] ill wast thou shrouded then (v. 419)
O patient Son of God, yet only stoodst
Unshaken; nor yet staid the terror there,
Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies, round
Environ'd thee, some howl'd, some yell'd, some shriek'd,
Some bent at thee thir fiery darts, while thou
Sat'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace. (v. 425)

There are more parallels than the verbatim quotation seems to indicate. Our Saviour is surrounded by 'Infernal Ghosts and Hellish Furies', while Dyer lives 'amid an incongruous assembly of attorneys' and the like (10: 19). 'Some bent at [the Saviour] thir fiery darts' (l. 424); Dyer remains unharmed by 'the fang of law' (10: 31); and though 'the winds of litigation blow over his humble chambers' (10: 32), he remains as 'unshaken' (*Paradise Regained*, IV, 421) as the Son of God while 'the winds [...] rush'd abroad' (*ib.* 413-414). All this shows that Lamb does not use a loose line, chosen at random to embellish his prose or as a substitute for an original formulation. There is an inherent logic here, a parallel in the two situations that fully justifies the borrowing – if any justification is called for. Dyer's unworldly innocence is so apparent that no-one thinks of offering violence or injustice to him – you would as soon 'strike an abstract idea'. (lines 34-35)

Though the words are within quotation marks, they may not be a quotation, at least not from a printed source. Lucas admits that he has failed to trace an original context for them, but launches the theory that it is a reference to an intermezzo involving the essayist Hazlitt. On some occasion, Lamb's brother John had knocked Hazlitt down; he did not hit back, however, saying he was 'a metaphysician, who dealt not in blows but in ideas'.[18] Lucas gives no reference for this story in his commentary; it is merely hinted at both in the *Life* (p. 451) and in a commentary to a letter from Lamb to Wordsworth in 1826, where he quotes a passage from Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, saying that Coleridge 'was not displeased to hear of his [Hazlitt's] being knocked down by John Lamb lately'.[19]

When the essay was published in the *London Magazine* another note was inserted after the words 'injustice to him'. Lucas includes the note in his commentary; though the note expressly states that it was 'not by Elia', Lucas

[18] For once Lucas' suggestion seems to be vague; but if it could be corroborated, it would be another "avis au lecteur" of Lamb's.
[19] *Letters* II, 198.

maintains that it 'almost certainly was.' Such little mystifications belonged, by the way, to the genre. In the note some 'unknown' person contradicts Elia and relates a 'silly joke' that 'L' had played at G. D.'s expense, about the identity of 'the author of Waverley'. This note was not reprinted in the 1823 Elia.

The following paragraph deals with Dyer's drudgery and the little recompense he had for his labours when serving the two Universities with historical research. Talking of the governing bodies, Lamb involves himself in a lot of flippant puns which somewhat blunt the edge of his criticism: 'Your caputs, and heads of colleges, care less than any body else about these questions. - Contented to suck the milky fountains of their Alma Maters, without inquiring into the venerable gentlewoman's years, they rather hold such curiosities to be impertinent – unreverend.' (p. 10, line 43 - p. 11, line 2) He doubles the expression 'heads of colleges' by using the Latin equivalent *caputs*, meaning 'the former ruling body or council of the University of Cambridge' (OED). Separating 'any' and 'body' further emphasizes the physical impression of a body. The college bodies are content to take what profit they can from the universities and they pay little attention to Dyer's investigation into their old history: they 'suck' what they can from their gentle mother, their Alma Mater, without caring about her age – as long as the old woman pays up. Again an allusive pun serves a euphemistic end.

Elia now proceeds to his actual encounter with Dyer in Oxford/Cambridge. In order to illustrate his friend's absentmindedness he relates an anecdote about Dyer who once called twice at the same household, that of a Mr. M(ontague), though he was told, on his first visit, that the family were not to return until a week later. 'Some two or three hours after his walking destinies[20] returned him into the same neighbourhood again, and again the quiet image of [...] Mrs. M. presiding at it like a Queen Lar [...] striking irresistibly on his fancy, he makes another call [...].' (p. 11, lines 18-22) Lucas identifies Mrs M. as the wife of Basil Montague; the 'Queen Lar' is, Lucas says, Lamb's deduction from *Lares*, who were the household gods of the Romans. The Lares personified the hearth of the home, which makes Dyer's expectations to find the lady of the house at the fireside all the more apt: '[...] again the book is brought, and in the line, just above that in which he is about to print his second name (his rescript) – his first name (scarce dry) looks out upon him like another Sosia, or as if a man should suddenly encounter his own duplicate!' (p. 11, lines 25-28) The allusion to Sosia is a double literary allusion. Sosia appears in the Roman Plautus' comedy of errors, *Amphitruo*, and Shakespeare borrowed from here for his *Comedy of Errors*. As Lucas says in the commentary, two Sosias, one real and one false, caused the misunderstandings.

Dyer is confronted with his signature, when he is about to write its 'duplicate' in the visitor's book, and Dyer starts at his Doppeltgänger as the true Sosia did on seeing the false one.

A third time Lamb reminds his readers and himself that he is an 'outsider' when he apologetically uses the word 'profanely' in a parenthetic comment to the punning allusion to St. Paul's second letter to the Christians in Corinth, where the apostle talks about human mortality: in death man is absent from his body: but

[20] 'Walking destinies' has an allusive ring, but I have not been able to find any possible source for the expression.

Lamb makes it have a bearing on Dyer's absentmindedness: 'For with G. D. – to be absent from the body, is sometimes (not to speak it profanely) to be present with the Lord.' (p. 11, lines 31-32) *Cf* . 2 *Cor.* V: 6-8: 'Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.' When Dyer is absent from his body, he is, so to speak dead to the world: he notices nothing and nobody around him. But his mind dwells 'with the Lord', in spiritual surroundings, religious, or literary, or philosophical, or utopian-political.

> [...] he passes on with no recognition – or being stopped, starts like a thing surprised – at that moment, reader, is he on Mount Tabor – or Parnassus or co-sphered with Plato – or, with Harrington, framing "immortal commonwealths" – devising some plan of amelioration to thy country, or to thy species [...] (p. 11, lines 33-38)

There is a veritable cluster of allusions in these few lines. First, there is what Lucas calls 'an interesting example of Lamb's gift of fused quotation'; he points to the two lines that are merged, one from Wordsworth's 'Ode on Intimations of Mortality' ('Tremble like a guilty thing surprised'), and one from *Hamlet* ('Started like a guilty thing'). Both the original lines contain the word "guilty", which Lamb drops. It would not have fitted in here with the pious and "innocent" Dyer.

> *cf.* Wordsworth's "Ode", line 140 ff.
> Not for these I raise
> The song of thanks and praise;
> But for those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realized
> High instincts before which our mortal Nature
> Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised: [...]
>
> *Hamlet*, I, i.147
> Ber. It was about to speak, when the cock crew.
> Hor. And then it started like a guilty thing.

It is true, as Lucas says, that we have here an example of fused quotation. It is also an example of Lamb's happy gift or instinct for finding the apt quotations. He then transmits them to a new context on another level. In the 'Ode', 'our mortal Nature' trembles; in *Hamlet* the King's spirit suddenly disappears. In both texts the tone is solemn and serious, but Dyer is more comical than tragical. The juxtaposition of high and low results in mildly absurd humour.

Next comes a stream of names, all with distinct connotations to spheres that lay within Dyer's interests. Mount Tabor, from early Christian days regarded as the mountain where Christ was transfigured, is a symbol of Dyer's piety. Parnassus signifies his literary interests; he was a poet, though a bad one, and his poems did not sell. To be 'co-sphered with Plato' could mean two things. Either it could mean to study Plato's dialogues, and so to speak, breathe the same air as the old

philosopher. But it could also have a bearing on Plato's political writings on a model society, *The Republic*. This was a subject that busied Dyer's thoughts, too, and he was the author of social-political pamphlets and in that respect co-sphering him. Harrington, now, was a Utopian; and 'immortal commonwealths' alludes to a reply to his *Oceana*, describing another model state. *Holy Commonwealth* is the title of this reply, written by Baxter, but Lamb makes it stand for all kinds of Utopian writing. Together the names combine to give a full picture of Dyer's interests as a Christian, a poet and a concerned citizen. But to get at all this information the reader must be able to recognize the allusions and interpret them.

In the *London Magazine* a long passage followed this paragraph. It gave a very vivid picture of Dyer's life, not shunning the darker aspects of it. It resulted in a protest from a reader, which in its turn led to a reply from Lamb: his only intention had been 'to make more familiar to the public, a character, which, for integrity and single heartedness, he has long been accustomed to rank among the best patterns of his species.' The ultimate result of this interchange was that Lamb omitted the passage from the 1823 *Elia*. Lucas gives the text both of the original passage and of Lamb's reply in his commentary (*Lucas, Works*, II, 314-315)

The essay ends with a eulogy. Dyer, we are told, prefers Oxford to Bath, and no river is better than the Cam and the Isis. The Cam and the Isis are to him 'better than all the waters of Damascus'. (p. 11, lines 44-45) This is a reference to a story, told in the Book of Kings, about a man who preferred the river of Damascus to 'all the waters of Israel'.

> So Naaman came [...] and stood at the door [...] of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth and said, [...] Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. (Naaman was a leper.) (2 *Kings*, v: 9-12)

To Dyer, nothing could surpass the rivers that flowed through the university towns. Thus it is a most apt way of expressing this preference, when Lamb says that he prefers them to the river which Naaman preferred to Jordan.

As is fitting, Dyer himself is praised in the very last lines with words borrowed from *Pilgrim's Progress*: he is both one of the good Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains (which correspond to his own Muses' Hill) and the Interpreter in the House Beautiful: 'On the Muses' Hill he is happy, and good, as one of the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains; and when he goes about with you to show you the halls and colleges, you think you have with you the Interpreter at the House Beautiful.' (p. 11, last line – p. 12, line 4) In *Pilgrim's Progress* the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains have been given the charge of looking after strangers that come there, and they fulfil this commission 'lovingly':

> *cf. Pilgrim's Progress*, First Part, ed. Wharey-Sharrock. The Pilgrims [...] asked, Whose delectable Mountains are these? and whose be the sheep that feed upon them? [...] Shepherd. The Lord of

> these Mountain hath given us a charge, Not to be forgetful to entertain strangers: Therefore the good of the place is before you. (p. 119)
> But [...] the Shepherds [...] looked very lovingly upon them; and said, Welcome to the delectable Mountains. The Shepherds [...] I say, whose names were, Knowledge, Experience, Watchful and Sincere, took them by the hand and [...] made them partake of that which was ready at present. They said moreover, We would that you should stay here a while, to acquaint with us, and yet more to solace your selves with the good of these Delectable Mountains. (p. 120)

Pilgrim's Progress was so well known that everybody would remember the general atmosphere even if they did not recall the passages verbatim. Lamb knew that it would be quite enough to give these prompts to trigger off many pleasant associations that would accrue around Dyer. The same goes for the Interpreter and the House (or Palace) Beautiful.

Having analysed an essay in such detail one realizes how misleading the word 'causerie' is when applied to an Elia essay. Usually, one connects this word with something loose, haphazard. Instead one finds detail upon detail testifying to meticulous workmanship; unless one is going to give 'genius' the whole credit, of course. Without any distinct break the essay changes from nostalgic yearning to the portrait of Dyer. And the allusions are certainly not chosen at random, nor is the vocabulary. For example, Lamb's veneration for old and dusty books is mirrored in language seemingly borrowed from his dear old authors. Lamb defines his audience through the cultural degree he expects from them. He knows, or at least presumes, that they are conversant with the Bible, Milton, and Bunyan. For Browne he gives the source, but on the other hand he does not explain 'Janus'. But not only do the readers seem to determine the nature of the allusions: the subject of the essay is a very important factor. Very often the allusion is euphemistic. In other cases, the absurdity implied in the clash between high and low contributes to an overall humorous tone. Sometimes the effect aimed at (gained, at least) seems to be double-entendre.

It has been argued that too close inspection will destroy and dispel the charm of Elia. On the contrary, as I hope to have shown, it contributes a new dimension and adds to our appreciation of the endearing way Lamb has of speaking to us.

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Charles Lamb and Thomas Griffiths Wainewright

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Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794-1847) was perhaps the most notorious of all Charles Lamb's associates. This article will look at the relationship on both a personal and professional level. On a personal level Lamb's view of Wainewright and the latter's view of Lamb will be examined. The two men's views of each other as writers will be explored, particularly the influence of Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens* on Wainewright's 1821 edition of Marlow and Chapman's *Hero and Leander*. Both men's contributions to the *London Magazine* will be considered. Finally the question of Wainewright's sanity will be explored, through his own words and other writer's comments. The style and content of his articles in the *London Magazine,* written under the aliases of 'Janus Weathercock' and 'Cornelius Van Vinkbooms' also shed light on the question of Wainewright's mental state.

Firstly, who was Thomas Griffiths Wainewright? He lost both his parents at a tender age and was reared by his maternal grandfather until his death in 1803. After this death, the boy was taken responsibility for by his maternal uncle. Wainewright came from a literate and cultured background and a property-owning family. As a young man he moved in both literary and artistic circles. He tried a literary career, then an artistic one and, finally, was briefly in the army. He showed an inability to settle to any occupation. For a short period he became a contributor to the *London Magazine* where he moved in the company of some of the greatest writers of the time, including Charles Lamb. Later Wainewright became a high profile convict: he was sentenced to Van Diemen's Island for life after having been convicted of forgery. It is also possible that he was a multiple poisoner, especially within his own family. But during his friendship with Lamb all this notoriety was in the future.

Jonathan Curling opines that Lamb and Wainewright probably met before they were both contributing to the *London Magazine*. Curling suggests that the magazine's first editor, John Scott, who was a mutual friend of the two men, introduced them.[1] What was the relationship between Lamb and Wainewright based on? In 'A Preface by a Friend of the Late Elia' (probably written by Lamb himself) it is stated that his alias 'never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people'.[2] Robert Lynd has offered a plausible explanation of the unlikely friendship between Lamb and Wainewright in *The Elian Miscellany*:

> It is a strange fact that in recent years Lamb, like Stevenson, has been impatiently spoken of as a 'plaster saint', since in his lifetime he was occasionally condemned as a man with a special weakness for consorting with the worthless, and Wainewright the poisoner was only one of the dubious persons who were numbered among his friends. The truth is, of course, that Lamb's humanity was almost as wide as

[1] Jonathan Curling, *Janus Weathercock The Life of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright 1797-1847* (London, 1938), 186.
[2] EV Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London, 1903) II, 152.

> Shakespeare's own. The Quaker and the murderer, the clergyman and atheist, were all drawn into his circle (Quoted in Curling, 185).

What did Lamb make of Wainewright the writer? He was evidently impressed by Wainewright's criticisms of literature and art in the *London Magazine*. In 'A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis', Lamb added an 'N.B': 'I am glad to see JANUS veering about the old quarter. I feared he had been rust-bound'. Lamb also wrote that: 'C [oleridge?] being asked why he did not like Gold's 'London' (another periodical) as well as ours - it was in poor S(cott)'s time - replied - Because there is no WEATHERCOCK. And that's the reason why.' These two lines were a misquote from Wordsworth's 'Anecdotes for Fathers; or, Falsehood Corrected', and refer to Wainewright's pseudonym (Janus Weathercock) (*Works*, II, 388). It is perhaps an irony that Lamb did not live to see Wainewright's falseness detected and punished.

At that earlier time, however, Lamb shared the regret for Wainewright's absence from the pages of the *London Magazine*. In two letters to Bernard Barton, Lamb expressed his own sense of loss at Janus's non-appearance in the magazine. On 3 May 1823 he wrote: 'I cannot but think the *London* drags heavily. I miss Janus [...] Procter too is affronted (as Janus has been) with their abominable curtailment of his things - some meddling Editor or other - or phantom of one - for neither he nor Janus know their busy friend.'[3] In a later letter to Bernard Barton of 2 September 1823, Lamb paid tribute to Wainewright as both a writer and a personal friend: 'The London I fear falls off - I linger among its creaking rafters, like the last rat. It will topple down, if they don't get some Buttresses. They have pulled down three, W Hazlitt, Procter and their best stay, kind, light-hearted Wainewright - their Janus.' (*Works*, II, 618) That Lamb appreciated the friendship of Wainewright is also apparent in a letter that Lamb wrote to Robert Southey in 1823: 'You have put me upon counting my riches. Really, Sir, I did not know I was so wealthy in the article of friendships. There is [...] and W. the light, and warm--as-light hearted, Janus of the London.'[4]

Long after Wainewright had been dismissed as a contributor to the *London Magazine*, Lamb maintained his contact with this friend. During 1829 he dined with Wainewright and his extended family. Two years later, in 1831, he advanced Wainewright's name as a possible contributor to Edward Moxon's new periodical *The Englishman's Magazine:* 'Could you get hold of Procter [...] or of Janus Weathercock? Both of their *prose* is capital' (*Works*, VII, 878).

Finally, the enduring nature of Lamb's relationship with Wainewright is revealed by his desire to contribute to the pleasures of Janus's family. William Carew Hazlitt, in his introduction to Wainewright's *Essays and Criticism*, tells us that Janus's surviving sister-in-law, Madeleine Abercromby, had 'an apparently unpublished copy of verses by Charles Lamb, who must have seen her repeatedly in her

[3] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. EV Lucas, (London, 1912) VII, 613.
[4] *Works*, ed., Lucas, I, 229

unmarried days at the Wainewrights.'[5] As W. C. Hazlitt tells his readers, the verses were dated the 7 September 1830.

So much for Lamb's view of Wainewright's character, abilities and achievements. Janus Weathercock reciprocated Lamb's warm admiration. The next part of this essay will trace Wainewright's comments on Lamb both as the author of *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* and as a contributor to the *London Magazine* under the alias of 'Elia'. As an introductory comment it is relevant that Wainewright also highly valued Lamb's poetry. In his contribution to the *London Magazine* of October 1821 (under another pseudonym, Cornelius Van Vinkbooms), Wainewright quoted from Lamb's poem the line: 'all, all are gone, the old familiar faces' (*E&C*, 190) Jonathan Curling also reveals that in a letter of condolence of May 1830 to his cousin, Wainewright made another allusion to Lamb's poem, when he wrote: 'But we get older ourselves; and every season will steal away the old familiar faces, till comes our own wintry night.' (Curling, 229)

It seems likely that Lamb and Wainewright were drawn together on another subject for which they had a mutual interest and shared passion: that is, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and poetry. In 1821 Wainewright contributed an anonymous introduction to Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman's *Hero and Leander*. It was part of a series edited by SW Singer called the *Select Early English Classics*. As Curling remarks: 'There is much internal evidence alone to prove Weathercock's responsibility for the preface' (138). A couple of examples of 'internal evidence' immediately strike the reader who has any familiarity with Wainewright's work. The first is the dedication of the poem to Wainewright's artist idol, Henry Fuseli, who he called 'the greatest genius born since the glorious day of Michel-Agnolo'. References to Fuseli are scattered throughout his articles for the *London Magazine*, as are also those to Wainewright's favourite romantic novelist Baron de la Motte Fouque and two of his novels, *Undine* and *Sintram and His Companions*.

Wainewright shows a great familiarity with and intimate knowledge of many of the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights who Lamb presents in his *Dramatic Specimen*.[6] Wainewright wrote critically of past masterpieces in literature and was careful to distinguish between them and second-rate books in his edition of *Hero and Leander*. Of the series he was contributing to, Wainewright wrote:

> [...] the object of the Select Poets is to supply true adorers with copious draughts unadulterated, from the well-head of the Sacred Waters [...] - but this selection is planned with a ruthless regard to intrinsic value, and the editor's opinion that age, when not dignified by worth, is most unreverend and despised.[7]

Lamb's appreciation of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatist and poets dated from his early manhood. There is a possible misquote from *Hero and Leander* in *Rosamund Gray* (*Works*, I, 6 and note on page 390). In an endnote to *Rosamund Gray*,

[5] William Carew Hazlitt *Essays and Criticism* (London 1880), lxxxi. All future references to this text will be found in the body of the article, abbreviated to *E&C*.
[6] *Works*, ed., Lucas, IV, xii.
[7] Christopher Marlow and George Chapman, *Hero and Leander A Poem* (London, 1821), xii. All future references to this text will be in the body of the article, abbreviated to *H&L*

E.V. Lucas also writes that 'Canon Ainger has pointed out that the name Matravis is probably Lamb's recollection of Matrevis, one of the assassins in Marlowe's *Edward II*' (*Works*, I, 392). Lamb was proud of his pioneering work in bringing these neglected writers to the attention of his contemporaries, as he revealed in 'An Autobiographical Sketch', (which was written by Lamb in the third person): 'He also was the first to draw the Public attention to the old English Dramatists in a work called *Specimens of English Dramatic Writers who lived about the time of Shakespeare*'. (*Works*, I, 321).

It is arguable that in Wainewright's edition of *Hero and Leander*, his preface not only acknowledged the work of Lamb, but actually constituted the continuation of a debate between the two men on the Elizabethan and Stuart dramatists. For Wainewright does not simply casually allude to the *Dramatic Specimens*, but makes extensive quotes from it. It is as though - and possibly this was the situation - Wainewright had a copy of Lamb's work before him as he wrote his own preface to *Hero and Leander*. Wainewright quotes from some of the same passages which Lamb introduced in his *Dramatic Specimens*. For example, both men quoted the same two lines from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus:* 'Cut was the branch that might have grown full straight/And burned was Apollo's laurel bough' (preface, xxv; *DS*, 34). Both writers also quote a line from the beautiful pastoral song of Marlowe: 'Come live with me, and be my love' (preface xxvi; *DS*, 14).

Wainewright pays tribute to Lamb's championing of Marlowe whose 'plays came under the judgment of Charles Lamb, in his pithy, and deeply-weighed characters of the Elizabethan Dramatists' (preface, xxvii). Wainewright also supported other views of the dramatists who were contemporary with Shakespeare put forward by Lamb. Examples abound and only a few can be drawn attention to here. Wainewright endorsed Lamb's comments when he wrote: 'It is truly stated by Mr Lamb, that the genius of Chapman is epic, rather than purely dramatic' (Preface lxi-lxii; *DS*, 83). Wainewright repeatedly returns to Lamb's scholarship, as a further, longer, quotation will show. Characteristic of Wainewright's writing style is the inclusion of slight misquotes from other writers. This feature is noticeable in Wainewright's quotes from Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens*: 'There is in all the Elizabethans writers a wonderful exuberance and display of mental riches: they give full measure, heaped, and running over. – 'They mingle every thing' says that choice critic Lamb, 'run line into line, embarrass sentences and metaphors. The judgment is perfectly overwhelmed with the confluence of images'. (Preface, lv) The actual passage from Lamb is as follows: 'Shakespeare mingles every thing, he runs line into line, embarrasses sentences and metaphors; before one idea has burst its shell, another is hatched and clamorous for disclosure.' (*DS*, 341) However, whilst supporting many of Lamb's judgments of the Elizabethan and Stuart dramatists, Wainewright, as if he were determined to maintain his independence, also takes issue with Lamb on several points raised in *Dramatic Specimens*. Wainewright's divergences from Lamb's opinions are confined to the plays of Marlowe, the co-author of the poem he is introducing. Presumably Wainewright had paid particular attention to Marlowe and felt especially confident in this area. Thus Wainewright claimed that 'Mr Lamb is rather hard on the fame of Marlow, and indeed shows less attention to his merits, than to those of any other author included in his specimens'. (Preface, xxviii). The poorness of *Tamburlaine* compared with *Edward II*, as perceived

by Lamb, ought, according to Wainewright to have aroused suspicion about its authenticity: 'Did not this discrepancy suggest to Mr Lamb some doubts as to the identity of the author?' (xxviii) Ironically a play called *Lust's Dominion* is attributed to Marlowe by both Lamb and Wainewright, but has been dismissed as coming from Marlowe's pen by subsequent scholars. Further, it is as if Lamb did perhaps suspect its authenticity, for he dismissed it in four lines. Despite this, Wainewright argues that in *Lust's Dominions* 'There is a good deal of the same intense passion as in Faustus, the same recklessness of purpose, and the same smouldering fire within'. (Preface, xxix) Nevertheless, all writers on Lamb and Wainewright admit that the latter revealed a deep and genuine knowledge of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Wainewright himself made very humble claims for his scholarship, concluding his Preface to *Hero and Leander* with this self-assessment: 'This Preface has waited above a month, in expectation that the real Editor of the *Select Poets* (SW Singer) would have made some apology to his accustomed readers for appointing a journeyman to that work, which would have been most becomingly performed by himself [...] (Wainewright's mistakes) are the inevitable errors of an unpractised hand.' (Preface, lxiv-lxv)

In fact, Wainewright's self-image seemed to fluctuate bewilderingly between a sense of inferiority and a tendency to exaggerated boasting. The latter is shown by Wainewright's boast in *The London Magazine*, when that periodical was considering re-engaging him as one of its contributors. The prose is rather tortuous, using double negatives: 'Elia, the whimsical, the pregnant, 'the abundant joke-giving Elia' and our Mr Drama (William Hazlitt), the real, old, *original* Mr Drama [...] spoke flatteringly of Janus - shall I breathe it? - as of one not absolutely inefficient, not the worst of Periodical Scribblers.' (*E&C*, 308) A footnote to Janus's last regular contribution suggests that the name 'Janus' plays on the Irish pronunciation of 'genius'. Lamb and other contributors had evidently boosted Wainewright's self-confidence, but every now and again a distinct feeling of inferiority broke through. This feeling is expressed by Janus in his last regular contribution to the *London Magazine* in the January 1823 issue, where he addressed the proprietor of the periodical: 'Many of your readers, as I *know*, have been, and *are* surprised at the presumption which tendered, - at the weakness (that was the word) which admitted the tawdry articles signed JW and CVV [Wainewright's two pseudonyms Janus Weathercock and Cornelius Van Vinkbooms].' (*E&C*, 304) Bertram Dobell convincingly suggests that Wainewright perceived his own limitations as a writer and so used pseudonyms, as if embarrassed by his own endeavours: 'He had, in fact, a keen appreciation of literary excellence as displayed in the works of the old poets and in his great contemporaries, and he could not help perceiving how inferior his own writings were in comparison with theirs'.[8]

Wainewright's perception of Lamb, his personality and writing skills were enlarged on in his last regular article in the *London Magazine*, in the issue for January 1823. Its title was 'Janus Weatherbound; or the Weathercock Steadfast for Lack of Oil'. In this article Janus takes leaves of the proprietor of the periodical and his fellow contributors. He pays his farewell to Lamb amongst others with affection and

[8] Bertram Dobell, *Sidelights on Charles Lamb* (London and New York, 1903), 253.

appreciation. His word portrait of Lamb is a mini-masterpiece and one of Wainewright's greatest achievements. As Dobell points out:

> It should be remembered that Wainewright was the first who attempted the task of sketching Elia from the life, so whatever merit his work possesses is entirely his own. He seized upon all the essential traits in his subject; so that he left little to be done by those who came after him but to fill in the details, and supply the minor lights and shadows. He did in fact, all (or nearly all) that could be done at that time, when it was not yet possible to tell the whole truth about Lamb and his sister. [...] That Wainewright (strange as it seems) had a real and sincere admiration and even affection for his friend can hardly be doubted; and it was this that enabled him, with such apparently careless and rapid strokes, to set him so vividly before the mind's-eye of the reader (Dobell ibid, 43).

It is, however, rather strange that Wainewright should have pretended to be writing the obituary of Lamb after his apparent sudden death, when he was actually still very much alive! Dobell again comments pertinently that the deception of the periodical's readership, then and now, is of interest in its 'illustration of the odd and fantastic humour which formed so large a part in the character of Lamb: and in the proof which it affords of the intimacy which then existed between him and Wainewright.' (Dobell, *Sidelights*, 49). Indeed Wainewright's portrait in words is so full of insight into the complexity of Lamb's character that it is tempting to quote all the relevant passages in full! Alas, this is beyond the scope of this essay, so a few judiciously chosen quotations from it must suffice. Wainewright suggests that Lamb:

> hadst the gaiety of a boy, with the knowledge of a man; as gentle a heart as ever sent tears to the eyes. Marry! the black bile would sometimes slip over his tongue's tip; then would he spit it out, and look more sweetly for the riddance. How wittily would he mistake your meaning, and put it in a conceit most seasonably out of season! His talk without affectation was compressed, like his beloved Elizabethans, even into obscurity; like grains of fine gold, his sentences would beat out into whole sheets (*E&C*, 321).

Strikingly, Wainewright recognised the vein of depression and melancholy that were a part of Lamb's personality. It is of interest in Wainewright's account of Lamb that the latter's characteristics belonged to both the individual Lamb and to his literary alias Elia. Wainewright would have been in a good position to perceive this similarity for he too used aliases in his writings for the *London Magazine*, which both were and were not the same as the person he was in actual life.

Elia's essays for the *London Magazine* have deservingly won enduring fame. Wainewright's contributions to the same periodical are not so well known and tend to be lost in his later notoriety as a forger and possibly a poisoner in addition. The next section of this essay will look at Wainewright as a contributor to the *London Magazine* and seek to account for the fall into obscurity of almost all his writing in it. Wainewright's style of writing and some of his ideas will be examined.

In addition to writing about past and contemporary literature, Wainewright also briefly practised as an artist and wrote about the Fine Arts on the strength of this dalliance with this career. Several critics, including WC Hazlitt, have made the point that Lamb and other distinguished contributors to the *London Magazine* were professional writers, while Wainewright remained an amateur. Perhaps as a consequence, Wainewright had more difficulty dealing with the editor and proprietors of the periodical than his professional colleagues. In his farewell article, Janus gave an account of how he came to write for the *London Magazine*, under the sheltering wing of its first editor, John Scott. Wainewright had suffered some sort of mental breakdown (which will be considered later) and Scott helped him to convalesce by asking him to write for the *London Magazine* on art. In his second article in the periodical, Janus described the nature of his understanding with John Scott as to what sort of material he would produce: 'Janus, as you may remember, Mister Editor, before agreeing to become a Contributor, made a bargain with you that he should be allowed to be as profound or as flighty, as serious or as comical, or as personal or impersonal, or as general or as particular as he pleased.' (*E&C*, 23-24)

In the November 1822 issue of the *London Magazine*, Janus again referred to his understanding with the editor and the latter's tolerance of his unpredictability and flightiness:

> No sooner is my pen filled with ink, but my conceit (I have not the vanity to affect a fancy, much less an imagination) goes round like a whirligig, and then shoots away in the very direction it should *not*. Our dear Editor is quite accustomed to this chance-medley *method* (that's a superlatively wrong word! I wish you'd blot it, and insert a fitter) and dreams not of investigating nicely my intentions, or rather my *probabilities*, but blandly enquires 'if there will be *anything* for the *next*?' What this present may produce, it is quite impossible to say (*E&C*, 283).

Despite Wainewright's claims about the easy-going nature of the editor, it is a fact that from the very beginning of his contributions to the *London Magazine* his submissions were being amended and that the editor was far from being willing to simply publish whatever Wainewright offered. Janus himself admitted: '[...] I put so much gaiety and spirit into my *First Contribution* that S (Scott) was obliged to sheer away every alternate sentence (that at least was the agreeable turn he gave to the cursed excision). However, out *some* of it came, I was amazed – that's weak - I was astonished - astounded – confounded.' (*E&C*, 306-307) Janus proceeds to quote from Lamb's tragic drama *John Woodvil* to express his feelings, as if he were a hero of a tragedy. He concludes: 'Why should I, *anonymous*, flinch?' (*E&C*, 307, my emphasis) Wainewright believed that once Scott's benevolent purpose of helping him to recover physically and mentally from his illness had been achieved, Scott no longer wanted to retain his services. Instead Scott 'began to rap me on the head, as one sees a cat deal with an elderly kitten which retaineth its lacteal propensities overdue season.' (*E&C*, 308) That Wainewright resented this treatment is made apparent by a series of urgent and peremptory, if rhetorical questions, addressed to the proprietor and editor. He was intent on gaining the admission that it had never been his

ambition and pushiness which had led him into print in the pages of the *London Magazine*. Now at his 'literary decease' Wainewright wants it proclaimed that 'my reputation is unsmirched, unblemished, by any hateful scrambling after the loaves and fishes: answer for me. Have *I* been forward with MSS? Have *I* ever displayed an unseeming alacrity with my quill? Have *I* ever been ready and forthcoming when first called on?' (*E&C*, 309) Unlike Lamb, Wainewright is here stressing that he is a gentlemanly amateur, writing to oblige rather than soliciting to be published in the *London Magazine*.

Seemingly effortlessly, Lamb acquired the perfect style of writing for his purposes as his alias Elia. Wainewright was nothing like as gifted as his friend. About the only stylistic influence they both share is that of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Towards the conclusion of his writing career for the *London Magazine*, Wainewright started prefacing his articles with quotes from Sterne. Shandy is another character like Elia and Janus, who both was and was not his creator. In the July 1822 issue appeared Janus's 'The Delicate Intricacies' which is a parody of Sterne's style. Into Wainewright's story of Nina, enter all sorts of interruptions, diversions and digressions. Strangely enough, one of these digressions focuses on the '*wits* of London', one of whom was Lamb, famously discovered delivering a song when inebriated containing the words, '*Diddle, diddle, dumpkins*'. (*E&C*, 267)

Again like Sterne and Lamb, Janus apostrophises the reader who is thus drawn into interacting with the author and taking an active part in the text. All three writers sometimes project the reader into the text as a questioner, as for example Wainewright does here:

> 'Did she throw herself over, Mr Janus?' - Excuse me, madam, but I am not accustomed to be interrupted with foolish questions, when I take on me to relate one of the most interesting adventures that ever was adventured in all London! Another word and I am dumb for ever. – 'Oh dear, good nice Janus, pray forgive me this time: it was quite a slip' (*E&C*, 274).

Wainewright's next article, 'The Academy of Taste for Grown Gentlemen, or the Infant Connoisseur's Go-Cart by Janus Weathercock', is also prefaced by quotations from Sterne. This essay shows that Wainewright took the breathless, madcap style of *Tristram Shandy*, but that unlike Sterne he was not sufficiently skilled to use art to conceal art. As early as March 1820 Wainewright was practising an overloaded and florid style, with an overwhelming combination and number of adjectives, which together lead only to confusion and an impression of wading through porridge. Here is an example, chosen more or less at random:

> The happy set have chosen their spot uncommonly well. They are completely embowered in a natural saloon, composed of sturdy thick-leaved elms, and slender acacias waving their feathery transparent tops in a gently-gliding air, just sufficiently strong to tend their young, yellow-green shoots. In one corner comes a clear, cold stream, paved with gravel and silver sand, and full of shining pebbles, flinging a hundred hues against the dancing sunbeams; while violets trail their leafy nets over the thick, soft, dark-green grass on the edges (*E&C*, 29-30)

Wainewright wrote many such purple passages.

Another characteristic of Wainewright's style is both more appealing and indicative of his educated background. A footnote, perhaps by Janus himself, to his article in the June 1822 issue of the *London Magazine* pinpoints a certain stylistic device mentioned earlier: 'Janus is extremely fond of distorting notable passages in notable authors' (249). This reveals Wainewright's awareness of past literature which he shared with Lamb. Several examples of this fascinating technique will be cited. First, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is slightly misquoted: 'What a blind world is this, my masters!' (*E&C*, 257) From *King Lear* comes another adapted line: 'and last, not least in our dear love, *me*, myself, Janus!' (*E&C*, 26-27). Thirdly, Janus slightly misquotes a line from *Macbeth*: 'Pope is full of sound and fury, and means nothing'. (*E&C*, 114) Finally, in his final article, Janus slightly adapts a longer quotation from *The Merchant of Venice* from Shylock's most famous speech: the proprietor of the *London Magazine* writes that Janus is 'one that hath eyes, ears, and nerves, even as a contributor; liable to the same sicknesses, mental and bodily; possessing human sympathies and dimensions'. (*E&C*, 303)

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The last section of this essay will consider the mental health of Wainewright. He shared mental instability with at least two of the other contributors to the *London Magazine*; the important one of these is of course Charles Lamb. Lamb had one period when he had to stay in a private madhouse for six weeks. Mary Lamb had many more periods when she had to be confined for weeks or even months at a time. Wainewright possibly resembled Mary Lamb in being a murderer in a domestic context. It is quite possible that Charles Lamb may have unconsciously been attracted by a similarity between himself, his sister and his friend. Both men developed a protective carapace of wittiness and fun to disguise a tendency towards depression. Certainly Wainewright began his series of forgeries while he was writing for the *London Magazine*, which surely suggests that much of his frankness and gaiety at this time must have been assumed. Yet even amidst great personal and financial difficulties William Carew Hazlitt described Wainewright as 'an agreeable associate, and his spirits never flagged [...] he was cheerful and ready to look at the bright side'. (*E&C*, liii)

In his last regular contribution to the *London Magazine*, Janus describes his background, which is identical with Wainewright's own. He describes the illness which followed his brief period in the army as 'an acute disease, succeeded by a relaxation of the muscles and nerves which depressed me [...] hypochondriasis! ever shuddering on the horrible abyss of mere insanity!' He goes on to record how his physician and future wife Eliza Ward, 'brought me at length out of those dead black waters, nearly exhausted with so sore a struggle'. (*E&C*, 305-306) In a study of malefactors called *The Criminal* Dr Havelock Ellis made the following professional judgment on Wainewright's early illness: 'There is, however, distinct interest in noting that at one period of his life Wainewright was on the verge of insanity, if not, as is more likely, actually insane; it is extremely probable that he never recovered from the effects of that illness'. (quoted by Jonathan Curling, 54-55)

One of Wainewright's articles had the title 'Janus's Jumble'. In a late article, purportedly by Cornelius Van Vinkbooms, Wainewright's alias describes his other alias's – Janus's - boudoir. It is full of miscellaneous and eccentric objects, leading Van Vinkbooms to comment: 'Mercy upon us, this is Janus's Jumble with a vengeance!' (*E&C*, 224) The phrase – 'Janus's Jumble' - is the impression the reader increasingly derives from reading Wainewright's articles in the *London Magazine*. Janus was aware of his instability and inability to adhere to his subject; writing in November 1822 he felt it necessary to reassure his reader: '- pray Sir, don't jump off the chair and run to the door; I am not mad'. (*E&C*, 281) In the same article Janus reveals his awareness of his poor concentration and grasshopper mind and appeals to his 'dear doctor' to 'examine my cranium and perhaps we may light on the confounded Jack-o'-the-lantern *bump*, whence spirt and squirt all these impedimental excrescences, these parentheses?' (*E&C*, 282) Wainewright's poor memory and sheer distractibility are emphasised by his disordered and muddled thinking: 'All traces of the digression are now quite obliterated, I'll venture to say - judging from myself at least - the fact is, I've forgotten whither this letter tended - I must turn to the first leaf - um - thirdly - um- um - O!' (*E&C*, 310) The next page is equally indicative of a collapsing mind: 'I don't know what I was going to say - … But never mind; it is the last time I shall ever cudgel *my* brains for a meaning, or *yours* to find it out'. At the end of the article Janus admits to feeling depressed: 'Many things had contributed lately to break and daunt my once elastic spirits'. (*E&C*, 323) Wainewright's final contribution to the *London Magazine* came three years later and shows a great deterioration in his mental faculties. William Carew Hazlitt's brief comment eloquently highlights this: 'This queer little scrap is signed Janus'. (*E&C*, 332-333)

That Wainewright's sanity did not return is suggested by Curling, who writes that in the 1840s his subject wrote a letter to the Governor of Van Diemen's Land asking for a Ticket of Leave: 'The hysterical purport, wild style and inconsistent punctuation of this remarkable plea clearly display the unbalanced, if not insane state of Weathercock's mind.' (Curling, 346).

In conclusion, Lamb and Wainewright shared a mutual respect and affection on a personal and a professional level. They shared a deep interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights and poets, culminating in Lamb's 1808 *Dramatic Specimens* which had a definite and direct influence on Wainewright's 1821 edition of Marlowe and Chapman's *Hero and Leander*. Lamb did not live long enough to witness Wainewright's ignominious end, though he may well have suspected that his friend was mentally unstable, and extended sympathy on that ground, even if it was unacknowledged openly. Looking at the *London Magazine*, it is impossible not to conclude that he was always on the border of sanity like Mary Lamb and, to a lesser degree, her younger brother, Charles Lamb.

Epsom, Surrey.

'A solemn bleat': Charles Lamb agrees to review Wordsworth's *The Excursion*

John Williams

~ Introduction ~

Natalie Blake, Zadie Smith tells us, is a 'city animal', consequently she does not 'have the proper name for anything natural'. In Smith's novel *N-W* Natalie almost has a Wordsworthian epiphany: she is 'surprised by beauty'. On her way to Kilburn tube station she sees, as it were for the first time in her life, an ornamental cherry tree in full bloom. Spontaneously she reaches up to break off a twig heavy with blossom:

> […] a simple, carefree gesture – but the twig was sinewy and green inside and not brittle enough to snap. Once she'd begun she felt she couldn't give up (the street was not empty, she was being observed). She laid her briefcase on somebody's front garden wall, applied both hands and wrestled with it. What came away finally was less twig than branch, being connected to several other twigs, themselves heavy with blossom, and the vandal Natalie Blake hurried away and around the corner with it.[1]

Natalie's ill-fated encounter with the cherry tree is mirrored in the encounter of another 'city animal', Charles Lamb, with Wordsworth's poem, *The Excursion*. He read it, and wrote to tell Wordsworth that it had given him a 'day in Heaven'.[2] Natalie marvelled at the beauty of the tree. Lamb agreed to review *The Excursion* for the *Quarterly Review*; Natalie decided she would pick a twig full of blossoms. The result for both of them was panic, confusion, and acute embarrassment. Having carried her branch as far as the tube station entrance, Natalie guiltily abandons it outside a telephone box and plunges into the Underground. Having finally written his review and sent it off, Lamb destroyed all his notes and copies; out of sight, out of mind. Where Nature is concerned it would seem that the Londoner is well advised to mind his or her own business.

In this paper I shall not be primarily concerned to analyse the text of Lamb's review. My focus will be on the circumstances surrounding Wordsworth's unexpected decision to ask Lamb to write the review, and Lamb's foolhardy decision to accept the commission. The relationship between Lamb, a child of the Inner Temple living in his 'ever dear London' (Marrs, I: 271), and the Romantic poet who leads the reader of *The Excursion* into a 'savage region!', 'a heathy plain, / With

[1] Zadie Smith, *N-W* (London, 2012), 253. Hereafter cited in text as Smith.

[2] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, 3 vols. (Ithaca and New York, 1975), III: 95. Hereafter cited in text as Marrs. The original spelling and punctuation of the letters has been retained.

a tumultuous waste of huge hill tops',[3] was a complex one, and nowhere does this become more evident than in the letters Lamb wrote to Wordsworth during these events. A discussion of the contents of these letters, a sequence of four beginning on 9 August 1814 and finishing in January 1815, will provide the basis for a consideration of the influence which metropolitan culture continued to exert on British Romanticism early in the nineteenth century.

Charles Lamb's review of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* was published in the *Quarterly Review* in October 1814. William Hazlitt had commandeered Lamb's copy of the poem and written his own review for the *Examiner* before letting him have it back; Francis Jeffrey's withering critique was published in the *Edinburgh Review* in November 1814. When Lamb's essay appeared, he discovered that William Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*, had tampered extensively with his text. This is how he described to Wordsworth what had happened:

> The *language* he has alterd throughout. Whatever inadequateness it had to its subject, it was in point of composition the prettiest piece of prose I ever writ. [...] That charm if it had any is all gone: more than a third of the substance is cut away, and that not all from one place, but *passim*, so as to make utter nonsense. Every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one. (Marrs, III: 129)

I will suggest that there are reasons why we should treat the contents of this letter with caution. Lamb's frame of mind at the time of writing was such that it remains very difficult to be sure of the full extent of Gifford's editing, though edit it he most certainly did. If we imagine a reader confronted first by Lamb's letter, and only then turning to read his review, we might reasonably expect them to be puzzled by the fact that, whatever else might be said of the piece, it is clearly not to be dismissed as 'utter nonsense', or entirely devoid of 'warm expression'. Gifford had published a review that – though it included somewhat timidly expressed reservations – remained broadly sympathetic to the poem. Referring to Wordsworth's as yet unfinished poem, *The Recluse*, of which *The Excursion* was a section, we read in the opening paragraph that the 'completion of this plan' might be looked forward to 'with a confidence which the execution of the finished part is well calculated to inspire.' He concludes by affirming that 'the "Excursion" is not a branch plucked from the parent tree to gratify an overhasty appetite for applause; but is, in itself, a complete and legitimate production',[4] at which point it is impossible not to be reminded of the unfortunate Natalie Blake's experience!

~ Second Thoughts ~

When Lamb agreed to review *The Excursion* he fully understood that his role was to provide a counter weight to the savaging confidently predicted from Jeffrey. Nothing he had written to this date had prepared him for a task of this magnitude,

[3] William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca and London, 2007), 81, l.163; 86, ll.344-6. Hereafter cited in text as *Excursion*.

[4] *Romantic Bards and British Reviewers: A Selected Edition of Contemporary Reviews of the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelley*, ed. John O. Haydon (London, 1971), 53. Hereafter cited in text as Haydon.

and the extent of the traumatic consequences for him may be appreciated by comparing the tone of the letter he wrote to Wordsworth on 9 August 1814, thanking him for sending him a copy of the poem, and the three letters he subsequently wrote (beginning a little over a month later), first while struggling to write the review, and then when he finally read the published piece in the *Quarterly*. Lamb's experience of what he had sentimentally (and rashly as it turned out) referred to as 'a day in Heaven' was transformed into the Hell of grappling with a literary project that was far beyond him. 'I have scarce time or quiet to explain my present situation' is how he begins his letter of 19 September. He goes on, 'I reclaimed your book, which Hazlitt has uncivilly kept, only 2 days ago, and have made shift to read it again with shatterd brain'. It is not that he admires the poem any less, 'but such was my aching head yesterday (Sunday) that the book was like a Mountain Landscape to one that should walk on the edge of a precipice. I perceived beauty dizziliy.' The letter includes evidence of Lamb's critical engagement with the poem, but at the heart of what he writes lies his confession that 'I feel my inability, for my brain is always desultory and snatches off hints from things, but can seldom follow a "**work**" methodically'. He lays particular blame on the pressures of his work, 'my sleep is nothing but a succession of dreams of business that I cannot do, of assistants that give me no assistance, of terrible responsibilities.' He says he will need at least three weeks to have the review written, 'I see no prospect of a quiet half-day or hour even till this week and the next are past.' At this point surely he is mentally crossing his fingers, because if that will not do, 'it is my bounden duty to express my regret, and decline it.' Drawing to a conclusion he explains: 'I finish this after a raw ill bakd dinner, fast gobbled up, set me off to office again after working there till near four. O Christ! How I wish I were a rich man [...]'. This outburst prompts a sudden change of direction characteristic of the letter as a whole: 'Apropos, are you a **Xtian**? Or is it the Pedlar and the Priest that are?' (Marrs, III: 111-13)

In his essays and letters, Lamb's attitude to religion is best characterised as that of a disinterested observer, fascinated by the Quakers, but beyond that well content to let theologians engage with points of detail, while he gently ridicules those who set great store by the rituals of their faith, as in the case of the 'Methodist divines' debating whether they should say grace over a cup of tea in 'Grace Before Meat'.[5] In this, Lamb exhibits an air of metropolitan liberalism born of a life lived in the polyglot community of London where, as Wordsworth described it in *The Prelude*, Italians rubbed shoulders with Jews, Turks, Swedes, Russians, American Indians, Moors, Malays, Lascars, Tartars, Chinese, and 'Negro ladies in white muslin gowns'.[6] Once he had agreed to review (rather than merely read) *The Excursion*, Lamb will quickly have realised that he needed to engage with religious belief in a way that was new to him if he was to write at-all satisfactorily about the poem. The question that in consequence fell off the end of his pen and into his letter to Wordsworth, '[...] are you a **Xtian**? Or is it the Pedlar and the Priest that are?', is

[5] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London 1903), II: 96. Hereafter cited in text and notes as Lucas.

[6] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York and London, 1979), 238, ll. 239-43.

indicative of Lamb's faltering first steps into virgin territory; the request sounds almost obtuse, and in the context of the letter we might be forgiven for suspecting that this is part of a strategy designed to convince Wordsworth that he should not be trusted with the job.

The impression he gives of himself as a less than focussed reader is compounded by his confession that: 'I find I miscalled that celestial splendour of the mist going off, a *sunset*. That only shows my inaccuracy of head'. The fact that Coleridge had written to him declaring that he is going to review *The Excursion* for the *Quarterly*, creates a brief moment of resolution, '*that* shall not stop me'; but there can be little doubt from what he goes on to write that Lamb desperately wants to be let off the hook: 'I keep writing on, knowing the Postage is no more for such writing, else so faggd & disjointed I am with damned India house work, I scarce know what I do. My left arm reposes on "Excursion". I feel what it would be in quiet. It is now a sealed Book.' (Marrs, III: 112-3) There was to be no reprieve.

~ A Londoner tries to make sense of Langdale ~

Given the anomalous circumstances surrounding the production of Lamb's review - the fact that it was Lamb who was offered the job, and his temerity in taking it on - it is not surprising that most references to the review content themselves with a narrative rather than an analysis of the circumstances of its production. My guess is that Lamb accepted the commission because it came as a flattering expression of confidence in his ability; only then did it occur to him that he was destined to be completely outgunned by the other reviewers, and once he set about trying to bring Wordsworth's 9,068 lines of poetry into focus for his review (after Hazlitt had deigned to return his copy) the misery and panic he felt overflowed into his letters. The incident of Hazlitt and the purloined copy will only have served to confirm to him the extent to which he was considered a light-weight in the world of literary London.

Francis Jeffrey without doubt claims precedence as the chief protagonist in any account of Wordsworth's battle to move beyond the status of coterie poet to assume the role he craved, that of a major admonitory poetic voice in the service of the moral regeneration of his nation, precisely as he understood Milton to have been before him. When we have Hazlitt: 'The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe'[7], and when we have Jeffrey: 'It is longer, weaker, and tamer, than any of Mr. Wordsworth's other productions; with less boldness of originality, and less even of that extreme simplicity and lowliness of tone which wavered so prettily, in the Lyrical Ballads, between silliness and pathos' (Haydon 39), to help us establish the context of the progress of Wordsworth's reputation from its precarious beginnings through to the pre-eminence of his later years, who needs Lamb's (if it is Lamb's) indecisive commentary?

> To such a mind, we say – call it strength or weakness – if weakness, assuredly a fortunate one – the visible and audible things of creation present, not dim symbols, or curious emblems, which they have done

[7] *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (New York, 1930-4), XIX: 10-11.

> at all times to those who have been gifted with the poetical faculty; but revelations and quick insights into the life within us, the pledge of immortality [...] (Haydon, 55-6)

Sally Bushell and Felicity James have shown that there is indeed good reason to value what Lamb's review has to say about *The Excursion*. The assumption here is that, Gifford notwithstanding, we can still read the piece as an expression of Lamb's views; this despite Lamb's insistent disclaimers in his letters to Wordsworth. Bushell argues that Lamb's treatment of the poem as an entity which was in no way dependent for interpretation on a grasp of Wordsworth's grand scheme for *The Recluse*, distinguishes him from all the other critics, while his grasp of the original way in which the poet attempted to use a 'conversational' format made it possible for Lamb alone to describe *The Excursion* as employing 'a new dynamic in which, instead of a single voice controlling its own response, the creation of open dialogue within the text, with the poet's voice as one among many, is attempted.'[8] This crucial insight reminds us of the fact that Lamb is a quintessential Londoner. The Reviews were all primarily metropolitan organs of literary judgement, of course; where Lamb differs from Hazlitt, Jeffrey, Gifford, and the others, is that his natural sympathy for *The Excursion* (born not least out of Wordsworth's flattering decision to include him on his gift-list for a copy) means that he sets out to write a sympathetic review of the work of a poet for whom he has a genuine regard. To fulfil his task I would argue that Lamb has to search for a way to bring *The Excursion* within the range of his own experience of social interaction. Where Jeffrey and Hazlitt, in their different ways, take Wordsworth to task for absenting himself from society in *The Excursion*, Lamb actively seeks to explore the social dynamic of the poem; people talking to each other, a situation where 'the poet's voice' is 'one among many'. Lamb, 'born' as he wrote in his essay 'The Londoner', 'in a *crowd*' (Lucas, VI: 236), works with this in his attempt to translate the wilderness of Langdale into the busy conglomeration of metropolitan thoroughfares which have enabled him to make sense of his existence. In this he resembles Edgar Allan Poe's Londoner in 'The Man of the crowd', unable to survive if removed for too long from 'the heart of the mighty London'.[9] It was never going to work, and I would argue that the trauma of writing the review helped create in Lamb a maturing sense of what it meant for him to be both a Londoner and to engage with the cultural life of the times in which he lived.

In her article on Lamb's reading of *The Excursion* for the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* in 2010, Felicity James, reiterating Bushell's point that Lamb approached *The Excursion* 'as a complete poem', shows how the text exposes the subtleties of Lamb's response, not least with respect to his awareness of the 'reciprocity between the

[8] Sally Bushell, *Re-Reading The Excursion* (Aldershot and Burlington, USA, 2002), 38. Hereafter cited in text as Bushell.

[9] E. A. Poe, `The Man of the Crowd`, in *Selected Tales*, ed. D. Van Leer (Oxford, 2008), 83. In *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading and Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke, 2008), Felicity James opts for the gentler alternative role for Lamb as *flâneur* (pp.212-3). In *Charles Lamb, Elia and the London Magazine: Metropolitan Muse* (London, 2010), Simon P. Hull explores Lamb's Elian persona in relation to Poe's Gothic vision in 'The Man of the Crowd', where – although he does not comment on this – the narrator may be perceived as assuming the role of *flâneaur* (181-6).

outer and the inner world' that the poem explores.[10] In his letter of January 1815 to Wordsworth, Lamb describes this as the poet's 'Scheme of Harmonies' (Marrs, III: 129), claiming that he is quoting from his review. In the review, however, no such phrase is used, though reference is made to 'harmony'; so it is possible that Lamb is either embellishing an idea expressed in the review in the course of distancing himself from the published piece, or that this signals one of Gifford's cuts.

Lamb's wish to discuss the 'harmonies' in Wordsworth's work suggests to me a wish to translate what he finds to be the preoccupations of *The Excursion* into terms that a city dweller can grasp. His essay on `Quakers` might be read as a post-*Excursion*-review testament to the fact that what Wordsworth had found admirable in the spiritual life of the Wanderer (otherwise referred to as the 'Pedlar') and the Pastor, and sundry other inhabitants scattered across the Cumbrian wastes, is equally alive and well and commendable in the heart of London. 'Reader, wouldst thou know what true peace and quiet mean; wouldst thou find a refuge from the noises and clamours of the multitude [...] come with me into a Quakers' Meeting'. At the end of the essay Lamb elides the pastoral and metropolitan, coming firmly to rest in the metropolis:

> Their garb and stillness conjoined present a uniformity tranquil and herd-like – as in the pasture – "forty feeding like one."
>
> The very garments of a Quaker seem incapable of receiving a soil, and cleanliness in them to be something more than the absence of its contrary. Every Quakeress is a lily; and when they come up in bands to their Whitsun-conferences, whitening the easterly streets of the metropolis, from all parts of the United Kingdom, they show like troops of the Shining Ones. (Lucas, II: 45, 48)

In his review, Lamb wrote that Wordsworth's 'opinions and sentiments' assume 'the character of an expanded and generous Quakerism'; and he later reaffirmed this: Wordsworth's 'sentiments' are rooted in 'a sort of liberal Quakerism' (Haydon, 57). Wordsworth himself would not have been at all comfortable with Lamb's attempts to sum up the religious basis of *The Excursion* as in any sense rooted in Dissent, let alone Quakerism (despite his admiration for some of its adherents). In Book VI he wrote:

> -Hail to the State of England! And conjoin
> With this a salutation as devout,
> Made to the Spiritual Fabric of her Church;
> Founded in truth; by blood of Martyrdom
> Cemented; by the hands of Wisdom reared
> In beauty of Holiness, with order'd pomp,
> Decent, and unreproved. (*Excursion*, 196, ll.6-12)

Lamb was doing what he could to explain that Wordsworth's 'scheme of harmonies', the 'reciprocity between the outer and inner world' that he sought,

[10] Felicity James, `A Day in Heaven, Charles Lamb's reading of *The Excursion*`, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* 158 (2010), 20-21.

could be demystified and made to sound more familiar to a readership that remained, as he did, attached to the cultural life of the city. This could not have contrasted more with Francis Jeffrey's response. Jeffrey's assertion that Wordsworth's religion was an idiosyncratic manifestation of non-conformity, 'the mystical verbiage of the Methodist pulpit' (Haydon, 42), comes as one among many reasons why *The Excursion* is bad poetry. Jeffrey bluntly lays the blame for the failure of every aspect of the poem on the poet's contempt for civilised metropolitan values, and his consequent decision to retreat into a rural wilderness to write: '[...] if Mr Wordsworth, instead of confining himself almost entirely to the society of the dalesmen and cottagers, and little children, who form the subjects of his book, had condescended to mingle a little more with the people that were to read and judge of it, we cannot help thinking that its texture would have been considerably improved.' (Haydon, 41-2)

The discussion of Lamb's intervention in the history of *The Excursion* therefore provides valuable material for a discussion of the identity of British Romanticism across the turn of the eighteenth century. The notion of a broadly homogeneous literary 'movement' in Britain summed up in the term Romanticism only came into being later in the nineteenth century, but despite numerous and persistent scholarly re-reading exercises dating back to the 1950s, that initial characterisation, epitomised by the construction of Wordsworth by Matthew Arnold as the poet whose finest work constitute the lyrics written between 1798 and 1808, persists. Arnold's Wordsworth was being steered into a company of British Romantic poets for whom, as Lascelles Abercrombie claimed in 1923, 'inner experience assumes the first importance'.[11] 'Romanticism', the reader of the late twentieth-century coffee-table style of manual on Romanticism is told, 'changed everything'. Romantics are identified by their 'passionate self-expression, spontaneity and inspiration, unrestrained energy and imagination, violence and irregularity, the particular, the strange, the shocking, the elemental', and the 'Cult of Nature'.[12] This sits uneasily alongside Lamb's 'raw ill-baked dinner' followed by his need to dash back to the office. The very fact that it was indeed Charles Lamb who sat down to review *The Excursion* as Wordsworth's champion is sufficient to suggest that there was a good deal more going on in the cultural life of the Nation besides 'spontaneity', 'inspiration', 'violence', and 'the strange'. The relationship between Lamb and Wordsworth reflects more generally the complexity of the cross-currents at work within writing that resisted a metropolitan focus, and writing that still emanated from places where, as Jeffrey had pointed out, the people who were buying and reading books were for the most part to be found.

Lamb and Wordsworth's correspondence is always congenial, allowing, that is, for an interval when Lamb's cries of pain uttered while he was struggling with the review flood the page. Yet the Wordsworth who asked Southey to engage Lamb to write the review had earlier written the following imperious dismissal of him in a letter to Coleridge in 1808, when the merits of *The White Doe of Rylstone* had evidently fallen on deaf ears: 'Let Lamb learn to be ashamed of himself in not taking some pleasure in the contemplation of this picture, which supposing it to be even

[11] Lascelles Abercrombie, *Romanticism* (London, 1963), 95.
[12] *Romantics*, ed. Nathaniel Harris (London, 1991), 8.

but a sketch, is yet sufficiently made out for any man of true power to finish it for himself. [...] of one thing be assured, that Lamb has not a reasoning mind, and least of all, has he an imaginative one!'[13] On the other hand, Lamb's letters contain a note of wry acceptance of Wordsworth's tendency to patronise him as an aspiring literary Londoner beleaguered by the need to earn a living; this is woven in among genuine expressions of regard for the great poet. Lamb, however, was not slow to share with others his exasperation with Wordsworth's pomposity. Compared to Wordsworth on Lamb, however, the frustration is tempered by a beguiling good naturedness:

> I received almost instantaneously a long letter of four sweating pages from my reluctant **Letterwriter**, the purport of which was, that he was sorry his 2nd. vol. had not given me more pleasure (Devil a hint did I give that it had *not pleased me*), and "was compelled to wish that my range of **Sensibility** was more extended, being obliged to believe that I should receive large influxes of happiness and happy Thoughts" (I suppose from the L. B. -) With a deal of stuff about a certain Union of **Tenderness & Imagination** [...]

Lamb continues in this vein for several paragraphs, adding that Coleridge has also written to him: 'Coleridge, who had not written to me some months before, starts up from his bed of sickness to reprove me for my hardy presumption'. 'What am I to do with such people?', Lamb complains, concluding, 'I certainly shall write them a very merry Letter' (Marrs, I: 272-3). Lamb could never resist teasing Wordsworth, secure in the knowledge that Wordsworth's ego could be relied upon to blind him to the subtext.

The letter he wrote in acknowledgement of his copy of *The Excursion* is an excellent case in point. The warmth of his enthusiasm for the poem that makes up the first half of the letter must have been sufficient to suggest to Wordsworth that Lamb might be the man to set against Jeffrey in the battle of the reviews. Sally Bushell has pointed out that Wordsworth was quick to adopt Lamb's description of the poem as 'conversational', using it in a letter to Catherine Clarkson in 1815 (Bushell, 36). Here was a town bred reader who, against all the odds, seemed to have got the message, and to be worshipping enthusiastically at the appropriate shrine (never mind if the ebullience of his tone was not entirely fitting). 'There is a great deal of noble matter about mountain scenery,' Lamb wrote, 'yet not so much as to overpower and discountenance a poor **Londoner** or South-countryman entirely'. From his account of Mary's response, however, Wordsworth might have caught a hint of how Lamb also had reacted to the lofty peaks: 'Mary seems to have felt it occasionally a little too powerfully, for it was her remark during reading it that by your system it was doubtful whether a Liver in Towns had a Soul to be Saved. She almost trembled for that invisible part of us in her.' (Marrs, III: 96)

How closely did Wordsworth read what Lamb then went on to report when the subject veered away from his great work? By the third paragraph the seriousness of Lamb's initial comments begins to give way to something more characteristically playful, though at the same time we can see that the playfulness

[13] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford, 1937) I: 198.

reveals him as a Londoner still striving to engage with a poem that has transported him into an alien environment. Lamb's instinct is to look for what he might recognise in the people rather than the landscape, but with landscape still foremost in his mind, he travels – with evident relief – from the mountains of the Lake District via Harrow to Hyde Park, transformed at this time by its use to celebrate the centenary of the accession of George I, and the belief that hostilities between France and England were finally over (Lucas, VI: 239). I suggest that an unintended consequence of paying due homage to Wordsworth in the form of celebrating what he chose to call his 'day in Heaven', results in Lamb sketching what in effect is a parody of *The Excursion*. It begins with an innocent Londoner's genuine attempt to match the grandeur of the Lake poet's visionary capacity. What can happen in Cumbria can happen in Harrow:

> One <image> feeling I was particularly struck with as what I recognised so very lately at Harrow Church on entering it after a hot & secular day's pleasure, the instantaneous cooling and calming almost transforming, properties of a country church just entered - a certain fragrance which it has - either from its holiness, or being kept shut all the week, or the air that is let in being pure country [...] (Marrs, III: 95-6)

Wordsworth's description of the church interior in Book V (ll.137-215) of *The Excursion* was, needless to say, not preceded by the poet having experienced 'a hot & secular day's pleasure' (a preposterous proposition), but there is surely no ironic intent here. Lamb is attempting to move Wordsworth's poem into his own sphere of experience, and it is the genteel pastoralism of Harrow that provides him with a bridge into his account of Hyde Park, where the otherwise overpowering monumentality of *The Excursion* begins to be exorcised by a playful comparative element hinted at between the two locations.

Until *The Excursion* had arrived in the post, he explains to Wordsworth, it had been a summer when 'rural images were fast fading from my mind' apart, that is, from his brief expedition to Harrow. The reason for this is that 'by the wise provision of the Regent, all that was countryfy'd in the Parks is all but obliterated. The very colour of green is vanishd, the whole surface of **Hyde Park** is dry crumbling sand (Arabia **Arenosa**), not a vestige or hint of grass ever having grown there.' Although 'booths & drinking places go all round it for a mile and a half' and 'the stench of liquors, **bad** tobacco, **dirty people and provisions**, conquers the air', we should not assume that Lamb is in consequence pining for what in *The Excursion* Wordsworth describes as the 'waste wilderness' of the Lake District. It gets worse before it gets better, though, and in a fashion that might almost have been calculated to make the great poet wince: 'The whole beauty of the Place is gone – that lake-look of the Serpentine – it has got foolish ships upon it - but something whispers to have confidence in nature and its revival' (Marrs, III: 96).

At this point in the letter Lamb reveals himself in his true colours as a Londoner describing the place where he feels completely at home, both as a person and as a writer. Setting the '**bad** tobacco' and '**dirty people**' to one side, he continues:

> Meantime I confess to have smoked one delicious **Pipe** in one of the cleanliest & goodliest of the booths - a tent rather, ("O call it not a booth!") - erected by the public Spirit of Watson, who keeps the Adam and Eve at St. Pancras (the ale-houses have all emigrated with their train of bottles, mugs, corkscrews, waiters, into Hyde Park – whole **Alehouses**, with all their **Ale!**) in company with some of the guards that had been in France, and a fine French girl (habited like a Princess of Banditti) which one of <these[?] English> the dogs had transported from the Garonne to the Serpentine. The unusual scene, in Hyde Park, by Candle-light, in open air, good tobacco, bottled stout, made it **look like** an interval in a campaign, a repose after battle.... After all, the fireworks were splendent - the Rockets in clusters, in trees and all shapes, spreading about like young stars in the making, floundering about in Space (like unbroke horses) till some of Newton's calculations should fix them [...] (Marrs, III: 97)

We hardly need it to be confirmed: this is Charles Lamb in his element, and I think trying – one way or another – to convey this (not for the first time) to Wordsworth. In a letter of January 1801 he prefaced a celebration of London life by admitting, 'Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't mu[ch] care if I ever see a mountain in my life – I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of you **Mountaineers** can have done with dead nature' (Marrs, I: 267). The letter of August 1814 closes with a word to Wordsworth about *The Excursion*: '[I] assure you that fireworks and triumphs have not distracted me from receiving a calm and noble enjoyment from it' (Marrs, III: 97). What a difference a few weeks were to make in Lamb's relationship with the poem and its author.

~ `Born in a *crowd*` ~

Lamb epitomises the persistence of a volatile metropolitan, still essentially Augustan, culture persisting within the cultural life of the nation. His reviews and scraps of table-talk are valued by editors who know readable copy when they see it. Though he rubs shoulders with writers who valorise communion with the natural world, finding there a source of moral and religious guidance that they believe has long since been swallowed up in the corruption of court and city life, he himself remains firmly located in the tradition of city writing and its entertainment. His beat is the city streets, redolent with a cultural life that rolled on from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century to remain as central an ingredient of so-called Romanticism as was Wordsworth's remembrance of the Wye Valley, his vision of the redeeming power of Nature in the `Ode: Intimations of Immortality`, or Coleridge's nightmare narrative of the fate of the Ancient Mariner.

Lamb's perception of the natural world reminds us that the Augustan perception of 'Nature', what lies beyond the city streets, a nature sentimentally imagined with the help of Claude or George Lambert, or satirised when a country booby like Bob Acres leaves Clodd-hall and comes to town in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, is Nature sketched in as the framing device you might find in a portrait by Gainsborough or Reynolds. In a letter to John Clare of 1822, describing himself as

'an inveterate old Londoner', he advised against 'home rusticism' (meaning the use of dialect words and phrases). 'The true rustic style', he wrote, 'is to be found in Shenstone'. (Lucas, VII: 569-70) Lamb knew the countryside as it existed in close proximity to London, and even claimed in his essay 'Mackery End' that 'hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire' preserved distant family ties more surely than did 'the rending atmosphere of a metropolis' (Lucas, II: 78); but what Lamb excelled at was the observation of human beings in the environment they had constructed for themselves in order to work, play, do business in, and generally be entertained in. For the true Londoner, there has always been the certain knowledge that once beyond the metropolis and the home-counties, there are to be found another species entirely. Felix, one of Zadie Smith's Londoners in *N-W* 'had been to Wiltshire once and returned astounded' (Smith, 119). Out there, beyond the clamour of the city streets, beyond the heathland of Hampstead and the forests of Epping, live alien beings that move with a slow deliberation that all but robs them of their likeness to normal, city dwelling human beings.

Wordsworth had dragged a sociable Londoner out of his beer tent in the middle of Hyde Park and planted him in the middle of a Lake District valley, night coming on, and told him:

> "[...] Ambition reigns
> In the waste wilderness: the Soul ascends
> Towards her native firmament of heaven,
> When the fresh Eagle, in the month of May,
> Upborne, at evening, on replenished wings,
> This shady valley leaves, - and leaves the dark
> Empurpled hills, - conspicuously renewing
> A proud communication with the sun
> Low sunk beneath the horizon! – List – I heard,
> From yon huge breast of rock, a solemn bleat;
> Sent forth as if it were the Mountain's voice,
> As if the visible Mountain made the cry.
> Again!" – The effect upon the soul was such
> As he expressed [...] (*Excursion*, 141, ll.396-409)

A 'solemn bleat' indeed! Not even Lamb the lover of puns can have been expected to have survived the experience without being deeply traumatised. Lamb's critical writing on poetry before 1814 exists only as comments made in the course of his correspondence. The manner of his formally published criticism and commentary on the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries was no preparation for an analysis of Wordsworth's account of the lives of a motley crew of various battered and bruised working people as refracted through the minds of their pastor, a thoughtful pedlar, a misanthropic solitary, and a local poet. While Wordsworth, standing at the head of Langdale, lamented the passing of a world of Christian values, Lamb reflected on the vagaries of human nature from his standpoint as a city dweller born and bred, and it was during this brief period when he posed as an official reviewer of *The Excursion* that Lamb will certainly have come to appreciate more than ever his identity with enhanced clarity.

When in 1800 he reminisced in 'The Londoner' about the romance he had had with Ann Simmons in the early 1790s, he claimed that the experience had given him 'an almost insurmountable aversion from solitudes & rural scenes'. His initial response to *The Excursion* gives the lie to this, even if his enthusiasm was prompted by a sense of obligation to Wordsworth for his gift. His attempt to write the review, however, surely set the seal on his declaration, and is no doubt reflected in the way he characterises 'poets who declaim in such passionate terms in favour of country life'. After 1815, if not before, he was not to be influenced to the contrary by all the solemn bleats that might be heard on the `plains of *Arcadia* or *Epsom Downs*`:

> I was born (as you have heard), bred, and have passed most of my time, in a *crowd*. This has begot in me an entire affection for that way of life, amounting to an almost insurmountable aversion from solitude and rural scenes. This aversion was never interrupted or suspended, except for a few years in the younger part of my life, during a period in which I had fixed my affections upon a charming young woman. Every man, while the *passion* is upon him, is for a time at least addicted to groves and meadows, and purling streams. During this short period of my existence, I contracted just enough familiarity with rural objects to understand tolerably well ever after the Poets, when they declaim in such passionate terms in favour of a *country life*.
>
> For my own part, now the *fit* is long past, I have no hesitation in declaring, that a mob of happy faces crowding up at the pit door of Drury-Lane Theatre, just at the hour of five, give me ten thousand finer pleasures, than I ever received from all the flocks of *silly sheep*, that have whitened the plains of *Arcadia* or *Epsom Downs*.[14]

~ Lamb lost and found ~

Lamb was aware from the first that writing for the *Quarterly* meant that he would need to modify the style from that in which he normally wrote reviews; the circumstances were unlike anything he had encountered before, and his unease at not being able to be himself is evident when he writes to Wordsworth: 'I had a difficulty to perform not to make it all Panegyric; I have attempted to personate a mere stranger to you; perhaps with too much strangeness' (Marrs III: 125). When he came to read what finally appeared in the *Quarterly*, however, he insisted to Wordsworth that what had been expressed in enthusiastic, perhaps even florid, language had been edited into something far duller. Intriguingly, he attempts to resurrect his original style:

> I remember - I had said the poet of the Excursn "walks thro' common forests as thro` some Dodona or enchanted wood & every casual bird that flits upon the boughs, like that miraculous one in Tasso, but in language more piercing than any articulate sounds, reveals to him far higher lovelays." (Marrs, III: 129)

[14] Lucas, VI: 236. 'The Londoner' was published in the *Morning Post*, 1 Feb., 1802. Lamb transcribed it in his letter to Thomas Manning of 15 February 1802. Lucas reproduces the text as it was published in the *Morning Post* because 'Lamb's copy for Manning has disappeared' (Lucas, VI:239). Lamb's transcription is, however, reproduced in Marrs, II: 56-7. I use Lucas here for ease of reading. See also E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (London, 1905), 189.

When we compare the passage in this letter with what appeared in the review we find that 'common forests' has become 'every forest'; that 'enchanted wood' has been cut; that 'every casual bird' has become 'every bird'; that 'flits upon the boughs' has become 'flits among the leaves'; and that 'in language more piercing than any articulate sounds' has become 'in language more intelligent'. Gifford has toned down the ornamentation specifically as it relates to supernatural phenomena; but the substitution of the word 'intelligent' for 'more piercing than any articulate sounds', coupled with the retention of 'reveals to him far higher love-lays' arguably strengthens the passage (Haydon, 55). Inevitably we must speculate upon whether Lamb really possessed sufficient powers of recall (especially in these circumstances) to allow him to reproduce this passage from memory, as he claims he is doing. Might he in fact still have a draft to hand? Whatever the case, it would seem reasonable to suggest that Gifford had gone through the review knowing that Lamb's tendency to ornamental prose would need judicious pruning, and in consequence he left the piece where later readers have for the most part found it; in the words of Edith Batho, comparing reviews of *The Excursion* and their impact: 'In this particular instance the roles of the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh* are reversed: in general the attitude of the *Quarterly* was one of qualified friendliness'.[15]

The reason for Gifford agreeing in the first place to publish what he knew would be a sympathetic review of Wordsworth's work invites speculation. Rivalry between the Reviews was intense, to the point where John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine* was killed in a duel brought about by a feud with *Blackwood's* in 1821; but that Gifford was prepared to countenance anything other than a hostile review of *The Excursion* never-the-less suggests that the ideological battle lines between the Reviews were not so firmly drawn as literary history would generally have us believe. Gifford, initially editor of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* gained notoriety for the brutal style of his right-wing journalism. He had savaged the hyperbolic style Lamb used in a review of John Ford's *The Broken Heart* in 1808. Referring to Lamb's statement that 'a transcendent scene' in the play 'almost bears us in imagination to calvary', Gifford derided 'the blasphemies of a poor maniac, who, it seems, once published some detached scenes from the "Broken Heart"'. Southey was quick to point out to Gifford the unfortunate associations of these comments with Lamb's tragic personal circumstances, and Gifford duly apologised to Lamb through a letter to Southey. Was it possible that Gifford, despite the reputation he earned as a thoroughly unpleasant man, was prepared to take the opportunity of giving Lamb the commission in order to atone for the way he had dealt harshly with him in the past? He was, after all, in a position to ensure that any inappropriately ornate prose was pruned well before the final copy went to press.[16]

It seems likely that Gifford did cut a substantial amount from the latter part of Lamb's review, leaving it to come to a relatively lame conclusion on the subject of Wordsworth's choice of the 'Pedlar' for his central character; but the penultimate

[15] Edith Batho, *The Later Wordsworth* (New York, 1963), 348. Hereafter cited in text as Batho.

[16] Roy Park, *Lamb as Critic* (London, 1980), 128-9, 150 n39. See also Benjamin Clark, *William Gifford: Tory Satirist, Critic and Editor* (New York, 1930), 84, 128, 222-3.

paragraph sustains Lamb's measured commendation of the poem, clearly summing up the judgement of the review as a whole:

> [*The Excursion*] must indeed be approached with seriousness. It has in it much of that quality which 'draws the devout, deterring the profane.' Those who hate the Paradise Lost will not love this poem. The steps of the great master are discernable in it, not in direct imitation or injurious parody, but in the following of the spirit, in free homage and generous subjection. (Haydon, 60)

Batho concluded: 'Even in this modified form, the article was of importance to Wordsworth's reputation: Hazlitt's outbursts of enthusiasm in *The Examiner* and Montgomery's more qualified praise in the *Eclectic* had probably less influence at the moment upon public opinion than the approval of the *Quarterly*.' (Batho, 348)

For all the speculation that has gone on, we will never know the precise nature of how Lamb's original piece differed from what eventually appeared in print. What I think is the most important point to appreciate is that when Lamb sat down to read his review in the *Quarterly*, he did not recognise himself there. Whether or not he understood this at the time, and he probably did not, it was the disappearance (more accurately the distortion) of Charles Lamb that affected him most deeply. Lamb the Londoner was missing, and his alter-Elian-ego was nowhere to be found. He had been tempted to stray beyond the reassuring confines of the city into vast Wordsworthian rural spaces where, far from 'a hot & secular day's pleasure', unrelenting piety was the order of the day. Compared to this, Hertfordshire seemed like a place by a roaring fire in a snug inglenook. The profound changes that the literary life of the nation had been experiencing since the inception of the Enlightenment were invading the streets where Lamb went about his business; the reliable Augustan cultural values of common sense and order seemed to be increasingly under threat. The changes taking place may be envisaged as symbolised by the way a United Kingdom of England and Scotland had been heroically navigated by Sir Walter Scott's Jeannie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818). The two great cities of Edinburgh and London remained the focal points of the tale, but Jeannie traverses the countryside that lay between them, and with what Scott's readers found to be a wholly original blend of seductive, picturesque scene painting and geographical specificity, the city no longer held sway over their imaginations as it once had. The power of metropolitan culture, however, mapped by London's 'charter'd streets', was in no way lost. It is frequently forgotten that Scott's novel *The Fortunes of Nigel*, published in 1822, is set entirely in early seventeenth-century London, having as its epicentre the Temple Bar, a stone's throw from Lamb's birth place. With the new writers, flaunting their out-of-town imaginative credentials in the face of Augustan tradition, yet making their way to London to enjoy the publicity offered them by literary breakfasts, soirées and receptions in the homes of the metropolitan arbiters of fashion, Lamb's collision with *The Excursion* was an accident waiting to happen.

University of Greenwich

Poet and Patron: Wordsworth's winter garden design for Lady Beaumont

Tony Reavell

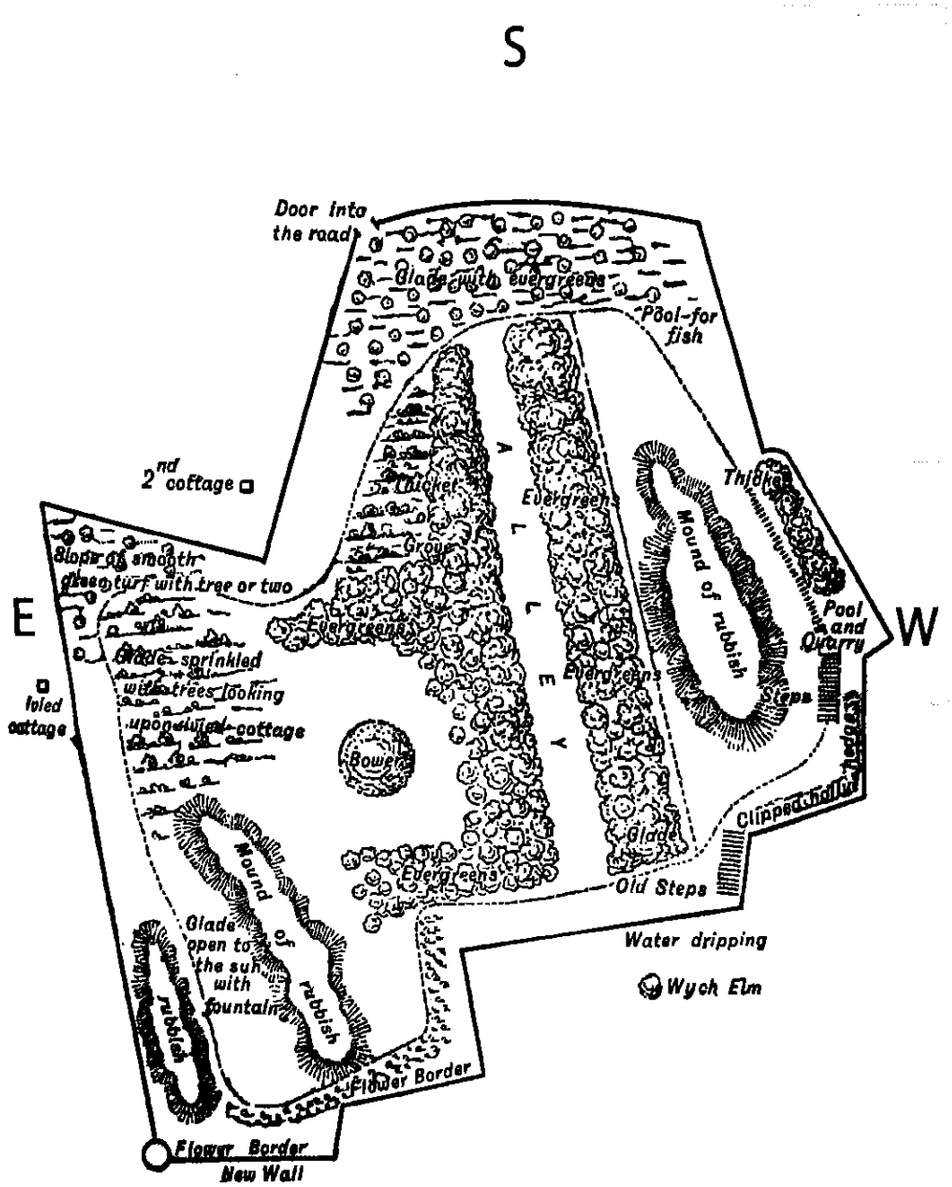
The concept of a 'winter garden' seems contradictory. When trees are bare, plants have died down, all is dormant, what interest has a garden? In February last year, I saw an extreme example of how winter can obliterate all appearance of life as it had in the garden below, the Arctic-Alpine Botanic Garden in the University of Tromsø, Norway. Little plant life to see. But in *England* the idea was not thought impossible. It is first voiced by that visionary Elizabethan scholar, Francis Bacon. A century later Addison enlarges the notion and describes the acre he has devoted to a winter garden. It has therefore a respectable literary ancestry.

The Arctic-Alpine Botanic Garden, University of Tromso, Norway

In this essay I shall first present the principal characters - Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, Sir George and Lady Beaumont - look at their relationship, and then study the Coleorton Winter Garden, its design, purpose, plants and features.

The main action of our drama takes place on Christmas Day in the winter of 1806 to 1807. William Wordsworth is 36, Dorothy 35. By mid-1806 William and his wife Mary have three children, and Dove Cottage, Grasmere has become impossibly crowded. With Mary's unmarried sister, Sara Hutchinson, the household has increased to four adults and three infants. William and Dorothy have now lived together for eleven years.

At this time Sir George Beaumont is 53 and his wife, born Margaret Willes, is 48. They have been married for 28 years, they have no children. Sir George is a wealthy landed aristocrat with a traditional education, Eton and Oxford. His father died when he was only nine, his mother married again six years later. So, like William and Dorothy, an unstable family background. The abiding interest of his life was first fostered at Eton where he showed an early aptitude for landscape drawing under Alexander Cozens. He and his wife make the Grand Tour and are painted by Reynolds, one of Sir George's heroes whose precepts and practice he would often quote. A significant collector of Old Master paintings from Rubens to Claude, another of his idols, he was also patron to young British artists. By 1806 he is an influential, if opinionated, arbiter of taste in the London art world, exhibiting



PLAN OF THE WINTER GARDEN.

N

CHURCH APPROX 85 METRES WEST FROM NEW WALL
HALL APPROX 60 METRES NORTH WEST FROM NEW WALL

Wordsworth's plan of the Winter Garden

work at the Royal Academy as an 'Honorary' (that is, amateur) artist. Although frequently suffering from ill-health or morbid depressions, he sketches or paints every possible weekday.

Like Dorothy to William, Lady Beaumont identifies herself wholly with her husband's interests. In their youth, they were both eager actors in country house theatricals; they first met at one of these performances. She became fluent in French and Italian and is described in 1786 as 'a young woman with some genius and a prodigious eagerness for knowledge and information'. The 'prodigious eagerness', or excessive enthusiasm, could make her seem a little ridiculous, which is why she makes a cameo appearance as Lady Bluemount in Byron's 1823 satire on the Bluestockings.

How did the Wordsworths and the Beaumonts meet? In the summer of 1803 the Beaumonts rented part of Greta Hall where the Coleridge family also resided. Naturally they heard all about Wordsworth from Coleridge and soon met. Before leaving, Sir George made an imaginative present to Wordsworth. Here we touch on a central issue in the relationship which might well have prevented its development. Sir George's sensitive gift was not a crude sum of money, but a practical response to Coleridge's lament that the Wordsworths lived at such a distance. So Sir George bought some land in the neighbourhood and, through Coleridge, gave the deeds to Wordsworth. Wordsworth would then be able to build a house and live there, thus realising that close communion the two men needed to express their poetic visions.

How was he to respond to such munificence, surely patronage on the grand scale? The eight week delay before his answer shows the difficulties it caused him. Even when at last he puts pen to paper, he contrives to present himself as a mere steward who would return the land to Sir George if no building materialised. Honour is satisfied. After the appalling treatment of the Wordsworth family by his father's employer, Lord Lowther, it is understandable that Wordsworth would not care to receive gifts from the landed aristocracy. But Sir George's passionate interest in the arts and his fundamental generosity of temperament eventually overcame this barrier. Also poet and patron shared a tendency to ill-health creating a sort of bond. The death of Wordsworth's brother John led to an exchange of letters of mutual sympathy, Wordsworth baring his soul to Beaumont and condoling with him on his health problems. It became a real friendship on an equal basis, Wordsworth making a return for the many gifts, sometimes even money, with offerings of his own poems in manuscript.

The tone of their correspondence becomes ever more warm and personal over the years – and *genuine*. In the same way Dorothy's letters to Lady Beaumont at first begin 'My dear Madam', later 'My dear Lady Beaumont', and finally 'My dear Friend' – which is how she writes to all her woman friends, with the same inimitable mix of intimate domestic detail and shrewd observation.

From the actors we move to the place of action. This is Sir George's estate at Coleorton in Leicestershire, not far from Ashby de la Zouch. In 1802 he had asked the architect George Dance to present plans for a new mansion. Sir George's well-known indecision had full scope in the planning of the house and grounds, so it was 1808 before the building was finally opened.

The eighteenth century in England had seen an extraordinary flowering in landscape and garden design, associated often with literature and with art. The

transition from the formal and geometrical to the irregular and more 'natural' is begun by Pope. In his 1713 essay 'On Gardens' he writes of 'the amiable simplicity of unadorned Nature'. The century is marked by a battle of styles, culminating in the 'picturesque'. And that is the key word. Beginning with classical models of rural retirement and philosophical contemplation, always closely associated with literature, art becomes the leading principle, the vogue for Claude and Poussin leading the way and all the grand houses vying for the services of Kent and Brown. Kent is also an accomplished artist. Parks and gardens become ideal artistic compositions with foreground, middle ground, and background.

The pioneer of the 'picturesque' is the Reverend William Gilpin, vicar of Boldre in Hampshire where he did much good and where he is buried. The illustrated books of his tours in the wilder parts of England and Scotland changed the way people viewed the landscape, always looking literally for a picture, exactly as in photography today. He and his young brother, Sawrey Gilpin, an animal painter, are visited at Boldre by Sir George as early as August 1795. They become friends. Sir George is also friendly with Uvedale Price and Payne Knight, influential figures in the picturesque movement and both having estates near the Welsh borders in which to demonstrate their landscape aesthetic.

Price was a disciple of Gilpin and is particularly important, first through his 1794 'Essay on the Picturesque', which he defines as 'whatever has been, or might be represented with good effect in painting'; and secondly through his lifelong intimacy with Beaumont, his near contemporary. It was from Beaumont that Price sought advice over the artistic passages in his 'Essay'. And Price was involved throughout in the design of the Coleorton park and gardens.

Naturally, Lady Beaumont is closely concerned in such schemes and apparently it is she who has the idea of a winter garden within the whole. Dorothy writes in February 1807, 'William is engaged in superintending the making of a winter garden for Lady B. (her idea she took from one of Addison's papers in the *Spectator*) but the plan and I may say invention is entirely William's, and a beautiful picture or romance it is'. Lady Beaumont also selected the disused quarry for the garden, of which Dorothy writes to her, 'What above all things I delight in is the piece of ground you have chosen for your winter garden; the hillocks and slopes and the hollow shape of the whole will make it a perfect wilderness when the trees get up'. Note the term 'wilderness'.

Wordsworth's first garden was at the rather grand house in Cockermouth that his father had the use of as Lord Lowther's agent. About this garden, where he played as a child, he writes feelingly in 'The Prelude', but it was not until 1795 when he begins his life with Dorothy at Racedown that he has a garden of his own to manage. It is clear that he was always a practical gardener, one who liked to work with his hands among the plants. How else could he thus address a garden spade? 'Thou art a tool of honour in my hands; / I press thee, through the yielding soil, with pride.' Then at Dove Cottage he had full scope, with Dorothy, to make a garden to their own choice. But what a site! A section of extremely steep rocky fell with a stream running down the side. The stream gave them a well which William dug and he used a rocky outcrop as a base for a terrace, with the moss-hut above, where they could sit and see the sun set over Silver How. He made paths and steps of stone, the trade marks of his garden designs thereafter which always include

Dove Cottage Garden, c. 1903. Stopford Brooke, centre, with his daughter and brother.

ways to wander, terraces for walking to and fro, and arbours for sedentary contemplation. Somehow they got apple trees to flourish on the slopes, the orchard to which they so often refer. Like Addison, Dorothy imported many wild flowers. For them a garden was a place of invitation to be lived in, used, and enjoyed: 'Sweet garden-orchard, eminently fair, / The loveliest spot that man hath ever found.'

Wordsworth was also very aware of grander gardens and of the prevalent taste for the 'picturesque'. When the Wordsworths finally accepted the Beaumont invitation to spend the winter in Hall Farm at Coleorton, Wordsworth wrote a lengthy letter in December 1806 to Lady Beaumont: 'I consider the request that I would undertake the laying out your Winter Garden as a great honour'. He is delighted to have the task. It interests him greatly and gives him an opportunity to make the Beaumonts some return for their giving his family sanctuary. This letter is the principal source for our notions of the garden, since there are no descriptions of the finished scheme to my knowledge.

As in his *Guide to the Lakes*, he begins from an aerial perspective looking down on the garden-to-be from the terrace above. The area concerned is a former quarry or gravel pit scooped out of the hillside only a few hundred metres from the house and the church. The ground falls gently away either side of this hole. The terrace is supported by Dance's handsome and substantial 'New Wall' shown on the plan, itself a continuation of the older walls, all happily facing directly south and ideal for the enclosure proposed. His first concern is to establish 'the sentiment [...] the *feeling* of the place'. This he characterises as a 'spot which Winter cannot touch, which should present no image of chillness, decay, or desolation' as opposed to the natural state elsewhere in winter. The whole should give 'the greatest appearance of depth, shelter, and seclusion possible', each weighty noun here of individual significance. It is to be a place apart, totally private, and offering shelter from the storms and blasts outside. Depth, shelter, seclusion are to be secured by a 'double evergreen

fence' of 'a line of evergreen shrubs, intermingled with Cypress', with 'a Row of Firs' behind them (pictured to the right).

Remains of the 'Evergreen Fence' from road outside, 2011

He elaborates further 'the feeling of the place' by establishing its literary credentials, quoting Addison's *Spectator* Essay 477 of 1712. To digress from the tour, we can usefully look at this now. Addison writes that he is 'a humourist in gardening', his 'several acres' being 'a confusion of kitchen and parterre, orchard and flowering garden' which a foreigner would see 'as a natural wilderness'. There is a 'profusion [of flowers] in several parts', often taken from the wild, and arranged under no system except that of putting together plants that flower in the same season. His 'plantations' follow the same pattern of 'irregularity', trees that suit the soil in miscellaneous conjunction. Note his use of the words 'wilderness' and 'irregularity'. Addison goes on: 'There are as many kinds of gardening as of poetry [...] Wise and London [celebrated landscape gardeners of the day] are our heroic poets; and if as a critic, I may single out any passage of their works to commend, [it would be] that part in the upper garden in Kensington, which was at first nothing but a gravel-pit. It must have been a fine genius for gardening, that could have thought of forming such an unsightly hollow into so beautiful an area'.

Then comes the novel gardening idea:

> I have often wondered that those who are like myself, and love to live in gardens, have never thought of contriving a winter-garden, which would consist of such trees only as never cast their leaves. We have very often little snatches of sun-shine and fair weather in the most uncomfortable parts of the year [...] At such times, therefore, I think there could not be a greater pleasure, than to walk in such a winter-garden as I have proposed. [...] When Nature is in her desolation, [...] there is something unspeakably cheerful in a spot of ground which is covered with trees that smile amidst all the rigours of winter.

So here we have, nearly a century before, an authoritative literary origin for Lady Beaumont's conception, both in converting a quarry or gravel pit and in creating a special garden for winter. Addison, like the Wordsworths, loves to live in his garden. For him, an enclosed garden, a 'hortus inclusus', 'the habitation of our first parents before the fall', brings a sense of 'calmness and tranquillity [and] suggests innumerable subjects for meditation'. Wordsworth, quoting from

Thomson's 'Hymn to Solitude', seeks this same meditation in the seclusion of her 'secret cell, [her] deep recesses'.

Secure behind his 'evergreen fence' in his letter to Lady Beaumont, Wordsworth then makes a circular tour of the quarry, starting from the north at the terrace wall, then going round eastwards, and finishing back where he began. The wall is to be draped 'here and there' with ivy and pyracanthus for its 'scarlet berries'. Pyracanthus berries last well into winter as do the flowers of the Common Ivy if not in shade, so some colour and variety could come from these plants. Together with periwinkle, he uses ivy again on two 'scars', as he calls them, which occur in this tour, one a 'mound of rubbish' and the other the 'remains of the little Quarry'. From the rubbish mound he suggests juniper and yew might 'start out from the sides of the bank'. This is difficult to imagine, especially as 'it might be sprinkled over with primroses'. Would they not be soon overcome by the ivy and periwinkle, admirable plants though they are for total ground cover in shade?

Two deserted cottages on the site present Wordsworth with a difficulty. These could 'break in upon the feeling of seclusion'. To prevent this, no window must 'look directly upon the garden'. He is in two minds over the cottages and half wishes them away but their 'irregular and picturesque form' pleads successfully for retention to support 'a grove of ivy'. Ivy, indifferent as to sun or shade for growth, is going to be hanging and scrambling everywhere. The conventional 'picturesque' is presented as desirable. By this time, the word 'picturesque' seems no longer confined to Claude-like landscape prospects, but has expanded to include anything that catches the eye and also, for Wordsworth, feeds the mind. Finishing the tour back at the wall end he suggests a tall hedge of clipped holly to conceal 'an old ugly' section. He keeps the old steps leading down from the terrace into the winter garden. Then he allows himself an extremely romantic and impractical feature. At the terrace level, a Wych Elm is growing and he wants to bring water to the area and allow it to 'trickle down the bank about its roots'. Here would 'flourish some of those vivid mosses and water plants, a refreshing and beautiful sight in the dead time of the year', presenting 'the most enchanting vision when 'cased in ice'.

Proceeding still beneath the wall, we come to the main open area, facing south. The warmth and protection of the stone behind allow a display of 'the earliest and the latest flowers', he says. This border is to have a traditional boxwood edging, with a row of crocus first, then a row of daffodils, a middle of 'good width' with a host of flowering plants, there to flourish 'richly tufted or bedded over', and finally a row of white lilies under the wall. Interesting that he is still formal in this linear arrangement. There are six spring flowers listed and four autumn, after which he adds 'and many other shrubs and flowers'. He wants a profusion of colour and does not follow Addison in separating spring from autumn. For spring he lists *Hepatica*, a low-growing semi-evergreen flowering plant, another narcissus in the scented jonquil, a member of the bluebell family in the Grape Hyacinth, two Primulas in *Polyanthus* and *Auricula*, and finally the exquisite *Daphne Mezereum* bearing scented white flowers on bare stems in late winter or early spring. For autumn he has two asters, first the well-known Michaelmas Daisy, then what he calls China Asters; also a Winter-cherry, and finally the ever popular Christmas Rose or hellebore. He shows an impressive working familiarity with these plants. Dorothy was at hand, too, with their up-to-date plant encyclopaedia, Withering's *An Arrangement of British*

Plants (1796).

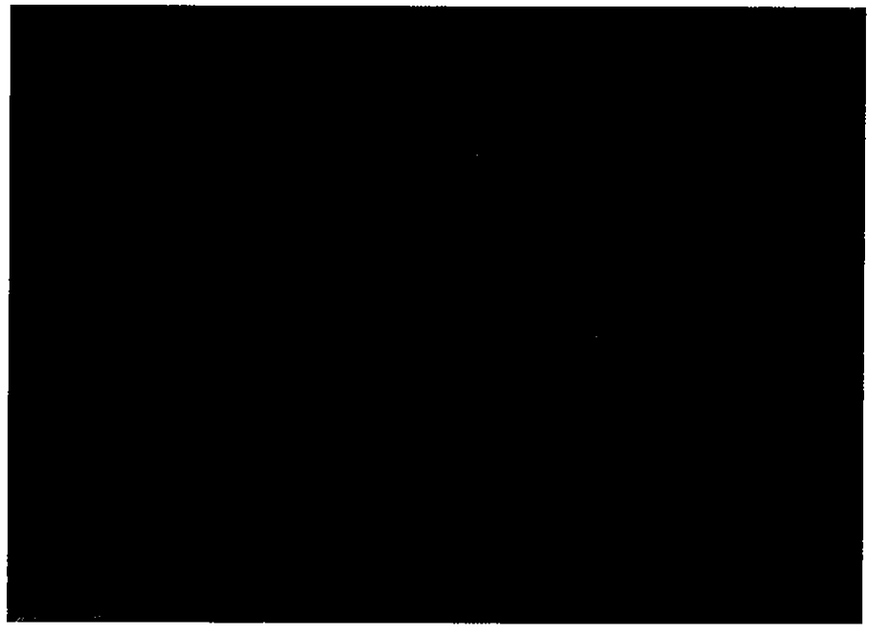
Wordsworth has now taken us full circle on his Path which, he writes, 'should wind round the garden, mostly near the Boundary line'. He then embarks on a second circular tour, this time listing the several features he plans along the way. These he calls 'compartments'. The first, just now discussed, is to be 'open to the sun', backed by the wall, the flower border beneath giving a formal architectural feel to the area. In this sun-spot he apologetically inserts a fountain as its centre-piece, pleading for its 'sparkling water' and noting the light-effect as well as the soothing sound. The apology is because a natural stream would be preferable. The path then runs between the two mounds of spoil, which are to be planted 'with shrubs, trees, and flowers', and continues with 'a line of evergreen shrubs' punctuated with the odd cypress, the columnar shape of which would not cast too much shadow. The first compartment is marked by a busy, varied profusion of plants, its architectural character symbolised by the fountain. By contrast, in the second compartment, simplicity is the keynote, the 'ivied cottage' is 'the presiding image' and wild flowers replace the 'border flowers'. After the second cottage, nothing much happens as we traverse the southern aspect, passing through 'a dark thicket or grove' from which a concealed path leads to the door opening onto the road.

Then the poet's imagination is rapturously excited by a romantic little fish pool. The fish, in their 'bason of Water', are to be brightly coloured against a backdrop of 'monotonous' uniform evergreens and a 'green grass floor'. 'These little creatures are to be the Genii of the Pool and of the place', 'the two mute Inhabitants the only image it should present unless here and there a solitary wild flower'. He foresees the fish may not be hardy enough, still he pursues the vision. Would grass grow happily in such a dark place, let alone a wild flower?

A glade is an 'open space in a wood'. Wordsworth has three glades marked, the first 'open to the sun', the second 'sprinkled with trees', and now the third containing the fish pool, 'belted round with evergreens, quite unvaried and secluded'. He seems to be seeking a special sense of privacy in this compartment. Could it be out of respect for the living creatures within? A later version of the fish pool and a grotto stripped of its shells are visible today. Mystery surrounds this grotto which is

Fish Pond, Grotto, and Beaumont/Wordsworth Memorial Stone, 2011

not in Wordsworth's plan, nor is it mentioned by the two principal writers on the garden, though a 1998 District Council Survey records it 'with shell work by Dorothy Wordsworth and a pebble floor with Star of David pattern'.

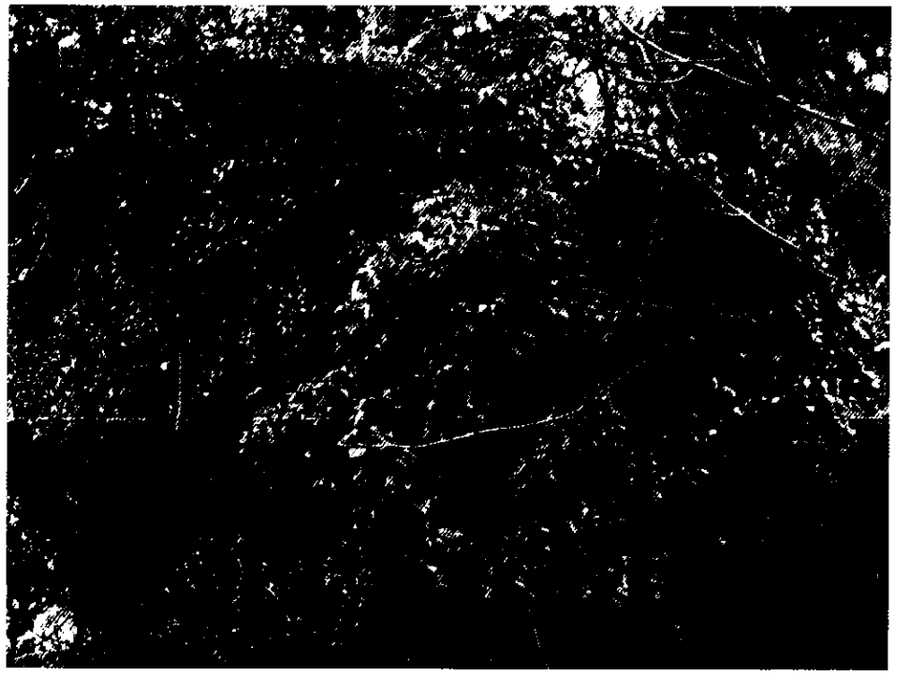


The Grotto, c. 1880

We carry on through another 'dark thicket' to the quarry which was presumably a solid rock face, hacked out. Here Wordsworth adopts Lady Beaumont's suggestion of a pool, reflecting, he hopes, the rocks and the church spire. Probably, though, any reflection would be limited to the surrounding sombre evergreens. The path continues 'under the ridge of rubbish'. This is the third of these mounds. It is to be grassed over, with tall trees planted on its summit 'to give the recess as much depth as possible'. 'Depth' was the first of the three desirable qualities for the garden with which he began his letter. It must be said that this same depth would also exclude light and make for gloom. The path continues 'round a rocky projection'. Steps are then revealed to take you up and out of the darkness 'into a large glade'. A further set of steps lead out of the garden, while the path brings you round to 'the waterfall, for so I will call it' from the roots of the Witch Elm above, 'a refreshing and beautiful sight in the dead time of the year'.

After this comes the *pièce de résistance*, the Alley, which is 'to run down the whole length of the Garden [...] quite straight, the ground perfectly level'. Everything so far has been sinuous, the wall and border at the beginning being the only obviously straight lines; the cottages are so sheathed in ivy that they will become mere rounded mounds (see adjacent image). The beginning and the end are given special significance by Wordsworth, with much elaboration and detail to show the feeling he wants to convey. Not only will the Alley be lined on either side by evergreens, they will be all of the same evergreen, the English Laurel. These will meet overhead, 'over-arching'. The uniformity will help to induce a mood which is

'cloistral, soothing and not stirring the mind or tempting it out of itself'.



Ivy-covered cottage remains, 2011

The image of a cloister is highly significant. Cloisters are where the monks exercise, walking round and round, with light on one side only, little to catch the eye, the whole designed to encourage thought while the thinker perambulates. Within the cloister 'the floor [...] will be a gravel walk mossed over', writes Dorothy. The cloister will not be completely enclosed, as Wordsworth envisages a 'rising bank of green turf' at the far end to 'present a chearful image of sunshine' even when all else is in 'complete shade'. The bank would draw the eye to the prospect beyond and above but would not allow egress. There is one other outlet in the Alley apart from the entrance. It leads to Wordsworth's last feature, returning once more to the man-made character of the first compartment with its fountain and formal border.

As Lady Margaret walks up and down the Alley, she will be aware of a path leading off but so angled that there is no glimpse of anything beyond. Here she will find a 'Bower' or 'little parlour of verdure'. The floor is to be of variegated pebbles, mostly white in tone, which he says can be seen in plenty on 'the sandy roads of the Country'. The white will be in contrast to 'the evergreen walls and ceiling of this apartment'. So, an actual structure may be envisaged, possibly along the lines of the Dove Cottage 'moss hut'? He does not elaborate on this but hints at a circular arrangement by saying 'all around should be a moss'd seat and a small stone table in the midst'. Here she may sit for a few final moments of contemplation before returning to the world above. 'The place is to be consecrated to Winter', he writes towards the close of his letter. The word 'consecrates' elevates and almost sanctifies the garden into something special, dedicated, and holy, offering the 'shelter' and

'seclusion in its depth[s]' with which he began. Since writing these words, my impression has been reinforced by Jessica Fay's recent study of Wordsworth's preoccupation, at this period, with things monastic and religious. To extend the allusion we remember here how Wordsworth later used the image of a cathedral structure when describing his great philosophic poem of the future. That image fits here too, with the alley as nave and the compartments as side chapels or, as he puts it, 'little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses'.

Winter Garden Pines (Pinus Sylvestris), 2011

'My dear Lady Beaumont,' he then writes, 'I have now written you the longest letter I ever wrote in my life'. Its length of nine printed pages testifies to the intense care and deliberation he has given to the work; as in his verse composition, going over and over again in his mind all the detail within the grand narrative. It is difficult to visualise this complex plan but a closer look at some of the evergreens which are to form the bulk of the planting may be helpful. The Scotch Pine sends out its branches in irregular clusters of grey-green clouds and would form, indeed still does in part, a majestic backdrop to the garden (see image above). It thrives on poor soil and is an ancient inhabitant of our islands. The bark has a red tinge and breaks up with age into plates surrounded by dark wavy lines.

The yew, another old native of Britain, was well-known to Wordsworth who

gave and planted eight of them to enhance Grasmere churchyard. They have always been associated with sacred sites. These incredibly tough trees can survive for several thousand years. There is now a towering dark mass of them along the west bank of the garden where they form the outer fence he planned. They have a peeling red-brown bark and their needles are almost black-green and glossy above, much lighter beneath. The berry-like fruit is red. Wordsworth waxes eloquent when writing of the four Borrowdale yews 'Upon whose grassless floor of red-brown hue, / By sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged', showing the intimacy that only comes from close study. He also celebrated the holly-grove beside the drive into Alfoxden when a sudden hailstorm made the dead leaves on the ground 'jump and spring', 'dancing to the minstrelsy', he writes, well before those daffodils at Ullswater. His lifelong devotion to this plant is well-known. As well as its glossy dark green leaves and red berries in winter, there are small white flowers in spring. It was to be a major contributor to his planting plans for the Winter Garden.

Of other evergreens, he mentions box and cypress in passing but perhaps the most important for him was the evergreen he chose for his grand central feature, the great Alley. 'Laurels I think the best as they grow tall, and so much faster than any other evergreen I know'. This could mean either the English or the Portugal Laurel, both of which he knewand were in Dove Cottage garden, and both still remain in the existing Coleorton garden. It has generally been taken to be the English Laurel, *Prunus Laurocerasus* which had become very popular in gardens during the eighteenth century. Botanically it is a plum or cherry, *prunus*, specifically a cherry-laurel, *laurocerasus*. It has no relation to the classical laurel of our poets' laureate, *Laurus nobilis*, the Sweet Bay we use in cooking. The English Laurel is celebrated by the friend of Gray and, with him, a fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, the Reverend William Mason. In his delightful poem of the 1770s, 'The English Garden', he writes:

> her glittering green
> Shall England's Laurel bring; swift shall she spread
> Her broad-leav'd shade, and float it fair, and wide,
> Proud to be called an inmate of the soil.
> Let England prise this daughter of the East.

Valued for its vigour, the laurel's leaves have a glossy bright green upper surface which becomes a dark olive green with age. They would make a monumental statement, massed together in the Alley. If untrimmed, the Laurel bears upright white flowers in spring that look like candles.

Mason uses the phrase 'glittering green' of the laurel which brings to mind one seasonal characteristic that Wordsworth does not mention, the low winter sun. The effect of this on a garden where the near-horizontal sun's rays can reach is quite spectacular, a shimmering and glittering, especially if there is any movement of air to make the foliage tremble. But Wordsworth's appetite for 'depth' in his garden may preclude any dazzling effects of this nature, except perhaps in the first compartment which is designed particularly for the sun.

Wordsworth's letter was probably enclosed with Dorothy's of 23 December 1806 to Lady Beaumont. A month later Dorothy writes again to Lady Beaumont: 'It is a most delightful morning. My brother and Sister are gone to the winter garden,

he visits the workmen generally twice in the day, and one of us accompanies him.' Wordsworth is preoccupied with the Winter Garden work, dealing with the head gardener Mr Craig, a vital figure in the realisation of the project; 'industrious, ingenious, and faithful' as Dorothy writes.

Wordsworth shows sensitivity to Craig and gives him credit for not overtly resenting the design being given to Wordsworth rather than himself. He is therefore reluctant to give Craig advice on other parts of the grounds as the Beaumonts had suggested. He and Craig make expeditions together to a Nottingham nursery for plants, so it must have been an effective partnership. They were lucky with the weather. When Dorothy wrote to Lady Beaumont in mid-February, the clearance work and soil preparation were virtually finished. She talks then of their having enjoyed for a week or more 'the sweetest weather possible', even primroses showing. This would allow planting to proceed during the traditional winter months.

But what did this intricate design look like when realised? We do have one reaction while it is still being planted. Lord Redesdale writes to the Beaumonts in January 1807 and makes the obvious point about the potentially overwhelming gloom, from the shade of the multitude of evergreen trees and shrubs, particularly in the Alley. Wordsworth replies to Lady Margaret:

> Our winter garden is four parts out of five planned for the sun; if the alley or bower, the only parts exclusively designed for shade should appear too damp or gloomy, you pass them by; but I am sure this will not always be the case; and even in those times when it is so, will not a peep into that gloom make you enjoy the sunshine the more?

He is on the defensive and will not yield the point. I have felt all along that the result of these plans, if realised as stated, would have meant in a few years a massive growth of evergreens, forming an impenetrable roofing in many parts of the garden. No plants grow beneath holly, yew and laurel when in their full vigour and height; nor would much light be admitted, let alone the low rays of the winter sun. I have not found any account of the garden as it became in reality, so it remains largely Wordsworth's dream together with the fragments of masonry and evergreens that survive today. Similarly, William Knight, in his *Life of Wordsworth*, calls it 'an almost ideal garden – variety and unity combined, in a way in which they have perhaps never been actually carried out'. Cautiously enigmatic!

When this garden is being discussed, time and again the term picturesque is used both by Wordsworth and others. It seems, therefore, that Wordsworth is being fashionably conventional in his design, with its irregularity and also in its succession of features, similar to the 'stations' or viewpoints that the tourist was to follow, Gilpin in hand. Such features were a commonplace of gardens such as Shenstone's 1740s popular 'Leasowes', visited by Beaumont and Wordsworth together in 1810; and of Kent's 1730s 'Rousham' where you wandered from one statue, grotto or water feature to another. There is a didactic element in Wordsworth's similar provision, almost you feel he wants to direct the mind of the visitor at least to the extent of inducing a particular mood or feeling. This is substantiated in the sonnet to Lady Beaumont which he wrote in these months

about the winter garden project:

> [...] this paradise for winter hours,
> A labyrinth Lady! which your feet shall rove.
> Yes, when the sun of life more feebly shines,
> Becoming thoughts, I trust, of solemn gloom
> Or of high gladness you shall hither bring;

Where Wordsworth is decidedly unconventional is in his dominant feature of the Alley. Price, an Olympian in garden design, regretted the way it cut the garden in two down the middle. Shenstone, several decades earlier, had poured scorn on 'straight-lined avenues [which] must give actual pain to a person of taste' when walking, as Shenstone did, 'immured betwixt Lord D's high-shorn yew hedges'.

But Wordsworth's Alley had a roof as well as walls, a green tunnel with only fitful light through the bushes. It is this feature, which crowns the design, that I think of as uniquely Wordsworthian. It is opposed to contemporary taste and I wonder if it's over-arching laurels have their origin in John Wordsworth's walk in the fir trees along from Dove Cottage? Its mention in Saeko Yoshikawa's 2007 paper probably led me to this consideration. Wordsworth writes of this winter walk:-

> I found beneath the roof
> Of that perennial shade, a cloistral place
> Of refuge, with an unincumbered floor.
> Here, in safe covert, on the shallow snow,
> And, sometimes, on a speck of visible earth,
> The redbreast near me hopped [...]

It is singular that the poet uses the word 'cloistral' in both contexts and it is surely not fanciful to see a connection between his winter perambulations in the shelter of Grasmere's 'John's Grove' and his Winter Garden Alley for Lady Beaumont. Also she is always pictured as solitary when walking there, as were the brothers when walking in John's Grove.

Wordsworth revisited the garden several times. His expectations were high. After all, he had written that it would give pleasure in six years and be a paradise in fifty! Unfortunately, there is no substantial record from any source of what was seen or felt. We do know that predictably the garden soon became too near Dorothy's 'perfect wilderness' and that Price recommended 'ferocious surgery'. The property remained in the Beaumont family until 1946 when it was sold to the Coal Board. The Board decided the Winter Garden was a choice site for their manager's house. It was built at the southern end near the road, with a large garden behind up to the terrace wall. In 1997 British Coal sold the property to a development consortium who converted the Hall into individual apartments and built an estate within the former service areas. The manager's house and former Winter Garden remain an individual property separate from this complex.

Wordsworth's many inscriptions on stone are all preserved *in situ* in the main garden, as is the large smooth rock which Beaumont imported as a memorial to another of his heroes, the artist Richard Wilson.

Beaumont/Wordsworth Memorial Stone, 2011

It is sad that the cedar blew down which Beaumont and Wordsworth planted in June 1807 to commemorate their collaboration and friendship. But the stone with the poet's verses remains. The pines, the yews, some Portugal Laurels, much holly and a wilderness of English laurel, together with ubiquitous ivy still represent the work of Mr Craig and the Wordsworths in the winter of 1806 to 1807. The fountain never happened, nor did the Wych Elm water feature. The mysterious grotto, the fish pool, and the other pool, which was to mirror the church spire, survive today.

The original steps leading down from the terrace above, a remodelled terrace wall and the ivy-clad remains of a chimney breast from one of the cottages are extant. What is now known as Scott's seat can be seen, hollowed out by the hands of the Wordsworth family from the soft sandstone. 'This little Niche, unconscious of

Scott's Seat, 2011

decay, / Perchance may still survive', wrote Wordsworth. And so it does.

All these remains and memorials of the past have one unifying theme, the warm and lasting friendship between the Wordsworths and the Beaumonts, Dorothy and Lady Margaret as well as William and Sir George. 'Poet and Patron', yes, in material terms, but emotionally and intellectually a relationship of brotherly love and understanding. There is no more telling testament to this bond than the poem Wordsworth wrote on his Italian tour in 1837, 'The Pine of Monte Mario at Rome'. This tree had been under sentence to be felled. Sir George, hearing of this, had paid the owner of the land on which it stood to let it live. It was still standing when William Knight visited, probably in the 1880s. Wordsworth writes:

> But when I learned the Tree was living there,
> Saved from the sordid axe by Beaumont's care,
> Oh, what a gush of tenderness was mine!
> The rescued Pine-Tree, with its sky so bright
> And cloud-like beauty, rich in thoughts of home,
> Death-parted friends, and days too swift in flight,
> Supplanted the whole majesty of Rome [...]

On this visit, Wordsworth allowed himself a spontaneous gesture of affection which is even more powerful than the words. The Fenwick note reads: 'May I venture to add here, that having ascended the Monte Mario, I could not resist embracing the trunk of this interesting monument of my departed friend's feelings for the beauties of nature, and the power of that art which he loved so much [...]'

A 'gush of tenderness' indeed!

Hastings

Glimpses of Tranquillity: A Reading of *The Ruined Cottage*

Oliver Clarkson

I will begin not by posing the question, 'What is the essential Wordsworth?', but by quoting a passage from the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* that reveals something of what Wordsworth thought 'essential' about his own poetry: 'Low and rustic life was generally chosen,' he remarks, 'because in that condition, the *essential passions of the heart* find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language'.[1] It seems to me that those 'essential passions' chosen by Wordsworth as the subject of his poetry resemble the passions stirred in readers of his verse; not least when we encounter a poem as affecting as *The Ruined Cottage*. Wordsworth revised *The Ruined Cottage* restlessly across most of his writing life, and the poem exists in a number of valuable forms.[2] But in every incarnation it has possessed the power to awaken 'the essential passions of the heart'. Coleridge called it 'one of the most beautiful poems in the language'; F. R. Leavis thought it 'the finest thing that Wordsworth wrote', and 'certainly the most disturbingly poignant'; and it was *The Ruined Cottage* that provoked perhaps the most heartfelt admission in all of Wordsworthian criticism: 'In the last resort', said Jonathan Wordsworth, 'literary criticism is personal: one has to fall back on "This moves me," "This doesn't"'.[3] Readers and critics alike are moved deeply by *The Ruined Cottage*.

This essay pays tribute to Wordsworth's greatest tragic poem. In particular, I focus upon the distinguishing characteristics of the poem's language, as well as Wordsworth's ways of balancing with majestic touch issues of suffering and consolation, intensity and relief, appearance and truth, the spoken and the unspeakable.[4]

~ I ~

The Ruined Cottage tells a story everybody knows well. In the wake of poor harvests, Robert, an industrious weaver, is forced to enlist in the army, leaving behind his wife, Margaret, and their two young children. Margaret's protracted decline in Robert's absence, as recounted by the venerable pedlar, Armytage, becomes the poem's principal concern. But this is never a narrative of gripping twists and turns.

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[1] 'Preface', in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (Harlow, 1992), 55-87 (60). From this point onwards, all emphasis, unless stated otherwise, will be my own.

[2] Here I attend to the *MS. D* version of 1799. Useful discussions of the manuscript history of the poem can be found in *The Ruined Cottage and the Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, NY, 1979); and Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (Oxford, 2011), 47-82.

[3] *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols (London, 1835), II, 69; F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London, 1936), 179; *Music of Humanity*, 152.

[4] This essay began life as a lecture given to the Wordsworth Winter School in February 2014, under the theme of 'The Essential Wordsworth'. I owe thanks to Richard Gravil for the invitation to speak.

From the moment the poet and Armytage meet beside the 'four naked walls' (31) of Margaret's cottage, it is the force of the telling that moves us:

> I slaked my thirst and to the shady bench
> Returned, and while I stood unbonneted
> To catch the motion of the cooler air
> The old Man said, 'I see around me here
> Things which you cannot see [...]' (64-68)

Armytage's words coax our imaginations, and endeavour to forsake their place in time. His repeated 'see' elevates his vision into a realm beyond or before 'here', as though enabling us to glimpse something, even as we see nothing; and what Armytage 'sees' is a scene whose every detail is tinged with his sadness of knowing what it once was. He continues:

> 'we die, my Friend,
> Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
> And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
> Dies with him or is changed, and very soon
> Even of the good is no memorial left.' (68-72)

The poem begins where it will end: amid the ruins of change, where 'or is changed' only tenuously reconciles whoever 'dies' with the 'earth' that continues to live. Without those who cared for this 'nook', 'a bond / Of brotherhood' between man and nature 'is broken' (85): the cottage is 'Stripped' of its 'garb' of 'houshold flowers' (105), and trickling waters are no longer touched by human hands. Then from 'we die' we learn of the 'she' (100) who is now lost: Margaret, whom Armytage 'loved' as his own 'child' (95-96). In their way of mingling composure and unrest, the lines following these are characteristic of *The Ruined Cottage*; and quite unlike anything else Wordsworth wrote:

> 'She is dead,
> The worm is on her cheek, and this poor hut,
> Stripped of its outward garb of houshold flowers,
> Of rose and sweet-briar, offers to the wind
> A cold bare wall whose earthy top is tricked
> With weeds and the rank spear-grass. She is dead,
> And nettles rot and adders sun themselves
> Where we have sate together [...]' (103-10)

This is blank verse of the serenest delicacy; but it has an anaphoric pulse ('She is dead [...] She is dead') whose dogged vulnerability surrenders to an absence which refuses to die.

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge celebrated Wordsworth as a poet who guides us out of a state in which 'we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand'.[5] Yet Wordsworth's primary accomplishment in *The Ruined Cottage* is not that of offering any concrete 'understanding' of loss, but of

[5] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton, 1983), II, 5.

using language in such a way as allows us to 'feel' something of what Armytage feels: 'So familiarly / Do I perceive her manner, and her look / And presence,' he says of Margaret, 'and so deeply do I feel / Her goodness' (365-68). These lines, as much entranced as they are entrancing, feel their way towards fantasy in a 'beautiful and deeply imaginative' way, as Jonathan Wordsworth says,[6] even as the recurrent 'her manner', 'her look', 'her goodness', makes efforts to augment a dissolving vision. For Armytage, Margaret is 'A human being destined to awake / To human life, or something very near to human life' (372-74), where his speech-rhythms reach for 'something' that remains elusive, and the unremitting phrasing ('human...human...human...') enacts a would-be resuscitation. These examples serve as paradigms for the way the poem's language at once deadens fantasy and holds delicately on to illusions of life.

Armytage's account is always an elegy to another elegy, a feeling for what has already been felt; and key to the poem's achievement is its capacity to carry those feelings into the hearts of poet and reader. So when Armytage remembers Margaret reimagining Robert, who plays with his children as his hopes and health dwindle, the moment reverberates through time, and through and beyond the lines we read:

> 'Every smile',
> Said Margaret to me here beneath these trees,
> 'Made my heart bleed.'
>
> At this the old man paused,
> And looking up to those enormous elms
> He said, ''Tis now the hour of deepest noon.' (183-87)

If the demonstrative pronouns ('these', 'those') lure us into hearing Margaret's voice as though in the present, Wordsworth's interlacing of direct speech and narrative voice dramatises the reciprocation of feelings.[7] We sense that Armytage's 'pause' responds to a moment of agonised contemplation, one suggested by the interspersed line of narrative whose presence stalls Margaret's voice between 'Every smile' and 'Made my heart bleed'. Soon the poet himself will succumb to a 'heartfelt chillness' (213).

Every response bears testimony to another as all who speak and listen are suspended in 'one sadness' (84); and although 'here' may give hope that all is 'as it was then', always there is the shadow of the unsaid: 'She is dead [...] She is dead'.

~ II ~

Wordsworth never allows us to be passive readers of *The Ruined Cottage*. Early on we know little of what will unfold: only that Margaret's 'industrious' (120) husband, 'Sober and steady' (121), is falling quietly to pieces. But the moment beneath the elms prompts Armytage to pause for breath, and to question, on Wordsworth's

[6] *Music of Humanity*, 93.

[7] Wordsworth's multi-layered narrative—in which Margaret's tragedy is lived, told, and retold—continually achieves this sort of effect. Karl Kroeber describes Wordsworth's 'art of superimposition'; and, for K. E. Smith, the poem involves 'complex patternings which overlay the "base-narrative"'. See Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Landscape Vision* (Madison, WI, 1975), 117; and K. E. Smith, '"A pile of better thoughts": Margaret, Silent Suffering and Silent Blessing', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 145 (2009), 40-49 (42).

behalf, our responses to Margaret's tragedy. As he sits amid the 'repose and peace' (188) of the natural world, Armytage wonders why the human mind, so restless, and so debilitated by the grief it feels, must intrude upon tranquillity oblivious to its sadness:

> 'Why should a tear be in an old man's eye?
> Why should we thus with an untoward mind
> And in the weakness of humanity
> From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
> To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
> And feeding on disquiet thus disturb
> The calm of Nature with our restless thoughts?' (192-98)

An untoward mind, Armytage conjectures, is one whose 'thoughts' succumb to grief-ridden sympathies and contemplations. But if he tries to steer us away from feelings that threaten to overwhelm us, Armytage's speech seems all too vulnerable to the object of its resistance. In those reiterated questions, 'Why should...', 'Why should...', we hear his voice yielding to 'restless thoughts', before 'should we *thus*' generates a moment in which strength of feeling overrides the task of articulation. Armytage poses these questions in an effort to achieve 'natural wisdom', and even 'comfort'; but the questions shield us at the same moment from a weaker, more heartfelt truth: that a tear is in the old man's eye.

Questions of this kind persist throughout *The Ruined Cottage*, as we are asked to treat our 'wounds' with possible 'cures'.[8] Sometimes we do feel cured, as does the poet himself when Armytage pauses midway through his account: 'when he ended there was in his face / Such easy chearfulness, a look so mild / That for a little time it stole away / All recollection, and that simple tale / Passed from my mind like a forgotten sound' (200-04). But in '*like* a forgotten sound' there is already the plaintive hint that words have moved on from that cheerful moment, that this 'simple tale' cannot, after all, be 'forgotten'. *The Ruined Cottage* is continually shaped by time-ridden rhythms of this kind, rhythms which repeat those transitions between emotions that characterise Margaret's tragic heroism: shifts from despair to cheerfulness, cheerfulness to despair. Armytage speaks later of Margaret's 'many tears', but within moments everything brightens into joy: 'with a brighter eye she looked around / As if she had been shedding tears of joy' (280-81). Margaret, we are told, 'sent a blessing after me / With tender chearfulness and with a voice / That seemed the very sound of happy thoughts' (286-88). 'Tender chearfulness' captures well the delicacy of Margaret's optimism. The more we press at these lines, the more fragile they seem: '*as if* she had been shedding'; 'That *seemed* the very sound'. Language in *The Ruined Cottage* is prone to such minute falls and lifts, as though anticipating inevitable turns into sadness and solemnity, before attempting to rise from the depths of sorrow.

Some of the most powerful examples of this come when we hear Margaret's own voice, bare and heartfelt, as it traces the shape and shapelessness of her sadness: 'I have slept / Weeping, and weeping I have waked' (354-55). 'The

[8] I borrow these terms from Helen Vendler's fine commentary on Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', in *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, MA, 1988). Vendler suggests that the Ode depends 'on a powerfully plotted succession of [...] "wounds" and "cures"' (107).

repetition, alliteration, inversion', as Jonathan Wordsworth says, is 'beautiful in context',[9] the lines, for me, garnering their power from the way their literal intensity tempers the risk that lilting rhythms will carry us along too easily. 'Weeping', we soon understand, almost cancels out 'I have slept'; 'And weeping I have waked' brings to bear the sheer relentlessness of heartbreak, tears as a new day begins. Margaret's voice moves to the rhythms of pain, but within that voice, even here, there is a counter-rhythm of endurance.

Hope, cheerfulness, relief; such feelings, though glimpsed momentarily in *The Ruined Cottage*, can never rest on their laurels. Haunted by a sense of temporarily, if sustainable for 'a little time' they will soon be 'stole away' (202). As Armytage states, 'there often is found / In mournful thoughts, and always might be found, / A power to virtue friendly' (227-29). This sounds like reassurance, and to some extent it is. But 'often' offers a note of qualification; and 'always might', for its part, comes to feel more like a 'sometimes', even a hopeful hit or miss. It is so often the little words—the 'oftens', 'seems', 'mights', and 'as ifs'—that hold the greatest power in *The Ruined Cottage*. They trace the flow and ebb of imagination, transitions between the mind's tendency to grieve and gather itself in the hope of comfort.

~ III ~

In *The Ruined Cottage* Wordsworth achieves a tragic language that is wholly his own, and whose authenticity lies in its willingness to dwell in the shadow of what is barely said or left unsaid. The poem's language is 'hauntingly under-emphasized', as Michael O'Neill has it, its 'characteristic idiom', says Paul Sheats, depending on 'controlled understatement'.[10] Partly this is because Wordsworth wants to avoid decorating his 'tale of silent suffering'; but also because he recognises that, as human beings immersed in our most troubled moments, we find it difficult to speak our minds openly, if we can bear to speak at all. At every stage we meet sights and sounds haunted by meanings not made explicit, beginning with the eerie state of silence from which Robert departs for the army: Armytage says he 'had not heart' (270) to take farewell of Margaret, but we suspect he had too much heart. Margaret sees only 'A purse of gold' (264). 'I trembled at the sight,' she says, 'for I knew it was his hand / That placed it...' (264-66). There, 'trembled' succeeds and is balanced out by 'I knew', a way of putting things that shows how devastation is always entwined with Margaret's heroic level-headedness. Robert's departure must remain unspoken, as though enunciating a sequence of words risks sealing dreaded fates. But for Margaret, who is left to decode the clues of tragedy, the moment of realisation is no less shocking, no less painful, even as it is brought tenuously into line by her composure. *The Ruined Cottage* asks us to measure what we 'see' and hear against what we suspect, in our heart of hearts, to be unalterably true.

Margaret's own feelings are left largely unspoken. She 'turned her head away / Speechless' (248-49), Armytage recalls at one point; 'She did not look at me' (379), he says at another. And yet, in her cottage and garden, Wordsworth founds a symbol for her decline that results not merely from poetic licence, since it was

[9] *Music of Humanity*, 137.

[10] O'Neill, 'Silent Thought', 16; Paul D. Sheats, *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 139.

Robert's 'hand' (477) that attended to the cottage. On Armytage's first call to Margaret after Robert's departure, he is on the lookout for signs of change: 'Her cottage in its outward look', he observes, '*appeared* / As chearful as before' (305-06). But reassurance is tinged with that familiar tone of unrest. Again the seemingly neutral words matter more than any others. 'Appeared' suggests that what Armytage sees does not quite tell the whole story; and there is 'as before', a phrase bearing tragic undertones elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry. We think of Michael, who, after Luke's demise in the city, 'still looked up upon the sun. / And listened to the wind; and *as before* / Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep'.[11] In those lines, 'as before' fails to conquer abiding feelings of unease, just as it fails to do so in *The Ruined Cottage*, where it indicates that something or even everything beneath the surface has changed.

'In any shew / Of neatness little *changed*,' Armytage says, as he approaches the cottage, 'but that I thought / The honeysuckle crowded round the door' (306-08). There is, I think, something unexpectedly powerful about 'I thought'. We hear in that phrase somebody who wishes to be mistaken: 'I thought something looked amiss; but I hoped I was reading too much into things'. But sadly there is more to come, as that word 'changed' returns: Armytage 'turned aside / And strolled into her garden.—It was *changed*: / The unprofitable bind weed spread his bells / From side to side' (312-15). He awaits the return of Margaret, who wanders aimlessly in the fields: 'The spot though fair seemed very desolate;' he reflects sorrowfully, 'The longer I remained more desolate' (328-29).[12] Soon Margaret comes into view, like a ghost of the person she once was:[13] 'Her face was pale and thin, her figure too / Was *changed*' (338-39).[14] As well as the familiar force of 'changed', we feel troubled by nature's spreading and crowding against Margaret's bodily thinning and discoloration, even if this sense of natural 'obliviousness' may, by the end of the poem, offer some sort of consolation. Then Margaret admits with heart-breaking self-awareness her own changed or changing state: 'Many days / About the fields I wander [...] for I am *changed*'. But this change has a specific cause. Margaret has lost her eldest child to a parish apprenticeship. Half of what she claims to live for has gone. It is typical that the poem should deliver its news in stages. Language hovers, stalls, and circles back. It shares in Armytage's hope that Margaret's decline might at any moment be stopped or saved by some quasi-divine intervention.

~ IV ~

The onset of despair in *The Ruined Cottage* can only be slowed for so long. On Armytage's next visit things have got much worse. Margaret '*seemed* the same / In person [and] appearance,' he says, 'but her house / Bespoke a sleepy hand of negligence' (399-401). He sees from the defaced 'weeds' and 'knots of withered

[11] 'Michael', in *Lyrical Ballads*, 341-57. Lines 461-63.

[12] Peter McDonald calls this a 'desperately closed couplet'. *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford, 2012), 90.

[13] Jonathan Wordsworth notes the progression from 'direct statement' to 'objective comment on Margaret' to 'her own words'. *Music of Humanity*, 137.

[14] As O'Neill writes, 'The ominous undertow carried by "changed" increases in force here, as Wordsworth invites his reader to enter imaginatively into the poem. The reader, in turn, responds to the emphasis given to "Was changed", held back across the line-ending'. See 'Silent Thought', 15.

grass' (415) that 'poverty and grief / Were now come nearer to her' (413-14). 'Now', because change has come; but that adverb marks the ominous culmination of what has always been coming. The poem's trajectory descends. Margaret's tears fall; 'Her eye-lids *drooped*; her eyes were *downward* cast' (377); 'her voice was *low*' (379); her face is 'sad and *drooping*' (396). In her cottage books lie 'scattered here and there, open or shut / As they had chanced to *fall*' (408-09). In her garden 'unwieldy wreaths / Had dragged the rose [...] and bent it *down* to earth' (315-17). On the horizon 'the sun was *sinking* in the west' (325). As Margaret falls, her whole world succumbs to darkness.

And yet Wordsworth's treatment of Margaret's tragedy is never single-mindedly morbid. Its beauty is born out of sorrow both countered and intensified by hopes of Robert's return that are always fading but never quite faded. In her capacity to keep on going, Margaret's bravery is nothing short of heroic; but it is mostly caught in gestures. When Armytage kisses her babe, he notices that 'tears stood' in her 'eyes' (389). The word 'stood' arrests Margaret's tears in motion, conflating her impulse to grieve and her capacity to carry on. Later, a seemingly innocuous comment bears deeper meaning: 'Margaret stood near, her infant in her arms, / And, seeing that my eye was on the tree, / She said, 'I fear it will be dead and gone / Ere Robert come again.' (423-26) 'The tree' enables Margaret to deflect fears concerning her own health and that of her infant, and to evade the question of whether Robert 'will' come again. His existence remains tremulously but necessarily indeterminate. As Armytage says, 'if he lived, she knew not that he lived; / If he were dead, she knew not he was dead' (397-99).

In what turns out to be Armytage's final visit to Margaret's cottage, the news comes of her baby's death: 'her little babe was dead / And she was left alone' (436-37). We wonder if this is it. But for her children, Margaret said earlier in the poem, 'She had no wish to live,' and 'that she must die / Of sorrow' (430-31). Yet this proves not to be true. Both of her children are now dead or gone, but Margaret continues to live, debilitated by her hope: 'My tears / Have flowed', she says, 'as if my body were not such / As others are, and I could never die' (355-57). For grief alone Margaret 'could' allow herself to die; for hope, and for her love of Robert, she must go on living, even if that means living for an impossible future. But we always believe in Margaret's hope; or at least we believe that she believes there is a glimmer of something worth hoping for.

Robert's return grows less and less likely as each day passes. But while not utterly impossible, Margaret's imagination remains haunted by visions of the past that cast darkness and light over the future. We, as readers, get a sense of this owing to Wordsworth's 'careful development of hints dropped earlier in the poem', as Jonathan Wordsworth puts the matter.[15] When Armytage remarks that 'Five tedious years / [Margaret] *lingered* in unquiet widowhood, / A wife and widow' (446-47), the doubling splices two states which at once justify ('wife') and cancel out ('widow') Margaret's purpose in lingering on. But the verb itself has also lingered. 'Sir, I feel / The story *linger* in my heart' (362-63), Armytage confessed earlier; and we might also recall that 'In disease / [Robert] *lingered* long' (149-50), a circumstance that turns a paragon of industry into shadow of his former self. Other examples

[15] *Music of Humanity*, 136.

show how Robert's departure sets a tragedy in motion. Margaret's 'poor hut / *Sunk* to decay' (477-78), just as Armytage's 'mind', against his own warnings, '*Sinks*, yielding to the foolishness of grief' (116-17), where the verbs remember the dreadful social conditions which initiate Robert's struggles, when stricken by 'two blighting seasons', 'Many rich / *Sunk* down as in a dream' (141-42). Then the word 'distant', in its forms as noun and adjective, haunts the poem following the description of Robert joining 'a troop / Of soldiers going to a *distant* land' (268-69). As Margaret's life is fading away, Armytage sees her '*distant* a few steps' (337), and remembers how 'her eye / Was busy in the *distance*, shaping things / Which made her heart beat quick' (455-57). Among the most heart-wrenching in the poem, these lines show Margaret reaching for Robert through shapes that forever grow more distant.

~ V ~

One of the hardest things about reading *The Ruined Cottage* is our knowledge that things can only end badly. From the beginning the cottage is 'changed', as Armytage said, and 'She'—Margaret—'is dead'. Another poet might have performed some valiant act of recovery; but not Wordsworth. There are no miracles, no second-comings. Margaret's circumstances corrode, and her imagination is brought poignantly to life by poetry that seems at once arrested in time and subject to time's fated progress, a double-motion exemplified by the ever-recurring adverb, 'still'. 'Yet I saw the idle loom / *Still* in its place' (431-32), Armytage recalls, where, amid the chaos of Margaret's cottage and garden, Robert's belongings remain in chilling, museum-like order. Margaret, we are told, '*still* would quit / The shade and look abroad' (453-54), and would 'dare to repeat / The same sad question' (475-76) to passers-by, 'with faltering voice, / Expecting *still* to learn her husband's fate' (466-67). Armytage, meanwhile, '*still* would ask / For him whom she had lost' (442-43). But, when no answer comes, '*still* Margaret's heart was more sad' (470). As an adjective, 'still' signifies a motionless state; as an adverb it makes any act of life torturing for its open-endedness: in all that Margaret 'dares to repeat' there is the repressed admission that 'what I seek I cannot find' (351). But Margaret's spirit does endure, as her pulse grows fainter, up until her death, and even—it might seem—beyond it:

> Yet *still*
> She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds
> Have parted hence; and *still* that length of road
> And this rude bench one torturing hope endeared,
> Fast rooted to her heart, and here, my friend,
> In sickness she remained, and here she died,
> Last human tenant of these walls. (486-92)

If these lines describe an ending, they remain alive to tragedy's living presence. For Harold Bloom, Margaret 'dies, *still* constant in her torturing hope';[16] for Jonathan Wordsworth, 'she dies, *still* hoping'.[17] Both critics' phrasing ensures that the event of

[16] Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Ithaca, NY, 1961), 195. Bloom's preceding sentence reads: 'Her remaining child dies, and she is left alone in her solitude, *still* hoping for her husband's return'.
[17] *Music of Humanity*, 144.

death comes prior to the prolongation of 'hope'. This seems true to Margaret's enduring tenacity, to the force of her tragedy that outlives her substance.

It was with these lines that Wordsworth concluded an early version of the poem.[18] They make for a harsh, abrupt ending. But Wordsworth must have come to feel this, too, because he proceeded to add forty-six more lines which depict the poet's response to Margaret's tragedy: 'I turned aside in weakness,' he says, 'nor had power / To thank him for the tale which he had told' (495-96). In the weakness, the powerlessness, the speechlessness, Wordsworth conflates those uneasy gestures of response that characterise *The Ruined Cottage* as a whole. But then, in a typical rhythmic shift, the poet's mood lightens. He 'trace[s] with milder interest / That secret spirit of humanity / Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies / Of nature, 'mid her plants, her weeds, and flowers, / And silent overgrowings, *still* survived' (502-06). The adverb that defined Margaret in life now defines her in death, since her spirit of bravery can 'still' be traced amid nature's flowers of persistence.[19] Armytage, in turn, encourages the poet to leave behind his 'sorrows' (508). What was conceived as natural 'change' preventing memorialisation at the poem's beginning might now be viewed as evidence of a consolatory changelessness, of nature's power to absorb the pains of a single human tragedy into its larger, immortal life:

> 'My Friend, enough to sorrow have you given,
> The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
> Be wise and chearful, and no longer read
> The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
> She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.
> I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
> By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
> As once I passed did to my heart convey
> So still an image of tranquillity,
> So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
> Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> The passing shews of being leave behind,
> Appeared an idle dream that could not live
> Where meditation was. I turned away
> And walked along my road in happiness.' (508-25)

I think this passage takes us to the heart of what is original or even 'essential' about Wordsworth's power. It is an elusive power, residing in poetry that is not easily paraphrasable. Given the pains of Margaret's life, Armytage wonders, how does nature remain 'so beautiful', and so tranquil? Cannot this scene of 'calm' help us to

[18] The *MS. B* version of March 1798.
[19] Margaret's 'death comes as a release,' writes Duncan Wu, 'but also as a necessary transition into her continuing existence.' See 'Wordsworth's Poetry to 1798', *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge, 2003), 22-37 (36).

understand Margaret's tragedy as 'simply one detail of an all-encompassing and harmonious pattern', as Cleanth Brooks puts it?[20] This sentiment is not wholly alienating; and we might, for means of comparison, think of those who were moved and even consoled by the beauty of poppies in Flanders Fields. But, if we want foolproof moral philosophy or 'wisdom', I do not think we quite get it. These lines move us most because in them we sense the force of thoughts that 'could not live' as they continue to live. Tranquillity is glimpsed 'amid'—rather than in place of—'uneasy thoughts'; whilst the idea that 'grief' '*appeared* an idle dream' might itself look idle for 'appearing' that way. (It is a word the poem has taught us not to trust.) If anything, Armytage's wisdom constitutes a fragile attempt to convert a remembered vision of consolation ('I well *remember*'; 'As *once* I passed *did*') into a present state of serenity. 'So still an image [...] So calm and still, and looked so beautiful': these lines do not plainly describe stillness, but feel their way through every word towards that vision of tranquillity once more.

It is a 'troubling thought', as Stephen Gill has said, 'but can Margaret's death be made to work for our good?'[21] For Wordsworth, the troubling questions are always the 'essential' questions. In his Great Ode he speaks of 'soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering';[22] and he concludes 'Elegiac Stanzas' with a double-negative that gestures hopefully in the direction of hope: 'Not without hope we suffer and we mourn'.[23] In the same spirit, Armytage does not promote denial of tragedy, nor clear-cut stoicism, but rather a feeling for tragedy that is weighed against the need to move forward. So the phrasing of that second example might be turned around in light of his touching bid for optimism: 'Not without mourning we hope'.

~ VI ~

I would like to draw things towards a conclusion by probing a bit further into the 'tranquillity' lines and the way we might be tempted to read them;[24] particularly given Armytage's seemingly insensitive concluding sentence: '*I turned away*, / And walked along my road in happiness' (525-26). 'I turned away' might sound pragmatically impassive, in the manner that bystanders turn to 'their affairs' after the boy's death in Robert Frost's 'Out, Out—': 'And they, since they / Were not the one dead, *turned* to their affairs'.[25] But this is to read Wordsworth's line strictly in isolation, since the action of 'turning' and 'turning away' has actually been associated throughout *The Ruined Cottage* with the very condition of 'human weakness' that we might accuse Armytage of vanquishing at its close.[26] We 'in the

[20] 'One can, for example, look at the rabbit torn by the owl in something like this fashion, and the rabbit's agony, no longer isolated and dwelt upon in itself , may cease to trouble us when understood as a necessary part of a total pattern'. Quoted in *Music of Humanity*, 146. My reading disputes the idea that Margaret's death ever 'ceases to trouble' Armytage, poet, and reader.

[21] Gill, *Wordsworth's Revisitings*, 56.

[22] 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', *Major Works*, 297-302 (302). Lines 186-87.

[23] 'Elegiac Stanzas', *Major Works*, 326-28 (328). Line 60.

[24] Jerome McGann contends that '*The Ruined Cottage* is an exemplary case of what commentators mean when they speak of the "displacement" that occurs in a Romantic poem'. But this overlooks the moving vulnerability of Armytage's speech. See *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago, 1983), 84.

[25] *Robert Frost: Selected Poems*, ed. Ian Hamilton (London, 1973), 89-90. Lines 33-34.

[26] Since giving this lecture, I have read David Fairer's excellent chapter on 'Returning to the Ruined Cottage', in *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798* (Oxford, 2009), 260-84. Fairer hones in on motifs of turning and returning to show that *The Ruined Cottage* constitutes 'a series of returns, and returns within returns' (273).

weakness of humanity / From natural wisdom *turn our hearts away*' (194-95), Armytage said; 'Margaret looked at me / A little while, then *turned her head away*, / Speechless' (247-49). Robert, before his departure, would '*turn his steps*, / Or wander here and there among the fields' (176-77). The poet, overwhelmed by Margaret's tragedy, '*turned aside in weakness*, nor had power / To thank him for the tale which he had told' (495-96). In this light, the phrase's past-associations contribute to the finely-balanced consolation offered by Armytage's vision: never merely catharsis, this 'image of tranquillity' (517) suspends rather than extinguishes grief, shielding us in a 'momentary trance' (369) from those tendencies towards sorrow and sympathy that will always linger, always return, always make us human. Then we have the final lines of the poem, a welcome walk into sunlight:

> He ceased. By this the sun declining shot
> A slant and mellow radiance which began
> To fall upon us where beneath the trees
> We sate on that low bench, and now we felt,
> Admonished thus, the sweet hour coming on.
> A linnet warbled from those lofty elms,
> A thrush sang loud, and other melodies,
> At distance heard, peopled the milder air.
> The old man rose and hoisted up his load.
> Together casting then a farewell look
> Upon those silent walls, we left the shade;
> And, ere the stars were visible, attained
> A rustic inn, our evening resting-place. (526-38)

'We left the shade' sounds much like another act of 'turning away', while the lines comfort us with the serenity of the thrush's song, natural 'melodies', and 'milder air'. But again the statement bears the weight of tragic associations. Robert, we remember, '*left* his house' (261); he '*left* me thus' (270), Margaret said; 'she was *left* alone' (437). Other departures from the shade come to mind, too: the poet 'rose, and *turning from that breezy shade* / Went out into the open air and stood' (214-15); Margaret 'still would *quit / The shade* and look abroad' (453-54). Yet neither moment was anything but a peaceful interlude within a sorrowful life and story.

For my mind, Wordsworth never wholly exorcises 'grief' at the poem's close, but maintains its motions within tranquillity. Even the 'farewell look' glances back to the farewell look Robert 'had not heart' (270) to give. If we, like pedlar and poet, must 'turn away' for the milder air, *The Ruined Cottage* has taught us that sorrow always looms on the horizon, and that 'Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark, / And has the nature of infinity'.[27]

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[27] Lines quoted from *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca, NY, 1982).

Reviews

DANIEL ROBINSON, *Myself and Some Other Being: Wordsworth and the Life Writing* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014). $17.00 paperback. 978-1-60938-232-3.

Daniel Robinson's title and sub-title are both creatively disconcerting. The title is just unusual enough to check us: did Wordsworth himself inscribe such a contrast? The answer 'yes' is given by chapter one, which is actually headed by the full and accurate quotation: 'I seem/ Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself/ And of some other Being' (in every version of *The Prelude* – II, 32-33 in the 1805 version). Then the sub-title looks like a minor solecism – what's that definite article doing there? But 'the' effectively gets us right away from the dutiful 'Wordsworth and Life Writing' which would comfortably assimilate Wordsworth to our familiar creative writing modules. We are brought up sharp against a poet feeling himself without choices who must write his story of himself 'in self-defence'.

'Myself' actualizes the present, shaping self of Wordsworth in 1798-1799 and beyond, a self whose remembering is also a half-creation and, as Robinson puts it, in 'specialized coordination' with imagination. Blake is usefully invoked but for Wordsworth the balloon of invention remains firmly tethered to such contingencies as one impatient boy with 'The single sheep, and the one blasted tree, / And the bleak music of that old stone wall', who will soon learn of his father's death. Yet this remembering of his own 'one life' will prove to be difficult and demanding compared with the buoyant, visionary unity of *Tintern Abbey* completed ('not a line of it was altered') before departure for a cold winter in Germany. By contrast, six years and 8500 thousand lines will be needed before, for example, an actual Snowdon ascent of 1791 can be fused into the imaginative vision that climaxes *The Prelude* of 1805 and later.

Part of the difficulty may have been the contingent but still serious anxiety about writing 'the wrong epic'. How to explain to Coleridge who wanted to hear of nothing but the philosophical *Recluse* that the great project was on hold while Wordsworth traced the growth of his own mind? However, Wordsworth was clearly able to resolve this issue to his own sufficient satisfaction. He would note later in the Preface to *The Excursion* that before embarking on his inclusive epic 'it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own Mind'. And addressing his untitled poem directly to Coleridge neatly resolved any doubts about apostasy from their shared project. In truth the main difficulty with writing *The Prelude* was internal, the quest to make articulate sense of those 'mountings of the mind' that had arisen unbidden in Goslar. To write, in Robinson's phrase 'an ontological epic – essentially [exploring] the origin of a writer's creativity' was to do something unprecedented in literary history. Robinson locates the creative source of the poem precisely in the difficulties evoked in the Goslar notebook: 'Creating not but as it may/ disturbing things created'. The gap between the self who is portrayed and the self who is portraying was far greater than the five-year

gap between two versions of the young adult self dramatized in *Tintern Abbey*. Here the leap was between the mentally and physically itinerant adult ('Was it for this?...') and the 'favor'd being' of two decades earlier.

Robinson is particular strong on those 'spots of time' where the other side of the Wordsworthian duality ('some other being') jumps unnervingly into focus: boat-stealing, dizzily skating, encountering the visionary dreariness of ordinary, extraordinary sights. He reminds us too that the poet's wondering reconstruction of these primal scenes should warn us not to regard them as simple fodder for the construction of a biography. If these are to be absorbed into the story of any 'actual' Wordsworth then such absorption will be a provisional 'this implies such and such for him' affair rather than a literal-minded 'this is what happened to him then'. One bonus of this awareness is Robinson's corresponding ability to use poems that seem to straddle 'fact' and 'fiction' (the Matthew and Lucy sequences) as 'creative composites' which equally explore and dramatize the 'other being' for 'myself'.

A few caveats need to be made, not so much on Robinson's convincing central thesis but on its peripheral claims. Yes, Wordsworth is highly selective and perspectival in 'the life writing' but he does have whole books of *The Prelude* with circumstantial titles such as 'Books', 'Residence in London' and 'Residence in France'. In Foucauldian terms, the author of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* was arguably a man of the Enlightenment in being an explorer of geographical and cultural space as much as he was a proto-Romantic in being a temporal explorer of the mind's history. A connected caveat might surround the handling of the 'Was it for this' issue. Robinson does tend towards seeing *The Prelude* as being such a magnum opus (however unwittingly becoming so) as to be the undeniably central achievement of the poet. Admiration for *The Excursion* may be tempered in 2014 but enough of a revival in its reputation has occurred for it to be characterized more positively than as exemplifying a Victorian taste for this 'long, didactic and generally tedious poem'. More strongly, this poet of the egotistical sublime was also the rescuer of wandering mothers, widows, pedlars, potters, waggoners, discharged servicemen, beggars and leech-gatherers from 'the enormous condescension of history' (E.P. Thompson). Further, for Wordsworth to make subtle, empathetic poetry rather than mere sympathetic annals from such histories is arguably an achievement as great as his invention of the secret-self-as-protagonist a hundred years before Freud.

One should judge a book's work by its strengths. At the risk of too-simple categorization this is a study which has the virtues of a historically-informed 'presentism'. The spirit of Wordsworth is rescued from its enriching, but slightly over-prolonged, sojourn with New Historicism. The observation is not meant to be dismissive: we derive so much benefit from the work of critics such as Alan Liu who have embedded political and social context in the heart of the texts in a way which we can hardly imagine leaving behind. But Robinson calls Wordsworth back to a strenuous, phenomenological engagement with his living readers. C.S. Lewis observed that the classics test us as we read them and one feels that Robinson has been very much tested by Wordsworth's impassioned quest to forge the (not 'a') story of himself. Important as linguistic isolation, arctic weather and the constant closeness with Dorothy were in the winter of 1798-1799, this study reminds us of

much less easily articulated forces coming to the surface in Goslar. Alongside this complex aspect of bringing Wordsworth into our own times there is a complementary making of Wordsworth available to new generations. The citation of James Dickey and Robert Lowell, of *Star Trek* and Bruce Springsteen embodies more than a top-dressing of contemporary American culture. Wordsworth is seen to speak to generations growing up in a post-postmodern (digital) age, where the task of seeking the hiding places of our power behind an endlessly-stimulated and endlessly-simulated present-tense existence is demanding in just the way the post-revolutionary swirl of the late 1790s was for him.

Finally, but not unconnectedly, there is a strenuous fluency in the writing of this book which makes its relatively short length a unified aesthetic experience. It is by no means the case that Professor Robinson needs to be pardoned for writing well but rather that style here is substance. His writing first stretches itself to meet its subject on its own complex ground and then pulls back to lapidary clarity: 'Wordsworth is a poet of the non-event and non-epiphany, of the nearly-significant and the not-quite-understood; he is, in other words a poet of the mundane sublime'. This is well said and more importantly, like the whole of *Myself and Some Other Being* in a broader sense, it makes us want to return to *The Prelude* afresh.

K.E. SMITH
Open University

Members of the Society at Lamb's grave at Edmonton on 4 October 2014

Society News

The first Lamb Festival was held in Edmonton from 31 May to 7 June 2014. Organised by the Vicar of All Saints Parish Church, Father Stuart Owen, the Festival was well supported by the Society. It opened with a puppet play written by Society member Helen Walton (who now lives at Lamb's Cottage) and mounted by Art Start, a local creative arts charity which has been active in Edmonton since 1995. The audience greatly enjoyed the play's interweaving of Shakespearean passages with the story of Mary Lamb's life. This was followed on the opening evening by Nick and Cecilia Powell's illustrated lecture outlining the Lambs' lives and works for the local audience (which included the Member of Parliament!). Both events attracted an audience of about 100. During the course of the evening entries in the Festival's photographic competition were displayed in the church and the shortlist for the essay competition was announced.

The Festival's essay competition titles had been decided at its launch back in January. As Charles and Mary were both avid card players, six essay titles had been twinned with six playing cards, and Tony Beardwell from the Society drew cards at random to select the two competition titles. The cards were the ten of spades and the seven of clubs, which meant that this year's competition titles would be 'A Chapter on Ears' and 'Saturday Night'. Veronica Finch, Secretary of the Society, Father Stuart and Richard Morrison, Chief Music Critic of *The Times*, formed the panel of judges. Anjali Shelley of Highfield School was winner of the primary school competition; Victoria Achola-Achur from The Latymer School succeeded in the secondary school competition; and the open competition was won by Jennifer Wiltshire. All three had chosen to write under the heading 'A Chapter on Ears'. The winning essays are reproduced on the Festival website. A similar process had led to the photographic competition themes, 'As You Like It' and 'A Winter's Tale'. It was fascinating to see the imaginative and very varied ways in which photographers had approached these topics.

The second Festival day was Sunday and a service of thanksgiving for the lives of Charles and Mary was held at the Parish Church, with eighteenth and nineteenth century choral music and readings from the Lambs' works. During the rest of the week there was a poetry reading, a local walk around Elian sites, an organ recital and a musical recital with a focus on composers who had struggled with their mental health. The Festival concluded with an afternoon of celebrations and the announcement of the winners of the competitions.

Throughout the week a massive tapestry created by local needleworkers was on display, which showed numerous features of the locality many having an Elian connection. The Society also lent its own Lamb quilt, donated several years ago by its creator, Sandra Knott. This aspect of the Festival was particularly appropriate, given that we are marking this year the bicentenary of the publication of Mary Lamb's "On Needlework"; and members should note the forthcoming study day on this topic which the Society will be holding on 29 November.

Establishing a Festival on this scale is no easy task and Father Stuart Owen is to be congratulated. He succeeded in involving several local schools and gaining

support from many local business enterprises. In one way or another hundreds of people from Edmonton and its area became drawn into an event focused on the Lambs. Father Stuart hopes to repeat the Festival in 2015 and we wish him well with this endeavour.

Nick Powell

A Canterbury Tale

Pilgrims to came to Canterbury on the blazingly hot weekend of 31st May/1st June this year both to attend the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies and to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Christopher Marlowe. Around seventy delegates from all over the UK crowded into the School Room of the King's School in the grounds of the Cathedral on Saturday morning to hear a welcome talk by the Headmaster, Mr Peter Roberts, who surprised everyone present by contending that in its long history the school had produced around 400 writers, among whom were pioneering physician Gabriel Harvey, novelist Hugh Walpole, poet Sebastian Barker (son of the egregious George), Michael Morpugo, chick-lit novelist Charlotte Mendelson and, of course, Christopher Marlowe himself.

After a short introduction to the Marlowe-themed weekend by the President of the Marlowe Society, who were hosting the event ,there followed a truly fascinating expose by Valerie Colin-Russ of the playwright's extraordinary life and mysterious death, in which we learned that his early career as a government spy under the aegis of Frances Walsingham was undoubtably connected with his alleged death at a Deptford tavern , which the speaker concluded was a government set-up that allowed Marlowe to disappear, probably to the continent, and possibly to re-invent himself as 'William Shakespeare'. It was only when the inquest report relating to Marlowe's 'death' was discovered in the twentieth century that this duplicity became obvious.

Delegates had hardly recovered from all this when Richard Wilson of Kingston University delivered a most lively analysis of Marlowe's excursion with the Earl of Pembroke's players to the north of England in the 1590s. According to Professor Wilson, this tour gave the players, including Marlowe, who had ambitions to become a courtier, opportunities to persuade the King of Scotland to invade England.

Following a light lunch, which gave delegates the chance to network, the AGM began its business at 2 o'clock, with our president, Jenny Uglow, the biographer of Thomas Bewick and Mrs Gaskell, presiding. The Secretary, Anita Fernandez Young (Dickens Fellowship), reported that the ALS continued to grow in size with an influence extending beyond the UK into Europe and the USA. There had been a good deal of media interest in the ALS, which in turn has encouraged non-aligned literary societies to approach the Alliance. Today it consists of a record 115 constituent societies, with an aggregate of over 60,000 individual members. New societies in 2013/14 included the Galloway Raiders, the Children's History Book Society, the Westerman Yarns and the Scottish Writers Group.

It was also announced that the committee personnel has changed over the past year. Kenn Oultram (Daresbury Lewis Carroll Society) had been replaced by Maggie Parsons (Barbara Pym Society). All the members of the Committee, including the present writer, were re-elected *nem con*, as was Chairman and *ALSo* editor Linda Curry (John Clare Society), Secretary Anita Fernandez-Young, Director of Communications Marty Smith (Johnson Society of Lichfield) and Treasurer Julie Shorland (Jane Austen Society).

The Secretary announced that the large number of fliers and bookmarks that had been printed to advertise the Alliance were being distributed to delegates and Committee members for placing in library, second hand and new books around the country. Copies of a history of the ALS by the Secretary are also available free to interested parties. Editor Linda Curry promised that copies of the annual issue of *ALSo* would be sent out sometime in July. A possible ALS presence on Facebook/Twitter was mentioned by the Director of Communications. Other ways in which the ALS could continue to maintain its high profile would be discussed at the next Committee meeting in October. Finally, it was declared that the 2015 AGM would be hosted by the Anthony Trollope Society and take place in York.

After the meeting broke up at 3 o'clock the delegates divided into two groups. In place of the shortened version of 'Dr Faustus' that had been cancelled, one group was treated to a talk by Keith Carabine on the bizarre early life of Polish author Joseph Conrad, while the other group visited the wonderful Walpole Collection of English Literary Manuscripts, which is housed in an annexe of the School's Library. Elians will be excited to learn that letters from Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Leigh Hunt were among the items chosen to be displayed by the Archivist Philip Henderson, who told those assembled that private visits to the Collection can be arranged by e mail or phone.

In the evening a group meal took place at a hostelry in the city and on Sunday delegates were encouraged to attend a morning service in the cathedral or, if they wished, to visit various Marlowe exhibitions in the city.

R.M.Healey

An Edmonton Pilgrimage

On 5 August, 1834, the young J. Fuller Russell made a pilgrimage to Edmonton. He had sent Charles Lamb a poem and was eager to catch a glimpse of the writer himself:

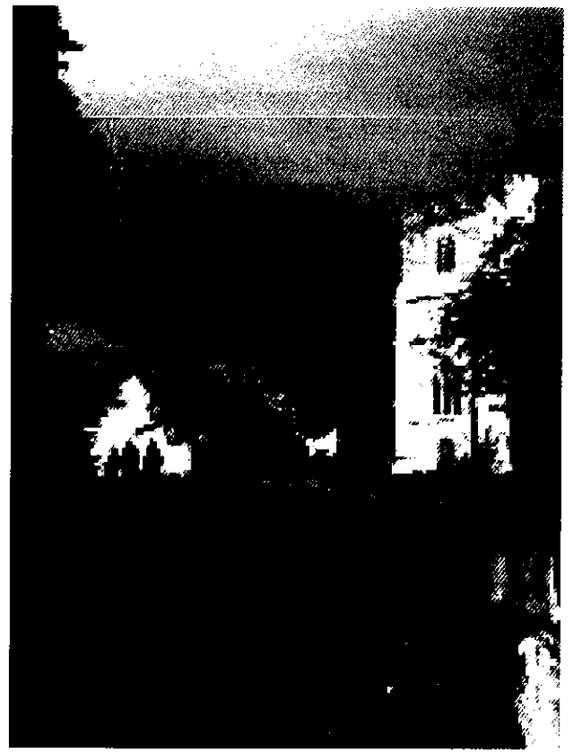
> I was admitted into a small and pleasantly shaded parlour. The modest room was hung around with fine engravings by Hogarth, in dark frames. Books and magazines were scattered on the table, and on the old-fashioned window-seat. I chatted awhile with Mary Lamb – a meek, intelligent, very pleasant, and rather deaf, elderly lady, who told me that her brother had been gratified by parts of my poem, and had read them to her. "Elia" came in soon after – a short, thin man. His dress was black – a capacious coat, knee-breeches, and gaiters, and he wore a black neck-handkerchief. His head was remarkably fine, and his dark and shaggy hair and eyebrows, heated face, and very piercing jet-black eyes gave to his appearance a singularly wild and striking expression.

This is one of our last glimpses of the Lambs entertaining, in the front room of the cottage they rented in Church Street, Edmonton. They had moved here in the spring of 1833, as Mary's illnesses became more frequent, to live with the Waldens, a husband and wife experienced in nursing. It would be their last move together – Charles died in the cottage in December 1834, after a fall in the street outside. He is buried, along with Mary, in All Saints churchyard almost opposite the cottage. The images captured by Fuller Russell, of Charles among his Hogarth prints, drinking rum and water – while Mary unsuccessfully attempted to restrain him – and reading aloud from his folios of Beaumont and Fletcher, are therefore poignant ones.

The Lambs' Cottage at Edmonton

Remarkably, the scene of Fuller Russell's encounter still exists almost unchanged, and on 4 October, the Charles Lamb Society was very grateful to have the chance to visit Church Street, guided by the present owner, Helen Walton.

'Lamb's Cottage' is fascinatingly eclectic, a cobbling together of parts from the 1680s through to the early nineteenth century, with tiny casement windows at the rear, original panelling, a low plaster and horsehair ceiling in the eighteenth-century kitchen, and the wash-house and mangle in the garden. When E. V. Lucas visited in the early 1900s, preparing his *Life* of 1905, he noted that 'Walden Cottage, or Lamb's Cottage as it is now known, close to Lower Edmonton station, has hardly received the addition of a tin-tack since Lamb's day. A gloomier house can scarcely be imagined. It has no memorial tablet'. The cottage now does have a blue plaque – but, amazingly, it has had no substantial changes. As Helen explained, the station mentioned in Lucas' account may have been the key to its preservation, since the introduction of cheap workmen's tickets and the clearance of the slums around Liverpool Street meant an influx of poorer residents in the later nineteenth century and a general decline in the fortunes of Edmonton. Marooned in an unfashionable area, the cottage was saved from gentrification and alteration; a part of the house was sold off in the early part of the twentieth century and has become the North London Clinic, and the remainder was Grade II listed in 1950. It is now a beautifully restored family home, sympathetically repaired – with Hogarth prints once again hanging on the walls and books on the window-seats. Our visit concluded with Helen's reading of Mary Lamb's essay 'On Needlework' in the sitting room, in front of an open fire, accompanied by sociable cats. 2014 marks the bicentenary year of the essay's publication, which will be celebrated by our study day on 29 November: the reading was a moving reminder of Mary Lamb's lively, polemic voice in a place she had once known.



We continued the Elian pilgrimage with a visit to All Saints Church (see image above). The Church organised its first Lamb Festival in summer 2014, and we admired the photographs on display from a competition inspired by the *Tales from Shakespeare*: a further festival is planned for summer 2015. Unfortunately, the Lambs' grave has had its metalwork vandalised, and the Society plans its restoration during 2015. We were also sorry to note that the Grade II eighteenth-century Charity School opposite the cottage, with its statuette of a female pupil above the door, has suffered in recent years and is now on the English Heritage At Risk register. We hope that the local authority will take steps to ensure the survival of one of the landmarks of the Lambs' Edmonton.

Felicity James

Report of a visit to Edmonton, 13 July 1935

Editor's Note: In the light of Felicity James' report on the recent Society outing to Lamb's Cottage at Edmonton, I thought it would be of interest to re-print the report of another pilgrimage to the cottage at Edmonton, eighty years previously. This was printed in number 4 of the CLS Bulletin for October 1935.

Thirty-three members attended this memorable gathering. The party was conducted over Edmonton Church by the Rev. R. C. Evill who had much that was interesting to tell and to show. At the grave of Charles and Mary Lamb a wreath of laurel was laid bearing the inscription:

To the evergreen memory of
Charles and Mary Lamb.
"They were lovely in their lives,
And in their deaths they are not divided."
Deposited by the Charles Lamb Society on their Visit
To Edmonton, July 13th, 1935.

A few appropriate remarks were made by Mr. Walter Farrow.

By the kind invitation of Miss Jessie Smith, the party visited Lamb's Cottage, where tea was served in the delightful old-world garden. Afterwards, Mr. G. Locke, B.A. discoursed most pleasantly and whimsically of Charles Lamb's associations with the locality and with that house. In expressing thanks on behalf of the Society to all who had contributed to the success of that day's series of functions, Mr S. M. Rich quoted from the conclusion of a leading article from the Daily Telegraph of February 25th 1925, when the sale of Bay Cottage took place:- "We hope that whoever purchases Lamb Cottage will realise that he is buying something beyond bricks and mortar, and will not be unmindful of the brother and sister who hallowed it." All agreed with acclamation that Miss Jessie Smith, their hostess, had amply fulfilled the writer's conditions. Miss A. Park also spoke to the vote of thanks; and, after a tour of inspection of the Cottage, members proceeded to the Edmonton Central Library, where the Librarian, Mr. F. E. Sandry, exhibited the collection of Eliana in his care.

(Snapshots of Members of the Council in Charles Lamb's garden were taken by Mr. W. Francis Aitken. Are copies available? The reply is in the negative. Mr. Crowley has it.)

Towards a History of Lamb's Cottage in Edmonton (and not intended to upset any more recent owners!)

I recently acquired a press cutting from an unidentified newspaper annotated 1 November 1954. It states that the cottage in which 'Charles Lamb, the essayist, died in 1834 had been sold privately by the estate offices of William Whiteley Ltd.' Neither the name of the purchaser nor the price paid is disclosed. When the property was put on the market £4500 was asked for the freehold.

D. E. Wickham

The Charles Lamb Bulletin

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The Charles Lamb Society Bulletin was published in quarterly issues from 1935 to 1972. Its first editor was the Elian scholar and poet S. M. Rich. The new series began in January 1973 as *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* under the editorship of Basil Savage.

The *Bulletin* is a peer-reviewed journal devoted to the study of Charles and Mary Lamb and their circle. It aims to promote Lamb scholarship and welcomes submissions in the form of essays, reviews, and notes and queries from established academics, new entrants to the field, and those who simply admire the Lambs' writings.

Essays submitted to the journal should be in typescript, and be between 4000 and 7000 words in length. Preferably, submissions should be sent to the Editor as an email attachment in MS Word. Submissions should be double-spaced throughout, including quotations, and should follow MHRA style, with a couple of minor alterations. A full style-sheet is available online at the Society's website.

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