

The Charles Lamb Bulletin

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Editorial

AS A READING of Madeline Huxstep's report on the AGM and David Wickham's article on 'The Society's Archives: The Open Day at Putney' will make clear, there have been rapid advances in the proper housing of the books and ephemera belonging to the CLS in recent months. At long last, after valiant struggles on the part of successive Officers over a good many years and a number of happy chance discoveries in the recent past, material has now been brought together in the right conditions and with the right resources available for the investigation and cataloguing of what we have known all along was likely to be a valuable archive to proceed steadily, with the likelihood that catalogues can begin to be published in the near future. Meanwhile, the *Bulletin* will present reports on the most interesting discoveries among our books and papers from time to time.

This is heartening, and so too is the way that material for the *Bulletin* continues to come in from young academics in various parts of the world. It has been part of the conscious policy of all the Editors since the New Series began to try to help young scholars of ability into print sooner than they might manage it in the majority of other literary journals. The way so many of our young contributors have gone on to establish themselves academically has justified our efforts to be of use. The July *Bulletin* has its share of younger writers. Long may the Editor be able to say the same!

Readers will be interested to hear that, as a way of marking the bicentenary of the publication of *Political Justice* the October issue of the *Bulletin* will be devoted to the Lamb-Godwin friendship and William Godwin and his influence.

Charles Lamb and the Cost of Seriousness

By SEAMUS PERRY

A Lecture delivered to the Society, 6 March 1993

IT IS A GREAT honour and pleasure to address the Charles Lamb Society; and I am both pleased and surprised by my invitation. Pleased, because it finally forced me to fulfil a promise I had made myself repeatedly for a long time, which was attentively to read again the *Elia* essays; and surprised, because, as that self-made promise will indicate, I am not a Lambian - Lamb is not, in the brutal terminology of the young aspirant academic, my 'specialty'. I hardly have the gall to advertise myself to you as a 'fresh pair of eyes', for that would carry the quite unwarranted implication that yours are jaded: and your excellent *Bulletin* provides quarterly evidence that such an implication would be very wide of the mark. But my comparative innocence does lead me to ask myself a question which to the life-long *aficionado* perhaps is less pressing: what precisely is *going on* in the *Elia* essays?

Lamb's essay style and procedure have been frequently, and latterly behittlingly, described as 'charming', 'beguiling': hardly concepts likely to appeal to the Scrutineer or the cultural materialist. Now, he is certainly fascinated by the ideas of charm and enchantment, and I shall return to these later, for they are present in the *Elia* essays in ways more interesting than the dismissive critic, or simply charmed admirer, might imply. Crucially, charm for Lamb is closely associated with familiarity, an association which may remind us that prolonged familiarity with a literary work, may come to beguile the reader with a sense of the sheer 'given-ness' of a literary style and consciousness. This, I think, is a kind of bad charm: a complete enchantment, one might say, a thing, incidentally, which we rarely find in *Elia*. One reason why teaching is so fruitful for the literary critic is that it really is salutary to have an undergraduate student produce a confused essay saying how very *odd* Wordsworth is: because it is an important fact about his imagination, and living too long with him can obscure the fact. From her journals one gets the impression that Dorothy thought her brother not only the best but the most natural of men: it takes the visit of a young De Quincey or Hazlitt to see his strangeness - as Hazlitt, years later, still recalling his response, 'With what eyes these poets see nature!'¹ In a similar spirit, then, somewhere (I hope) between the befuddled undergraduate and Hazlitt, I am intent on exploring the strangeness of *Elia*, its capacity to unsettle and perplex, its tendency to disconcert while it beguiles: the limits of its enchantment and of our charmed acceptance of its voice. It is, after all, a response which Lamb anticipates in the second of the essays to be published under the pseudonym: 'methinks I hear you exclaim, Reader, *Who is Elia?*'² More to the point perhaps, *Why is 'Elia'?*

In his unpublished review of Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, Lamb distinguished between those essayists who 'imparted their own personal peculiarities to their themes' (like Montaigne, Johnson and Hazlitt), and those who 'substituted for themselves an *ideal character*' (like Steele's persona Bickerstaff).³ At once we come across a feature of the Lambian mind which will prove strikingly recurrent: the positing of two, antagonistic, absolute positions, which

¹ 'My First Acquaintance with Poets'; in *Romantic Poetry and Prose* [*The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*] ed. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York, 1973) (hereafter Bloom and Trilling), p. 703.

² *Elia and The Last Essays of Elia* ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987), p. 8. References to this text are hereafter incorporated in parentheses.

³ *Lamb as Critic* ed. Roy Park (London, 1980) (hereafter Park), p. 300.

Lamb himself does not fit into. For while, as Jonathan Bate has argued, Lamb would seem very much to be working with the 'Bickerstaff principle' when he invents Elia, it is equally clear that this principle is invoked in so weak a form as to hardly matter. Thus, Jonathan Wordsworth in his introduction to the recent *Woodstock* facsimile of *Elia* rejects the notion of 'twentieth-century criticism' that Lamb has created a Bickerstaff-like 'fictional character' in favour of the 'simpler and more elegant' explanation that 'Lamb marketed *himself* as a fiction' (my italics), 'presenting as fiction experiences and opinions that in no important way deviate from his own'.⁴ And detective work, the monument of which must be Prance's *Companion*, and the spur to which must be the 'key' Lamb prepared for his friend Pitman, only tends to show how close were the 'real' Lamb and the 'ideal' Elia. In a headnote in the *Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, Bloom and Trilling remark, rather warily perhaps, of 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', that 'Lamb plays a curious game of identities', before going on, with what seems like some relief, to notice that 'as the essay proceeds, the "I" becomes Lamb himself'.⁵ Lamb is himself again. It is, at best, a moot point about the 'Christ's Hospital' essay (for where precisely does he become himself again?); but when the 'ideal character' is so nearly at one with the 'real', effectively so to deny the importance of the 'ideal' self altogether is always a tempting solution, if one is impatient of that Elian 'curious game of identities'.

But I do not want to dwell on the long over-chewed question of 'Elia' versus 'Lamb': I am rather more interested in the portrayal of self-hood and consciousness in the essays, of which the puzzles of Elia versus Lamb are an expression, but not the most interesting or subtle. Here that word 'game', used by Bloom and Trilling, leads me toward my title. For another way of thinking about the distinctly odd way Lamb writes himself an identity and a self-hood - and the way I want to approach the subject today - is to ask if it is 'serious'.

The question looks at once slightly forbidding (for what on earth does 'serious' mean?) and more than somewhat absurd. One of the complaints often made about modern 'lit. crit.' is its blithe capacity to ignore a thing so simply vulgar and archaic as one's 'enjoyment' of an author; and if the reader enjoys the essays of *Elia*, then my question will seem, and quite rightly, the sort of thing practitioners of 'lit. crit.' do too often: invoking criteria at once heavy-handed and quite beside the point. Yet, for all that, the idea of 'seriousness' certainly plays an important role in the literary tradition which we usually think of as extending from the 'romantics' - Lamb's lifetime, and indeed to a large extent his circle - down to the present day. So the equivocal, and even marginalised, presence of Lamb in the literary thinking of this tradition might invite us to look more closely at the relationship between the Elian literary consciousness and what we might go so far as to call the modern 'tradition of seriousness' - for it is, generally speaking, the odd figures who don't easily fit in which often give us the best chance of understanding the unstated assumptions behind a kind of thinking.

But I should begin by offering some illustrations of literary life within what I have called the 'tradition of seriousness'. We are all over-familiar with the reviewer's praise for a new novel or play, that it is 'profoundly serious': and 'seriousness' often comes to the rescue of an old work which we might have thought of, wrongly, as comic or frivolous. Peter Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, say, would leave its audience in no doubt that an intrinsic 'seriousness' had finally been brought to the surface; and F. R. Leavis, famously, excepted *Hard Times* from his general (early) disapproval of Dickens, on the grounds that it

⁴ Jonathan Wordsworth, Introduction to Charles Lamb, *Elia 1823* (Spelsbury, 1991).

⁵ Bloom and Trilling 659.

was the single novel to achieve the 'seriousness' of morally intelligent art. The Leavisite benchmark is, of course, inherited from Arnold's criterion for literary evaluation, 'high seriousness'; but the post-structuralist critic Paul de Man, otherwise a million miles from Arnold and Leavis, invokes his own version of the idea when he discriminates between works and readings on the basis of their 'rigour'. In what we are told is a post-modern age, it might be said, critics have a professional interest in works which exemplify the supposedly authenticating merits of arbitrariness and play: but there is rarely any doubt that the 'play' is in deadly earnest. Comedy can be its own, often rather grim, version of profound seriousness: and when a new introduction tell us that *Crime and Punishment* is a richly comic novel, we are in little doubt about the precise kind of comedy which the critic has in mind.

If Lamb has fallen foul of what I have called the 'tradition of seriousness', this is due in no small part to Lamb himself: as Edmund Blunden said in his Clark Lectures of 1932, 'nobody has been more ingenious in professing unimportance than Lamb, except Lear's Fool'.⁶ Blunden's comparison is probably prompted by a memory of the likeness drawn by Haydon in his account of the 'immortal dinner', where the 'exceedingly merry' Lamb's 'fun in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn intonations of oratory was like the sarcasm and wit of the fool in the intervals of Lear's passion'.⁷ And it would not be so unfair to say more generally that, like Lear's fool, Lamb himself mysteriously disappears from the plot of English romanticism in our critical accounts, centred as they are about the towering, tragic heroism of Wordsworth.

But the role of a fool in a tragedy is not simply a light relief and a structural irrelevance: a perception for which we are largely indebted to Lamb himself, who was keenly alert to those odd hybrids of genre which lent to Malvolio 'a kind of tragic interest' (p. 155) and who lamented the disappearance with Kemble of tragedy's incongruous but vital 'relaxing levities' (p. 168). The Shakespearean fool Elia is most closely associated with is not Lear's nameless attendant, but Hamlet's Yorick - specifically, the garrulously sentimental and covertly self-portraying Yorick created by Sterne.⁸ Elia laments that it would need the 'pen of Yorick' to draw his cousin '*par excellence*' James 'entire' (p. 81). For Yorick's pen, as imagined by Sterne, has its own kind of licensed foolery, which is a license to speak with a kind of comprehensive freedom, even an endlessly digressive one: and it is a license that comes from being thought a fool, from not being 'serious'. Jonathan Bate has ingeniously ventured that 'Lamb himself might be seen as Yorick, jester to the arch-Romantic Coleridge and Hazlitt, who self-consciously identified themselves as Hamlet-figures' (p. xv). And the implications of this happy formulation might be pressed further, even if their direction seems initially odd. One might, for instance, point out the odd fact that the Hamlet Coleridge and Hazlitt identify themselves with is, obviously enough, the play's introspective, meditative, doomed hero, by which stage, notoriously, Yorick is dead, long dead, his only presence being the unearthing of the rather gruesomely literal *memento mori* of his disembodied skull. I shall leave this with you for the moment as a riddle to be cleared up: which I shall at once compound by

⁶ *Charles Lamb and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 4.

⁷ David Cecil, *A Portrait of Charles Lamb* (London, 1983), p. 138.

⁸ Petrie notes that 'the character of Parson Yorick is an idealized portrait of Sterne himself' (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman* ed. Graham Petrie, introduction by Christopher Ricks (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 617n47.7. Elia, in a much more intricately self-protective and teasingly ironical way, has something of the same relationship to Lamb. (I am grateful to Duncan Wu, of St Catherine's College, Oxford, for drawing my attention to this illuminating parallel.)

suggesting that perhaps it is better to think, not of Lamb as Yorick to Coleridge's Hamlet, but of Elia as Yorick to Lamb's.

Before returning to *Elia* and the elucidation of this currently cryptic suggestion, I want to make a short detour into an apparently quite dissimilar area, so as to provide some kind of context for this idea of 'seriousness' which I have introduced. As I have said, it is the figures who do not easefully fit into our critical categories who offer the best opportunity of questioning those categories, and upon the issue of literary 'seriousness' a number of modern writers might be chosen. Betjeman would be one; but I want briefly to invoke W. H. Auden. There is, as far as I know, no evidence of much enthusiasm on Auden's part for Lamb; indeed, bearing in mind his nominal anti-romanticism, it should be surprising if there were. Nevertheless, there are, I think, genuine points of kinship between Lamb and Auden, not of 'influence' perhaps, but of analogy, which derive from their shared resistance to the tradition of seriousness. Auden's progress from early 'committed', theoretically informed poetry to his late belief in the gratuity and ultimate frivolity of art led to his marginalisation, wrought, revealingly, by the same kind of critics who were displeased by Lamb: *Scrutiny*, the champions of high-modernism, and those critics who might be best characterised by their insistence on the importance of the artist's engagement with 'reality'.

The great charge to be made against Auden, as against Lamb, is one of a kind of aestheticism, a romantic 'escapism': lack of seriousness means being too much 'imaginative', too much 'literature': while, in the words of Lionel Trilling's mythical realist, 'in a time like this what we need is reality in large doses'⁹ - as Elia acknowledges tragedy to need 'the absolute sense of reality' (p. 160). Thus Arnold approves of Wordsworth on the grounds that his poetry is so 'real' that it is written by nature itself, and becomes replete with all the substantial, existential concreteness of a stone, a 'touchstone'. For 'reality', idol of the tradition of seriousness, is, like a stone, obdurate and hard and external. Since Peacock, the complaint that literature 'internalises', that it represents a kind of retreat into a state of spurious archaic innocence, has been a leading weapon of attack. It has recently received a fresh sharpening in the arsenals of the New Historicists who identify this fake resolution of the problems of reality on the level of the ideal and internal as the 'romantic ideology', the result being the charge that the romantics wrote the *wrong kind of poetry*. So, instead of writing about the destitute poor who inhabited the ruins of Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth wrote about ideal images and memory: the point being that the destitute poor are 'real', and so a proper subject, while the ideal spaces of memory and consciousness are 'literary'. A common accusation is that a critic has 'privileged literature': an odd remark, as Jonathan Culler has said,¹⁰ for one cannot imagine a physicist being accused of 'privileging physics', but clearly this anxious scruple about 'reality' is responsible. Auden's characterisation of poetry as a pure 'verbal contraction', as a matter of 'halcyon structures' which 'make nothing happen', happily summarises the realist's objection. The 'purity' of the verbalism is accompanied by a 'purity' of effect, as Auden likens the poem, or the art world, to a kind of Utopia or Eden, a pre-lapsarian innocence which has its ancestor in Elia's characterisation of the artificial comedy as an 'impertient Goshen' (p. 164) - Goshen, you will recall, being 'the enclosed garden left to fallen man by a compassionate God'.¹¹ Pater's praise for Lamb's awareness

⁹ *The Liberal Imagination* (Oxford, 1981), p. 202.

¹⁰ *Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions* (Oxford, 1988), p. 57.

¹¹ James Scoggins, 'Images of Eden in the Essays of Elia', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 71 (1972) 198-210, p. 202.

of the 'pure sense of words' suggests the critical opinion which, inherited by the modern period, marked down *Elia*. To write of dreams, apparently to align oneself with a later aestheticism which held that 'words alone are certain good', to be praised by Swinburne and Pater and - the kiss of death - Arthur Symonds, put Lamb too clearly on the wrong side. The innocence of the aesthetic is a kind of wishful-thinking, a bad enchantment: it is a form of consolation, and to the modern realist mind, as Iris Murdoch memorably remarked, 'all consolation is fake'. And while Wordsworth and others have had their protracted rehabilitation, usually on the grounds that read rightly they too manifest the fakeness of consolation, I sense that Lamb as yet has not: witness the relief of the *Oxford Anthology* editors when (supposedly) he at last becomes a chronicler of actual times again - times with the additional virtue of including Coleridge.

Stephen Spender, like most of Auden's Oxford contemporaries, tended to take Auden very seriously indeed. One incident, recounted in Spender's autobiography,¹² features Auden exasperated at Spender's eagerness to reform his character in line with Auden's typically categorical criticisms of it: 'Why do you take me seriously?' asks Auden, 'What's so awful in this country is that people will take one seriously'. This, Spender continues, very seriously, is typical of what he calls Auden's 'serious-non-seriousness', a puzzling but useful formulation which might imply the friction created by Auden and, in an analogous way, Lamb, within the tradition of seriousness. For it is not that they are relentlessly frivolous, nor empty-headedly trivial, but that they occupy a kind of borderland between the light-hearted (the ephemeral essay, 'light verse') and what Stephen Dedalus calls the 'deeply deep'. It is such a borderland, of course, which the 'true Caledonian' cannot grasp: 'He cannot compromise, or understand middle actions' (p. 69), while 'middle emotions' (p. 161) are the stuff of the kind of artificial comedy *Elia* celebrates, and the spirit of which he emulates.

On the face of it, nothing should be easier than to import into *Elia* an interpretative theory, which would stiffen its exiguous fancy into that cogent deployment of material in the service of a prevailing 'view of life' which we expect of the 'serious' artist who has a line on 'reality'. It is not as if there aren't many possibilities: myths of the fall, testaments to the Imagination, the dark workings of the Electra complex. But such interpretations, by treating the essays as ingenious codes to be 'cracked', inevitably miss the full subtlety of the equivocations of identity which Lamb's imagination thrives upon, and which we are highlighted for us by his half-creation, the 'half-reality' (p. 166), 'Elia'. In an influential and meticulously argued essay, Donald Reiman offers the suggestion that by creating *Elia*, and thus 'ironically understating his conclusions', Lamb could avoid 'all trace of the "mental bombast" that, according to Coleridge, occasionally marred Wordsworth's poems of high seriousness' as he moved from 'everyday events and trivial opinions' to 'larger philosophical issues'.¹³ Reiman makes his case with exemplary clarity; but one wonders whether the essay encouraged less subtle critics to take Lamb's 'irony' too much as *simply* a piece of persuasive rhetorical strategy - achieving 'high seriousness' without the embarrassments of their solemnly excessive statements - which seems a rather Caledonian kind of irony, making of it a singularly (I use the word advisedly) *undangerous* figure; and moreover, it asks us to take Lamb's 'philosophy', his 'view of reality', as the message which this ironic technique is going to carry across. Of course, one may point out Lamb's anti-mechanism, his hatred of

¹² *World Within World: The Autobiography of Stephen Spender* (London, 1951), pp. 299-300.

¹³ 'Thematic Unity in Lamb's Familiar Essays', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64 (1965) 470-8, p. 471.

excessive rationalism, all the uncontentious bogeymen of what Leavis called Benthamo-technologism, but it hardly amounts, to my mind, to much in the way of an interesting or particularly novel 'philosophy'.

At points in his essay, perhaps, Reiman might be misinterpreted as taking Lamb with an almost Spenderian seriousness. His case is characteristically rigorous and water-tight; but to redeem Lamb by reclaiming him as part, albeit a paradoxical part, of the good old tradition of seriousness is to risk a certain incongruity when faced with the reality of *Elia*. Reiman himself is far too sharp a critic not to anticipate this danger, and registers his own scrupulous qualifications to this approach: for the good critic must recognise some sense of its misfitting, which is, I think, an indication of a tonal equivocation at work in the essays. Like Auden's poems, they operate a 'serious non-seriousness', which is difficult to conceptualise, but which, as this Society and its young sister The W. H. Auden Society exemplifies, exerts a curious fascination - a fascination (and this might give us a clue) which is as much with the 'personality' as with the work. (Alone amongst the moderns Auden has had a number of volumes of his 'table talk' published.)

If, for the modern realist, the opposite of 'reality' is at once 'literature' and the 'internal', it is to the twin matters of language and the literary consciousness that we might turn to explore the 'serious non-seriousness' of *Elia*. Like Auden, *Elia* speaks in absolutes. Both Bridget and *Elia* are 'inclined to be a little too positive' (p. 87); 'I like fish or flesh,' he tells us, expressing his dislike of 'half-converities' (p. 71); similarly of people who 'meet Time half-way' (p. 83); 'I love town, or country; but this detestable Cinque Port is neither' (p. 206). The delightfulness of beggars is that they represent a pure, incomparable absolute, 'not in the scale of comparison' (p. 132), entirely themselves. Yet at the same time, his defence of the artificial comedy is based upon an account of their characters' 'half-reality' (p. 164); his taxonomy of mankind into borrowers and lenders is soon mixed up by the emotive subject of books; and *Elia* is even placed in the position of moderating the formidable Mrs Battle's absolutism, which has led to a hatred of 'half and half players' (p. 37). So, like Auden also, his categorical temper not only contradicts itself in its statements from time to time, but isn't even consistently absolute. 'Imperfect Sympathies' is a fine example of the extraordinary, comic oddity of *Elia* logic: an essay which categorically assigns to racial types their prevailing faults, includes at greatest length the Caledonian, whose faults amount to precisely the categorical absolutism which *Elia*'s own essay exemplifies. *Elia* is, in the phrase he uses of himself when wandering by Shandy's mischance into a discussion of ecclesiastical policy, (deliberately) 'wading out of my depths' (p. 10). One form being out of his depths takes is his confession that his own mind or behaviour utterly disproves the absolute categories which he has just established. This is a very common form of the essays, and often a very funny one: a hard rule is proposed which *Elia* promptly exempts himself from, the humour of this forming a kind of running implicit parody of the 'confessions' genre. 'Grace Before Meat' establishes with almost Ruskinian emphasis a chastening philosophy:

I hear somebody exclaim, - Would you have Christians sit down at table, like hogs at their troughs, without remembering the Giver? - no - I would have them sit down as Christians, remembering the Giver, and less like hogs. (p. 106)

But, after praising what seems set to be the exemplary moderation of Quakers at dinner, we find: 'I am no Quaker at my food. I confess I am not indifferent to the kinds of it' (p. 108), a wonderful euphemistic phrase since we learn from a further confession that even badly melted butter ('that commonest of kitchen failures', p. 108) drives our narrator into a rage.

On the subject of appetite, the eulogy of the roast pig contains a fine example of this technique in miniature: Elia is celebrating his own sympathetic generosity, as a general principle of his character, before the typical last-minute qualification is registered:

Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chickens (those 'tame villatic fowl'), capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend. But a stop must be put somewhere. One would not, like Lear, 'give everything'. I make my stand upon pig. (p. 142)

Elia, you notice, turns to Lear's exemplary folly, and draws the same moral from it as Lear's Fool. *King Lear* is a play about absolutes, the absolutes of 'nothing' ('Nothing will come of nothing') and of 'everything' ('give everything') - indeed, a play of such extremism, that Lamb famously judged it impossible to play, not just because of its enormously demanding emotional range, but for the interesting reason that the drama is, really, an internal one: 'It is his mind which is laid bare'.¹⁴

The fascination of *King Lear*, then, is its portrayal of absolute states of mind and experience, which, in their joking way, is what the *Essays of Elia* are also about. But where *King Lear* is 'hard and stony',¹⁵ and has, we might say, the full 'absolute sense of reality', feels the full 'pressure of reality' (p. 162), *Elia* exemplifies the device which its author finds in artificial comedy: a 'perpetual sub-insinuation' (p. 185), 'a sort of sub-reference' (p. 186) alerting us to the work of an artificer. We experience not the stony stuff of reality, as in *Lear* or in Arnold's Wordsworth, but the performance of its dramatic representation: in Elia's words, which are almost Wallace Stevens's, 'a likeness only is going on, and not the thing itself' (p. 186). This kind of device we might call 'ironic': but we see that it is not being used as an ingenious cover under which the message of an Elian ethos is smuggled; rather more interestingly, it gives Lamb a kind of figurative mask, or a necessary psychological conviction of artifice and 'literariness', within which a deep and often tragic sense of the individual, isolated consciousness in time can feel excused and unembarrassed in expressing itself. By setting Elia playing at confessing trivialities, Lamb covertly confesses, by creating in writing, a deeply elegiac, poignant and solitary selfhood; it is a kind of presentation of the self under the guise of dramatic representation. Shakespeare's inspired brilliance in Lear's Fool is that he never stops acting as a Fool: it has been his life-long idiom; yet it is one which allows him to 'tell truth' as no-one else in the play can so persistingly. As another Fool says (a phrase which Auden took for a poem title), 'the truest poetry is the most feigning'. Hamlet himself, in some ways, occupies the place of the fool in Elsinore, and embodies the principle that by indirections one may find directions out; and so Lamb, with his Yorick, Elia, who is, as Yoricks are, dead¹⁶ - like Hamlet, Lamb elegises his dead Fool. Elia, we recall, praised fools for what he calls their 'honest obliquity' - a phrase which, as I take it, could serve as the imaginative motto for the whole volume.

Let me now say what I think Lamb is confessing: not, I hasten to add, a body in the library, some hidden, all-informing secret, like matricide, but what we might call an unhappy consciousness. Several critics have encouraged us to look at the *Elia* essays as prose versions of the Coleridgean conversation poem; this is a great insight into their manifest structure; but

¹⁴ Park 96.

¹⁵ Park 96-7.

¹⁶ Sterne's version of himself in the figure of Yorick, too, is barely mentioned before being killed off and elegised in the device of a black memorial page (*Tristram Shandy*, pp. 61-2).

also, I think, to their internal, or dramatic structure. For Coleridge's conversational poems, while preoccupied with the inclusiveness of the Unitarian One Life, in fact dramatise his own exclusion from that Life, an exclusion and solitariness which is heightened to the nightmare of the Ancient Mariner, and leads to the full confessional mode of the *Dejection Ode*. Lamb has some claim to have at least half-invented the conversation poems, in that his advice to Coleridge to keep the language simple was crucial. The tradition of late eighteenth-century verse of sensibility, of gentle moralisings of the landscape such as we find in Bowles's sonnets, is where both Coleridge and Lamb himself start as writers; but the mode is perfected by Coleridge, and it is not until *Elia* that Lamb finds his alternative, very far from an aesthetic of sincere simplicity, in a kind of defensively ironised confessional mode, while Coleridge moves on to his extraordinary career of metaphysician and aesthetician, systemising structures of inclusion and completeness from which he is left out.

To set up absolute categories from which you are excluded, even if the categories are funny and the exclusion delightfully whimsical - to deal in absolutes while characterising yourself as a half-creature - to create your own double-self - to be a writer in the double mode of irony, a practitioner of serious non-seriousness - all this is to re-enact a kind of Coleridgean solitariness, to be (as Lamb writes in a letter) 'in a manner *marked*', to be, as Coleridge recognised, 'a soul set apart'. Wordsworth can see himself set apart to be a chosen son; but such sanguine optimism is hardly available for Coleridge, nor Lamb.

Coleridge, we might say, generalising wildly, displaces his desires for unity and completeness into an idea of poetry, which he expects from Wordsworth, but never sees realised. Lamb's myths of belonging are more mundane; and might be represented by the picture at the end of 'Mrs Battle's Opinions on Whist', where Elia and Bridget sit playing an endless game of cards. Enchantment comes with familiarity, the power of charm exerted by familiar things, old familiar faces; and for Lamb, as 'Dream Children' makes poignantly clear, the self-consoling enchantment of repeating the familiar has its existence in the context of 'family'. One needn't restrictively interpret the essays as endless variations on Mary's matricide to grasp that family, for Lamb, is a site at once of enchantment and of catastrophe; and that enchantment is characterised by its doom, and has the taste of its morbidity. This is what I mean by saying, earlier, that enchantment in *Elia* is never simply the piling of 'honey upon sugar, and sugar upon honey, to an interminable tedious sweetness' (p. 46): Bridget and Elia play a game that 'means nothing', boasts merely 'shadows of winning', where the players gain 'nothing' and lose 'nothing' in 'a mere shade of play' (p. 43); just as, in the reverence-inspiring 'cessation' offered by the South Sea House, Elia paced the rooms to meet 'the shade of some dead accountant' (p. 2). And, similarly, the admirable, Quixotic librarian, R--, wanders among customers, 'extinct, bed-rid, [who] have ceased to read long ago' (p. 50).

We realise, with some more than mild surprise, that intertwined in the description of the card game's enchanted stasis is the language of a much less obviously charming stasis: the stasis of death. The quiet household of the familiar charm, Lamb's mild version of Keats's rather more frenetic 'Temple of Delight', at once contains the shrine of her darker sister, melancholy: but the cohabitation is much less difficult than the rather crowded homelife of Keats's temple, for death itself comes to figure as the agent and guarantor of the romance of stasis. 'James White is extinct' (p. 130) is poignant, but also a mark of his true wonder: 'He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died - of my world at least . . . the glory of Smithfield departed for ever' (p. 130). This is a Shakespearean nostalgia: of Lafew in *All's Well*, an old man lamenting a modern world where 'They say miracles are past', or, indeed, the end of *Lear*, but with the experiences of the past turned from explicit tragedy to

a more involuted and internalised sense of the sheer charm of pastness: 'we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long'. In a sense, then, far from immortalising the forgettable, as he might be claimed to do, Lamb could be said to cherish a transformation into immortal ideal already effected by their various kinds of death. The problem with children, as Elia engagingly argues, is that they are so recalcitrantly *alive*: they 'have a real character and an essential being of themselves: they are amiable or unamiable *per se*', and in this differ from the inanimate, which can 'receive whatever hue fancy can give it'. And amongst the list of inanimate objects, that queer, characteristic, strange variation in tone: 'a watch or a ring, a tree, or the place where we last parted when my friend went away upon a long absence' (p. 147).

For Coleridge, the possibility of belonging, to the One Life, to the Utopian Pantisocracy, to the Wordsworth household, is associated with his capacity to be a poet; and having been a poet, but now finding one's 'proper element is prose' (p. 80), is important for Lamb too, though in a different way. For I think we might see the *Elia* essays as themselves written in a kind of equivocal mode: not the brilliantly familiar essay-style of Hazlitt, yet not the mind-baring mode of the personal lyric. They are, if you like, wonderful 'poems *manqué*', a point made with beautifully self-deprecating comedy in the failed poetic vision he details in 'Witches, and other Night Fears'. Yet, in this comedy of misfitting, of being 'out of my depths', they are far from the settled verbalism of that always slightly precious genre, the 'prose-poem', for the poetic mode they invoke but decline in the courage of their whimsy is elegy. 'Elia', to my ear at least, carries the echo of 'elegist'.

The very first essay, 'The South-Sea House', is an elegy to 'the dusty dead, in whom common qualities become uncommon' (p. 6), and which ends with Elia reflecting, as a lyricist, that 'Much remains to sing' (p. 7). The last, and saddest portrait is of poor 'M-', 'mild, child-like, pastoral M-', singing 'Arcadian melodies' worthy of Shakespeare. The song Elia singles out is from *As You Like It*: and its citation carries, in miniature, the full, allusive drama of Lamb's covert confession. 'Blow, blow, thou winter wind, / Thou art not so unkind, As man's ingratitude' is sung, by a Fool, to a Duke who has been exiled; it is one of many striking and unexpected parallels that persist between the comedy and *King Lear*; and Elia, singing of 'M-', alludes to the greatest of all elegies in English, with that characteristic, and for Lamb enabling, mixture of poignancy and incongruity, the common made uncommon: 'Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew / Himself to sing'. At the end of 'Ellistomiana', Elia notes that 'For thee the Pauline muses weep. In elegies, that shall silence this crude prose, they shall celebrate thy praise' (p. 195). It is a device of reticence, perfected in Gray's 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat', and Cowper's animal elegies (it is also, by the way, used memorably by Auden in his elegy to 'Lucina, / Blue-eyed Queen of white cats'): it is to be slightly ridiculous about the paraphernalia of elegiac convention as a way of obliquely expressing, and persuading us of, genuine feeling. It is, in fact, a marvellous example of how 'mental bombast', which is defined by Coleridge as 'thoughts and images too great for the subject', can in fact be a device of great subtlety and tact: indeed, one might venture, reconceived in this way, it might be seen as Lamb's principal method.

It is also, one might add, itself a device of acute, if odd, realism, for it is closely associated with normal social embarrassment, the 'honest obliquity' of ordinary language, memorably exemplified by Lamb's extravagant praise for Cottle's much-abused epic, *Alfred*, in an attempt to console the poet upon the death of his brother. He writes to Coleridge, 'Was I a Candied

Greyhound now for all this? or did I do right? I believe I did'.¹⁷ In 'candied', reproof for telling a sugary lie, lurks 'candid', praise for the decency of a kind of honest rightness. Just so with Elia's 'candied' prose.

Elia gives us his own version of *Lycidas*, with a suitably jokey comic resolution, in 'Amicus Redivivus': yet even here, with elegy invoked and deferred, the essay ends with an image of the anticipated pleasure of the Elysian company, old Askew expecting the arrival of G.D. at any moment: 'to welcome into that happy company the matured virtues of the man, whose tender scions in the boy he himself upon earth had so prophetically fed and watered' (p. 242). To have the word 'watered' at the end of an account of a near-drowning is ingenious and funny: 'water', one could say, is conceptually transformed in tune with the comedy from danger to nurturer; but more than this, to mention the fatal element is also a priceless piece of Elia's carefully dramatised wrongness, saying words 'out of season'. The incompetence of Elia's prose stabs at elegy masquerades Lamb's abiding sense of loss. And loss is mysteriously equivocal: perhaps we could say that, in a sense, for Elia it is the best of things - his native ground is the old places of friends 'away upon a long absence', and if they live on, they tend to be, like dear G.D., 'the most absent of men' (p. 12). (One hesitates to make too much of the fact that the exemplary G.D.'s name is 'Dyer', but it surely couldn't have escaped Lamb's eye for puns. He is a dier who doesn't die, who gives the opportunity for elegy, while having the goodness to live on, unchanged.) Pater's praise for Lamb, that he works 'ever close to the concrete',¹⁸ seems to me, then, quite spectacularly wide of the mark, despite Elia's own declaration of love for this 'green earth' (p. 34). For while he delights in idiosyncrasy, and chastises the author of *Religio Medici* for preferring 'notional and conjectural essences' to the 'poor concretions of mankind' (p. 67), Lamb's own imagination tends in something like the same direction. The essays are full of celebrated absences: it is awful to see Lear's 'concretion' on stage, or Othello's in a print (p. 264); and the singular absence of being dead is something like the very mark of wonder and worth. Being absent can seem more real than being present; and the child's mind, for whom a fear is strong 'in proportion as it is objectless upon earth' (p. 78), shows absence to be the very stuff (if 'stuff' is the right word) of the poetic imagination.

I find a deep covert elegy on Lamb's part in Elia's delight in such whimsical transformations, such fanciful making-the-best of death: most poignantly, Elizabeth, Elia's sister, dies in infancy, to be replaced by the faithful stasis of Bridget; but, more mysteriously affecting, Lamb's elegy for his father, disguised amongst other recollections, as Elia's lament for Lovel: 'I knew this Lovel' (p. 100), an affect which seems only partially accounted for by its allusion: 'I knew him, Horatio'. To grieve in a *persona* has a curious, self-protectively duplicitous poignancy, and a kind of honest humanness.

For feeling in the *Elia* essays is a more intricate and human mixture of playfulness and hurt than might appear. 'The Bachelor's Complaint', delightfully funny, is underwritten by a real sense of awful, mundane social agony and a kind of self-hatred at 'the absurd attempt to visit at their houses' (p. 149); as 'Valentine's Day', out of nowhere, moves its tone strikingly from the fancy of the girl receiving a fairy present of a card, to the curt assertion, 'It would do her no harm' (p. 66). For there is, I think, a permanent, if covert, sense that harm may indeed always be done, a sense which is marked by these marvellous swerves in

¹⁷ To Coleridge, 9 October 1800; *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin J. Marrs, Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), i. 240.

¹⁸ 'Charles Lamb', *Walter Pater: Selected Works* ed. Richard Aldington (London, 1948), p. 69.

toné. At the end of 'Distant Correspondents', following a quotation from *Lycidas*, Elia writes, simply, 'Come back' (p. 123); which I can best gloss by what might be thought of as Auden's re-write of that essay, 'Night-Mail', which, after a wonderfully playful and enchanting portrait of the mail train, ends, quite incongruously, 'For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?'¹⁹

When the Elysian company prepares to welcome G.D., it is his old teacher who Elia singles out; when Elliston lies dying, he reverts to his classical education, 'connecting the man with the boy' (p. 195); and this connection of the elegiac with the theme of childhood reminds us of that other great English elegy (a paradoxical one, for it doesn't present itself as an elegy at all), Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*; and it is with some remarks on this matter that I wish to come towards my end. There are some comic allusions: of the dire Scotsman, pedantically unpacking his treasured opinions, says Elia, 'His riches are always about him' (p. 68), a witty parody of Wordsworthian boyhood, when treasure of a quite different 'heaven lies about us', only to disappear with age; and, Elia's delightfully improbable theory that the sweep who fell asleep in the grand house's bed carried some vestigial memory of an intrinsic nobility is a jokey version of the Wordsworthian child's pre-natal knowledge, which is also offered with some irreverence as an explanation for the power of insubstantial childhood dreams: 'a peep at least into the shadow-land of pre-existence' (p. 78).

But more serious work is done with the *Ode*. So great is the charm of pastness, almost pastness *per se*, that of Elia's life, although marked by his defrauding of a rightful inheritance (the theme of ancestry and the proper inheritances of the past recurs in *Elia*), he says, 'I would no more alter them than the incidents of some well-contrived novel' (p. 32). The tragic analogy to Elia's belief in the diverting plot of his life, is Wordsworth's insistence in the *Ode* that everything is for the best, despite the palpable tonal commitment of the poem towards self-elegy. Elia's Valentines may bring the modest consolation of being remembered, 'eternal common-places, which "having been will always be"' (p. 65): it is a delicately secularised version of Wordsworth's more religious experience of 'primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be', but one which carries the same, anxious equivocation between trust and need in 'must'. The Inner Temple has become 'common and profane' (p. 97), where once, as for Wordsworth, 'every common sight / To me did seem / Apparelled in celestial light'. For both, growth has become a kind of decline, though, characteristically, Elia's mocks his own change by echoing Snout's cry to Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream* ('O Bottom, thou art chang'd!'): 'God help thee, Elia, how art thou changed!' (p. 33). Elia, however, has no illusions about the merits of the 'philosophic mind': returning to the theatre after the enchantment of his first play, he remarks, 'I had left the temple a devotee, and was returned a rationalist' (p. 114). Elia is 'a stupid changeling of five-and-forty' (p. 33), an 'other me' (p. 32); one who, like Wordsworth, adopts his own childhood self, 'my own early idea, as my heir and favourite' (p. 33), because adult Elia has become a kind of 'nothing', a bundle of recollected absences. Elia, then, has his own, important, uniquely serio-comic, place amongst a tradition of romantic autobiographers, for whom self-examination is tantamount to self-elegising; and with the additional richness that it is precisely the 'common place', the domestic situation in which a life of social community prevails and includes, a 'common place' which one might have expected to inherit, which has been denied.

Finally, what of my title, which your *Bulletin* advertised, quite properly, as 'slightly mystifying'? Admirers of the Anglo-Australian poet Peter Porter would not, maybe, have been so mystified, for it is the title of one of his most striking and moving of poems, a poem

¹⁹ W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems* ed. Edward Mendelson (London, 1976), p. 114.

incidentally greatly influenced by the later Auden's voice, in which he ponders the possibilities of writing elegy, and the idea of seriousness with which I have tried to bring Lamb into genuine if ironic relationship.²⁰ 'The cost of seriousness will be death', Porter writes - a kind of death, that is, to the writer; and this is because the 'words can't help', they 'self-destruct'. And this is why, instead of such earnest pursuit, 'the artist must play'. The writer cannot by any other means come 'closer to my goal / of doing without words, that / pain may be notated some real way'. Doubtless not; and perhaps elegies, like Porter's poem, can only ever talk of the impossibility of being a full elegy. You would need the pen of Yorick to give the portrait entire. But Lamb shows us, I think, as does the Auden whom Porter follows, the dramatic and human possibilities of an 'honest obliquity'. Without making a Beckettian self-destructive commitment to the stony realities of death, a writer can find himself able, and his reader moved, to bestow on the airy nothings of absence a local habitation and a name; and this is, I think, what the *Elia* essays so subtly do, thus registering, in the last words of Porter's elegy-which-cannot-be-an-elegy, that 'The dead may pass / their serious burdens to the living', even - perhaps especially - when, the dead ancestors include among their number oneself. Lamb's achievement is to show that those serious burdens, of love and delight, may be best assumed by a voice apparently disavowing seriousness altogether.

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²⁰ Peter Porter, *The Cost of Seriousness* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 30-1.

Wordsworth's Metamorphoses

By DUNCAN WU

WORDSWORTH ONCE recalled that, as a schoolboy, 'I was so strongly attached to Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* I read at school, that I was quite in a passion whenever I found him, in books of criticism, placed below Virgil'.¹ This was high praise indeed, particularly in view of his fondness for the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics* - but Ovid's keen sense of magic, as in the story of Philomela at the end of *Metamorphoses* Book VI, evidently had a strong appeal. In Sandys' translation, which Wordsworth is known to have read at Hawkshead,² Tereus pursues Philomela and Procne with sword drawn, until they

appeare with wings
 To cut the ayre: and so they did. One sings
 In words; the other neare the house remains:
 And on her brest yet beares her murders staines.
 He, swift with grieffe and fury, in that space
 His person chang'd. Long tufts of feathers grace
 His shining crowne; his sword a bill became;
 His face all arm'd: whom we a Lapwing name.³

The transformation of Procne into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale, and Tereus into a lapwing is a meting-out of natural justice, for the birds' physical appearances are determined by the passions of their human counterparts. As G. Karl Galinsky observes, the *Metamorphoses* are 'meaningful because they set in relief the true and lasting character of the persons involved'.⁴ Eliot concentrates the episode into four brief lines in *The Waste Land*:

Twit twit twit
 Jug jug jug jug jug jug
 So rudely forc'd.
 Tereu
 (ll. 202-5)

In Eliot's distinctive hell, passion is reduced to a series of monosyllabic nonsense words, the only intelligible sounds being a rueful lament by Philomela for her violation by her sister's husband, whose name she cannot utter fully. Its very inarticulacy is the source of its emotiveness, and it serves as the anthem for a society full of similar violations, both of the body and the spirit. It is not hard to see the rest of Eliot's poem as a twentieth-century reworking of Ovid, since the transformations of *The Waste Land* are all degenerative, entropic - precisely the terms used by Northrop Frye to describe *Metamorphoses*. For him, Ovid's poem is a 'kind of pagan counterpart to the Bible':

¹ Fenwick Note to *Ode to Lycoris*, quoted from *William Wordsworth: Shorter Poems, 1807-1820* ed. Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca, NY, 1989), p. 544. Ovidian analogues can be found in Wordsworth's mature poetry; see Michael Ragussis, 'Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream', *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975) 148-65.

² See T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead* ed. Robert Woof (Oxford, 1970), p. 344.

³ *Ovid's Metamorphoses Englished*, tr. George Sandys (Oxford, 1632), vi. 714-21.

⁴ G. Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford, 1969), p. 45.

In these stories, beings who were originally conscious are turned into various objects of nature and fall silent, sometimes as a reward, sometimes as a punishment, but always as something no longer capable of speech or response, except for the plaintive songs of those turned into birds. Metamorphosis is thus an image of what in the Bible is called the fall of man, which traditionally has involved his alienation from nature.⁵

Frye's account rings true: Ovid's characters are transformed sometimes in punishment, sometimes in order to escape the evil of others. We can't be certain that young Wordsworth interpreted the poem in this way - he would also have enjoyed its descriptions of bizarre and grotesque deaths - but it seems likely that Ovid set him thinking about the symbolic significance of physical transformation. In fact, in the Preface to the first collected edition of his poems in 1815 Wordsworth explained his work in precisely these terms. Discussing *Resolution and Independence*, he referred to the transformation of the Leech-Gatherer first into a huge stone, and then into a sea-beast, 'which on a shelf / Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself' (ll. 69-70). In explanation, he observed that

In these images, the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination, immediately and mediately acting, are all brought into conjunction. The Stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the Sea-beast; and the Sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone . . .

At the same time, the Leech-Gatherer 'is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison'.⁶ The power Wordsworth attributes to the imagination is an ability to mould and manipulate forms created by an imaging faculty. *Metamorphoses* is not concerned with matters of psychology, but the Leech-Gatherer's transformation reflects Ovid's influence insofar as the old man is irrevocably, permanently altered in the poet's mind:

The Old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole Body of the man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a Man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, and strong admonishment.
(ll. 113-19)⁷

The unlikely figure of this old man - his 'whole Body', in fact - has acquired the otherworldly aura of a divine messenger, perhaps even an angel. As that old spoilsport Henry Crabb Robinson observed, it's a far cry from the reality; Wordsworth, Robinson noted, 'did actually meet [the Leech-Gatherer] near Grasmere, except that he gave to his poetic character powers of mind which his original did not possess'.⁸ In other words, the real Leech-Gatherer

⁵ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (London, 1982), p. 97.

⁶ See *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), hereafter *Prose Works*, iii. 33.

⁷ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807* ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY, 1983), hereafter *Cornell Poems 1800-1807*; *Resolution and Independence* is on pp. 123-9.

⁸ *Cornell Poems 1800-1807* 408.

was less like the angel Gabriel than the sort of garrulous bore one tends to meet on long airplane journeys. This is not to devalue the poem - on the contrary, it underlines the energy invested by Wordsworth in a process that occurs entirely in retrospect and within his own mind. For his attention is less on the social and political plight of the Leech-Gatherer than on himself; here, as A. D. Nuttall comments of *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, 'Wordsworth's lines, no doubt, are full of tenderness. But all the tenderness is lavished on the act of seeing, none on the human figure himself. Social indignation really has nothing to do with what is going on here.'⁹ *Resolution and Independence* is, in fact, more self-obsessed even than the earlier poem, since the transformation of the old man serves as the catalyst for a corresponding renewal in the narrator himself. Stricken by 'fears, and fancies . . . Dim sadness, and blind thoughts' at the outset (ll. 27-8), he eventually draws courage from the 'human strength, and strong admonishment' offered by the transformed vision of the old man. The poem's subject is, in fact, the process of renewal as it occurs within the perceiving mind. By contrast with Ovid, Wordsworthian metamorphosis takes place on a psychological level; more importantly, Wordsworth is concerned not with the degeneration, but with the restoration both of the spirit and of a natural order.

These characteristics can be found even in Wordsworth's earliest poetry - those fair copies and drafts composed 1785-7, before his 18th birthday. Some are published, but a considerable amount of material remains in draft. While editing the juvenile works I have come to see certain patterns in Wordsworth's early development which I should like to outline here; all quotations from the juvenilia are taken from my edition.¹⁰

Anacreon Imitated is the earliest of Wordsworth's surviving translations, and imitates a love poem by the Greek lyricist Anacreon:

Reynolds, come, thy pencil prove,
 Reynolds, come and paint my love!
 Shadow'd here her picture see,
 Shadow'd by the muse and me
 (The muse who knows 'twere rash to dare
 From life to paint a form so fair -
 For sure so many charms combine,
 Half Apelles' fate were thine).

Waving in the wanton air,
 Black and shaming, paint her hair -
 Could with Life the canvass bloom,
 Thou mig[h]t'st bid it breath perfume;
 Let her forehead smooth and clear
 Through her shading face appear,
 As at Eve the shepherd sees
 The silver crescent through the trees;
 Nicely bend the living line,
 Black and delicately fine,
 As you paint her sable brows
 Arch'd lik[e] two ætherial bows;

⁹ *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (London, 1974), p. 133.

¹⁰ 'A chronological annotated edition of Wordsworth's poetry and prose 1785-1790' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1990).

Gentle as a vernal sky,
Soft and sleeping paint her eye,
Trembling as the lunar beam
Sweetly silvering o'er the stream.

Now her lovely cheek adorn
With the blushes of the morn;
Give her lip the rose's hue
Moisten'd with the morning dew,
Paint it breathing love and joy,
Breathing bliss that ne'er can cloy;
Let thy softest pencil throw
O'er her neck a tint of snow,
There let all the loves repair,
Let all the Graces flutter there!

Wordsworth was 16 when he wrote this, and up to here offers little more than a highly competent rendering of the Greek text. But he is about to do something extraordinary. Two thirds of the way through the poem he embarks, somewhat unexpectedly, on a fantasy of his own. At this point in the original, Anacreon describes his mistress' mantle and alludes teasingly to what might lie beneath it. Earlier translations had tended to play up the amorous implications; one of the more daring, published in 1682, had rendered:

And last of all let her be,
Veil'd in a Dress as gay as she;
But let that Little part be bare,
That where all Woman does appear . . .¹¹

Wordsworth's originality lies in his rejection of the expected eroticism for a distinctive poetry of his own; he continues:

Loosely chaste o'er all below,
Let the snowy mantle flow
As, silver'd by the morning beam,
The white mist curls on Grasmere's stream
Which, like a Veil of flowing light,
Hides half the landskip from the sight.
Here I see the wandering rill,
The white flocks sleeping on the hill,
While Fancy paints beneath the Veil
The pathway winding through the dale;
The cot, the seat of Peace and love,
Peeping though the tufted grove.

Just as the Leech-Gatherer mutates first into a huge stone, and then into a sea-beast, idealized by 'the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination', so the mistress of the Greek poem is absorbed into the 'landskip' on which she confers an inexplicable, numinous life. This process depends on the fact that there are two kinds of

¹¹ *Anacreon Done into English* tr. Abraham Cowley, Francis Willis, John Oldham and Thomas Wood (London, 1682), XXV. *His Mistresses Picture* 43-6.

painting in the poem - the first practised by the likes of Reynolds, the second occurring within the imagination. Wordsworth cannot actually see what lies behind the veil of mist, but beneath it his Fancy 'paints' a pathway leading to a cottage. On a slightly lower level, of course, the randy poetasters of the previous century had done something similar, amusing themselves by imagining the parts concealed by the mistress' mantle. Wordsworth prefers a more symbolic vision; his mistress is transformed into the emblem of a paradise of which she is, by implication, an important element. If, at first glance, the cottage and pathway seem trite and emblematic, they also disclose a curiously strong sense of destiny, for it is no accident of fate that, 14 years after composing this poem, Wordsworth moved into Dove Cottage. The real metamorphosis implied by the vision is that of the 16 year-old imitator into an epic poet.

The creative tension between reality and an idealized vision recurs throughout the juvenilia. *Beauty and Moonlight* was composed shortly after *Anacreon*, probably in late 1786. It is the first of the poems certainly addressed to Mary Hutchinson, his future wife. As it begins, her image constantly threatens to displace the less colourful reality of nature:

High o'er the silver Rocks I rov'd
 To wander from the form I lov'd;
 I thought fond Fancy would be kind
 And steal my Mary from my mind.
 'Twas Twilight, and the lunar beam
 Sail'd slowly o'er Winander's stream;
 As down its sides the water stray'd,
 Bright on a rock the moonbeam play'd -
 It shone half-shelter'd from the view
 By pendent boughs of tressy yew.
 'True, true to love, but false to rest',
 So Fancy whisper'd to my breast,
 'So shines her forehead, smooth and fair,
 Gleaming through her sable hair'.
 I turn'd to Heav'n but view'd on high
 The languid lustre of her eye;
 The moon's mild radiant edge I saw
 Peeping, a black-arch'd cloud below -
 Nor yet its faint and paly beam
 Could tinge its skirt with yellow gleam.
 I saw the white waves o'er and o'er
 Break against a curved shore -
 Now disappearing from the sight,
 Now twinkling regular and white:
 Her mouth, her smiling mouth can show
 As white and regular a row! (ll. 1-26)

The love-stricken poet cannot help but associate the rocks about Windermere with Mary's forehead, the gleam of the moon with the lustre of her eye, the breaking waves with her teeth. The oddity of the imagery underlines the compulsive nature of his thought, for these associations intrude upon his peace of mind despite his efforts to escape them - despite, apparently, his reluctance even to recognize them. Finally the idealized image displaces the evidence of the senses completely:

Haste, haste - some god indulgent prove,
 And bear me, bear me to my love!
 Then might - for yet the sultry hour
 Glows from the Sun's oppressive pow'r -
 Then might her bosom soft and white
 Heave upon my swimming sight,
 As yon two Swans together ride
 Upon the gently-swelling tide!
 Haste, haste, som[e] god indulgent prove,
 And bear [me], bear me to my love!

This 'god' is that of the imagination; only when he allows it to take over does Wordsworth find peace of mind, rapt in a fantasy dominated by the image of his absent lover's bosom. The comparison with two swans probably derives from Macpherson's *Fingal*: 'Beside the murmur of Branno thou didst often sit, O maid; when thy white bosom rose frequent, like the down of the swan when slow she sails the lake, and sidelong winds are blowing.'¹² Where this simile serves to heighten our sense of the maid's solitary beauty, Wordsworth aims to convince us neither of Mary's charms nor of his love for her. Macpherson gives us a whole, integrated form, but Wordsworth prefers the enumeration of distinct parts - teeth, an eye, the forehead, and finally the bosom. Like disparate elements in some surrealist photomontage, they refuse to coalesce; at no point do they add up to a complete anatomy, let alone a personality. For the poet's attention is not on Mary at all, and their marriage in 1802 serves only to distract us from the fact that - as in *Resolution and Independence* - the poem's true subject is the imaging faculty itself, and its power to supplant the narrator's awareness of the perceived world.

The imagination is the explicit subject of *The Dog: An Idyllium*, also composed in late 1786. It describes the death of Ann Tyson's 'rough Terrier of the hills', and is based on Milton's *Lycidas*:

Where were ye nymphs, when the remorseless deep
 Clos'd o'er your little favourite's hapless head?
 For neither did ye mark, with solemn dread
 In Derwent's rocky woods, the white Moon's beam
 Pace like a Druid o'er the haunted steep,
 Nor in Winander's stream;
 Then did ye swim with sportive smile
 From fairy-templ'd isle to isle,
 Which hear her far-off ditty sweet
 Yet feel not ev'n the milkmaid's feet.
 What tho' he still was by my side
 When lurking near I there have seen
 Your faces white, your tresses green,
 Like water lillies floating on the tide?
 He saw not, bark'd not, he was still
 As the soft moonbeam sleeping on the hill,
 Or when, ah! cruel maids, ye stretch'd him stiff and chill!

¹² [James Macpherson], *Fingal, an ancient epic poem* (London, 1762), p. 58.

Up to this point Wordsworth has followed the elegiac path suggested by Milton, but like the previous poems, his concluding lines depart from their apparent trajectory. Abandoning the tone of lament, he moves smartly out of the present to celebrate a vividly recollected past:

If, while I gazed (to Nature blind)
On the calm Ocean of my mind,
Some new-created Image rose
In full-grown beauty at its birth,
Lovely as Venus from the sea;
Then, while my glad hand sprung to thee,
We were the happiest pair on earth!

Wordsworth is 'blinded' to nature by a 'new-created Image' that, like Grasmere in *Anacreon Imitated* and Mary Hutchinson in *Beauty and Moonlight*, takes the shape of an ideal - in this case, Venus. The most surprising effect of this is the resurrection of his deceased hound. With the words, 'while my glad hand sprung to thee', Rover returns, like Venus from the waters' depths, to be assimilated by the poet's touch into his vision. One of the questions begged by this canine rebirth is whether the poet prefers the vision of Venus or the dog - if, in fact, the two can be separated. A clue might be found in the final couplet, 'while my glad hand sprung to thee, / We were the happiest pair on earth!', which implies by allusion that the poet and his pet were as well-matched as Lord and Lady Lyttelton, celebrated in the former's *Monody to the Memory of a Lady Lately Deceased*: 'We were the happiest pair of human kind!' (l. 252)¹³ And it can be no accident that when he reworked these lines for Book IV of the *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, Wordsworth expanded what was formerly an affectionate pat into something more demonstrative:

I sprung forth towards him, and let loose
My hand upon his back with stormy joy,
Caressing him again, and yet again. (ll. 106-8)¹⁴

Although passion is fundamental to *The Prelude*, romantic love (in whatever form) is no more its subject than it was in *Beauty and Moonlight*. The concluding lines of *The Dog* describe two events: just as the image of 'full-grown beauty' is 'born' before his eyes, so, as the poet reaches out, the dead dog is reborn beneath his hand. In symbolic terms, an imaginative vision of beauty produces a spiritual redemption, for it allows the dog to be freed from 'the remorseless deep'. 'We were the happiest pair of human kind!', Lord Lyttelton had written of himself and his wife, implicitly elevating their wedded bliss above that of Adam and Eve, and recalling that prelapsarian period when, as Melville tells us, 'the angels indeed consorted with the daughters of men; the devils also, and the uncanonical Rabbins, indulged in mundane amours'.¹⁵ The narrator of *The Dog* is also recalled to an earlier and better time; in symbolic terms, a vision of beauty allows him to descend the underworld and bring back his Eurydice in the form of a 'rough Terrier'. But the Orphean parallel begs an important question: why should Wordsworth equate imaginative vision with redemption from

¹³ This was noted first by Carol D. Landon, 'A survey of an early manuscript of Wordsworth, Dove Cottage, MS.4, dating from his school days, and of other related manuscripts, together with an edition of selected pieces' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1962), hereafter Landon, p. 235.

¹⁴ All quotations from the *Thirteen-Book Prelude* are from *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1991).

¹⁵ *Moby Dick*, Chapter 49.

death? Why, in fact, is he concerned with death at all? For Ann Tyson's dog did not drown in 1786; it was an excellent swimmer and was still barking in 1788 - two years after *The Dog* was written.¹⁶ Yet the poem is fuelled by a sense of loss too substantial to be attributed merely to a reading of Virgil's tenth *Eclogue* or *Lycidas*.

In one way or another, this question is begged by almost all Wordsworth's juvenile writings, and the remainder of this article will attempt a possible solution to it. But before proceeding, I'd like to recapitulate, by way of rephrasing the question itself. I began by proposing that we regard the Wordsworthian imagination in Ovidian terms, as a kind of metamorphosis. The conferring, abstracting and modifying powers mentioned by Wordsworth in the 1815 Preface suggest that, like Ovid, he is concerned with the transition of living things from one state to another. But Wordsworthian metamorphosis differs from Ovid in one important respect: it is always redemptive. Where Ovid espouses a world-view not dissimilar from that of the late twentieth-century, in which metamorphosis re-enacts an original fall, removing mankind ever further from an implied state of innocence, transformation in Wordsworth aims to recreate that prior state, to redress that natural order, to restore the dead to life. In *Anacreon Imitated* the poet's mistress gains her vitality not from erotic promise but from integration into a vision of a Lake District paradise; the narrator of *Beauty and Moonlight* has exiled himself from his beloved Mary, and finds resolution only when he returns to her in his imagination. *The Dog* follows the same pattern, for here it is through an imaginative transformation that the poet is reunited with his four-legged friend.

Since their first publication in 1940, it has been customary to dismiss Wordsworth's juvenilia for their lack of depth and subtlety, and late eighteenth-century manner; even their first editor, Ernest de Selincourt, called them 'crudities'.¹⁷ They have the misfortune of having been written by a poet who went on to greater things, and consequently would suffer by comparison even if they were the very best of their kind. To appreciate their special context, we should remind ourselves that they were composed by a 16 year-old in an obscure (but reputable) Grammar School in the Lake District. That they combine a consummate technical skill with a mastery of the dominant poetic is remarkable enough; on these grounds alone any of them could have fitted respectably into periodicals of the time - and Wordsworth did indeed publish a sonnet in the *European Magazine* when he was 16. But to this should be added the fact that, nine years before his first meeting with Coleridge, 11 before the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, and 12 before the composition of the *Two-Part Prelude*, he was composing poetry in which the essence of Wordsworthian Romanticism can be discerned. As it happens, the redemptive transformation characteristic of Wordsworth's juvenilia lies at the heart also of his greatest poetry. In the *Thirteen-Book Prelude* Book XIII, the 'huge sea of mist' on the slopes of Snowdon is perceived by the poet to usurp the real sea of the Irish Channel:

A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still Ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes
Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem'd

¹⁶ Mark L. Reed points out that *Thirteen-Book Prelude* iv 84-120 indicates 'that "the Dog" was enjoying a cheerful old age when the poet returned to Hawkshead in the summer of 1788' (*Wordsworth: A Chronology of the Early Years 1770-1799* [Cambridge, Mass., 1967], p. 17n).

¹⁷ *Wordsworthian and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1947), p. 3.

To dwindle and give up its majesty,
 Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach.
 (ll. 45-51)

In *The Dog*, the new-created image rises up to displace the calm ocean of the poet's mind, which itself displaces the natural world: two usurpations, if you like, for the price of one. Here, the sea of mist assumes the majesty of the real sea, which is diminished by comparison with the fantastic shapes of the swirling vapours. Reality, whether it be the Irish Channel or a dead dog, remains fixed and dead until worked on by the imagination. To put it another way: the need to mould reality, to subject it to the shaping spirit of imagination, is inspired by an intense need to heal the sense of loss arising from death.¹⁸

Where the *Prelude* lines differ from the early poetry is in their balancing of inner and outer worlds. Here the Irish Channel at least retains an objective existence, even if it has yielded its majesty to the vaporous sea of an ideal landscape. In the juvenilia the ideal world is allowed to take over entirely. This struck Wordsworth himself as he re-read his juvenile poetry during composition of *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* in 1804-5. We know he returned to the early poetry because, apart from reworking *The Dog* in *Prelude* Book IV, he affectionately parodies in Book VIII three juvenile drafts, none of which has yet been formally published.¹⁹ 'I still / At all times had a real solid world / Of images about me', he observes in the midst of these reworkings.²⁰ This 'solid world / Of images' is the paradox on which the juvenilia is based: beside the solid world of the imagination, the real world seems disturbingly insubstantial. Over a year later in September 1806 he was still preoccupied with his early poetry. That month he met John Constable, probably at Brathay Hall,²¹ where the artist was based during a two-month tour of the Lakes. Over a year after the meeting, Constable recalled their conversation to Joseph Farington, who recorded it in his diary:

Constable remarks upon the high opinion Wordsworth entertains of Himself. He told Constable that while He was a Boy going to Hawkeshead school, His mind was often so possessed with images, so lost in extraordinary conceptions, that He has held by a wall not knowing but He was part of it.²²

This disturbing intoxication with a world of images and extraordinary conceptions is described again in the Fenwick Note to the *Immortality Ode*, where Wordsworth admits that

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own

¹⁸ There are other connections between these lines and *The Dog*; it is a stroke of genius, for instance, that the ocean of *The Dog* survives into the Snowdon episode as both the idealized vision and the reality it displaces.

¹⁹ These jottings are presented in my thesis as 'My true love's grave', 'The Vagrant Family', and *Vale longum vale*. They are reworked *Thirteen-Book Prelude* viii 533-41, 551-9, 610-23, respectively.

²⁰ *Thirteen-Book Prelude* viii. 603-5.

²¹ 'Mr Wordsworth had the pleasure of making Mr Constable's acquaintance when he visited this Country long ago', as Wordsworth recalled in 1844 (*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years iv: 1840-53* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised Alan G. Hill [Oxford, 1988], p. 553). The meeting took place either at Brathay Hall, then inhabited by the painter John Harden, or at Low Brathay, in which lived Charles and Sophia Lloyd. See *John Constable's Correspondence V* ed. R. B. Beckett (Ipswich, 1967), p. 74; and J. R. Watson, 'Wordsworth and Constable', *RES* 12 (1962) 361-7.

²² *The Diary of Joseph Farington* ed. K. Garlick, A. Macintyre, and K. Cave (16 vols., New Haven and London, 1979-84), viii. 3164.

immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes.²³

Wordsworth's 'immaterial nature' is not unlike Seamus Heaney's bogland, which disgorges everything from a Great Irish Elk to 'Butter sunk under / More than a hundred years'.²⁴ Just as these regurgitated emblems of inherited Irishness disclose Heaney's need to define a cultural identity, so the unappeased appetite of Wordsworth's abyss implies a psychological impulse of its own. This mental landscape can be traced in *The Vale of Esthwaite*, an ambitious poem of over 1000 lines, composed in the spring and summer of 1787, when Wordsworth was 17.

In the first of these the narrator describes his descent into an underground passageway beneath Helm Crag, led by a spectre-guide:

He wav'd again, we enter'd slow
 A narrow passage, damp and low;
 The mountain seem'd to nod on high -
 Shriek'd loud, then groan'd a hollow sigh.
 And on we journey'd man[y] a mile
 While all was black as night the while. . . .
 Now as we wandered through the gloom
 In black Helvellyn's inmost womb
 The Spectre made a solemn stand,
 Slow round my head thrice waved his [hand]
 And cleaved mine ear - then swept hi[s lyre]
 That Shriek'd terrific, shrill and [dire]!
 Shudder'd the fiend: the vault a[lon]g
 Echoed the loud and dismal song.
 (ll. 340-57)²⁵

The spectre's ritualized invocations and the bizarre exchange of shrieks are bound to make us wonder how the episode will develop. The localized topography (we are once again in Grasmere), and symbolism of the poet's lyre, might suggest a climax similar to that of *Anacreon Imitated* - a personal commitment to the life of a Lake District poet, for instance. At the same time, Virgilians might recognize that the three passes of the spectre echo Aeneas' three attempts to embrace his dead father, Anchises, when he descends into the underworld in *Aeneid* Book VI.²⁶ Is Wordsworth about to enjoy a reunion of his own?

Well, not quite. The poem continues, unexpectedly, with a terrifying vision of bloodshed. Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes* was the primary source for Wordsworth's knowledge of the most decisive event in Cumberland's history: the Battle of Dunmail Raise. As shown on the engraved map at the front of the *Guide*, Helvellyn straddled the old borders of

²³ Cornell *Poems 1800-1807* 428; see also Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 173-4.

²⁴ *Bogland* 13-14.

²⁵ Although de Selincourt's text differs from mine, I have provided line numbers keying quoted passages to his text, so readers may consult it to assess their larger context. It should be borne in mind, however, that de Selincourt's text represents a conflation of three manuscripts separated in time by nine months, possibly a year.

²⁶ *Aeneid* vi. 700-2.

Cumberland and Westmorland, and was the site of a tumultuous battle in which Cumberland's King Dunmail was defeated 'by the Saxon monarch Edmund, who put out the eyes of the two sons of his adversary':²⁷

I saw the Ghosts and heard the yell
Of every Briton [there] who fell,
When Edmund deaf to horror's cries
Trod out the cruel Brothers' eyes.
With dismal yell and savage scowl,
While Terror haglike rides my soul,
Full oft together are we hurl'd
Far, Far amid the shadowy world;
And since that hour the world unknown,
The world of shades, is all my own.
(ll. 369-78)

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Isaiah tells Blake that 'my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing',²⁸ here, a similarly idealized vision, the 'world of shades', has overwhelmed the poet, and symbolically reinstated the dead by which it is peopled: 'An unknown power connects him with the dead', as Wordsworth was to write in his 1793 poem, *Descriptive Sketches* (l. 543). The insistence of the poetry, which assumes an incantatory quality in its final lines, suggests that the desire to 'connect' is deeply-felt:

Full oft together are we hurl'd
Far, Far amid the shadowy world;
And since that hour the world unknown,
The world of shades, is all my own.

At the physical heart of his adopted home, confronted by a vision of the convulsive event by which it was once created, Wordsworth gains access to the world of the dead. He seeks neither to redeem them, nor to return to the living: access is what he sought. This state of access is another way of describing the abyss of idealism. For if the abyss can summon up a vision of the Battle of Dunmail Raise, it implicitly promises to invoke other, more personal, ghosts.

The final section of the *Vale* begins with the recollection of an evening in mid-December 1783, when the 13 year-old poet had waited above Hawkshead on the ridge north of Borwick Lodge, a mile and a half from his school, for a horse to take him, Richard and John Wordsworth home for the holidays:

No spot but claims the tender tear
By joy or grief to memory dear:
One Evening, when the wintery blast
Through the sharp Hawthorn whistling pass'd;
And the poor flocks, all pinch'd with cold,
Sad-drooping sought the mountain-fold;
Long, Long, upon yon steepy rock,
Alone I bore the bitter shock;

²⁷ Thomas West, *A Guide to the Lakes* (3rd ed., London, 1784), p. 81.

²⁸ *William Blake's Writings* ed. G. E. Bentley (2 vols., Oxford, 1978), Plate 12, i. 86.

Long, Long, my swimming eyes did roam
 For little Horse to bear me home,
 To bear me (what avails my tear?)
 To sorrow o'er a Father's bier.
 (ll. 416-27)

The difference between these lines and what precedes them is astonishing. In place of a theatrical and idiosyncratic gothicism, we are offered a deeply personal poetry unlike Wordsworth's models. And for the first time he has discovered a balance between the world of shades and the outer reality: they are, to use the language of *Tintern Abbey*, interfused. The landscape is proleptically imbued with grief at his father's death:²⁹ the flocks are 'Sad-drooping'; an alternative reading in the manuscript tells us that the rock is 'naked',³⁰ and the 'whistling' of the wind through the hawthorn recalls Macpherson's *Temora*, where the sleeping highlanders 'thought they heard the *voice of the dead*. This *voice of the dead*, however, was, perhaps, no more than a shriller whistle of the winds in an old tree, or in the chinks of a neighbouring rock.'³¹ Where in earlier poetry Wordsworth had allowed the idealizing faculty to take over completely, it is now in equilibrium with the outside world. It is the dead who endow the landscape with life.

More surprisingly still, the poetry now moves from 1783 to the moment of composition, July 1787, and describes its author's delayed grief for his dead father:

Flow on - in vain thou hast not flow'd,
 But eas'd me of an heavy load,
 For nuch it gives my soul relief
 To pay the mighty debt of Grief.
 With sighs repeated o'er and o'er,
 I mourn because I mourn'd no more;
 For ah! the storm was soon at rest -
 Soon broke the din upon my breast.
 Nor did my little heart foresee
 She lost a home in losing thee,
 Nor did it know, of thee bereft,
 That little more than Heav'n was left.
 (ll. 428-37)

The event precipitating this crisis and its retelling in the *Vale* is revealed by a letter of late July 1787 from Dorothy Wordsworth to her friend, Jane Pollard:

I was for a whole week kept in expectation of my Brothers, who staid at school all that time after the vacation begun owing to the ill-nature of my Uncle who would not send horses for them because when they wrote they did not happen to mention them, and only said when they should break up which was always before sufficient. . . . indeed nobody but myself expressed one wish to see them, at last however they were sent for,

²⁹ John Wordsworth Sr died 30 December 1783.

³⁰ The rock's 'nakedness' anticipates the 'four naked walls / That stared upon each other' in *Ruined Cottage* MS.D (ll. 31-2). See also Sykes Davies' discussion of the word 'naked' in Wordsworth, Sykes Davies 27-31.

³¹ [James Macpherson], *Temora, an ancient epic poem* (London, 1763), p. 79, his italics.

but not till my Brother Wm had hired a horse for himself and came over because he thought someone must be ill . . .³²

Wordsworth's original wait, which had taken place in 1783, was re-enacted in 1787, when his uncle, Christopher Crackanthorpe Cookson, refused to send horses. This alone might not have led to renewed grief for his father had it not been for a series of injustices that illustrated what Dorothy described to Jane Pollard as her relatives' 'ill nature'. For the first time since their parents' deaths the Wordsworth children found themselves alone and unprotected. 'Many a time have Wm, J, C, and myself shed tears together, tears of the bitterest sorrow, we all of us, each day, feel more sensibly the loss we sustained when we were deprived of our parents', Dorothy told Jane Pollard.³³ She went on to declare that '[We] always finish our conversations which generally take a melancholy turn, with wishing we had a father *and a home*'.³⁴ The same lament recurs in the *Vale*: 'Nor did my little heart foresee / She lost *a home* in losing thee'.

But Wordsworth's response to his father's death in the *Vale* possesses a complexity lacking in Dorothy's letter:

Flow on - in vain thou hast not flow'd,
But eas'd me of an heavy load,
For much it gives my soul relief
To pay the mighty debt of Grief.
With sighs repeated o'er and o'er,
I mourn because I mourn'd no more . . .

At the age of 13 Wordsworth had been unable to understand the full significance of his father's death. The failure to mourn in 1783 has given rise to a 'mighty debt' of undischarged grief - a debt that implies a great wealth of emotional pain. Only now, with a fuller understanding, can he begin to mourn his father as he should have done. But three and a half years of unexpressed grief cannot be resolved at once: 'With sighs repeated o'er and o'er, / I mourn because I mourn'd no more'. If some of his tears represent the due owed to his father in 1783, others are shed for the earlier inability to mourn. Underlying the mercantile metaphor, and its elegant working-out, there seems to be an element of self-reproach, perhaps even guilt. Seeking an explanation, F. W. Bateson suggested that Wordsworth's attitude to his father was one of 'indifference, if not of active dislike'³⁵ - a plausible, though speculative response. A similar guilt underlies the reworked version of this passage in *The two-Part Prelude*, where,

when I called to mind
That day so lately passed when from the crag
I looked in such anxiety of hope,
With trite reflections of morality
Yet with the deepest passion I bowed low
To God, who thus corrected my desires . . .³⁶

³² *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), hereafter *EY*, pp. 3-4.

³³ *EY* 3.

³⁴ *EY* 5.

³⁵ *Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation* (London, 1956), p. 51.

³⁶ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1798-1799* ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, NY, 1977), ii. 355-60.

In 1787 the Esthwaite landscape had been transformed by the poet's present remorse; the 1798 reworking goes one step further, framing John Wordsworth's death as the punishment of a vengeful God. Both passages find, at the heart of their author's imaginative world, a hidden, painful guilt; both beg the question, how might it be resolved?

Parallels can be found in the case of the painter, Frank Auerbach, also orphaned at an early age, when his parents disappeared into Hitler's gas chambers. Robert Hughes tells us that when Auerbach received his parents' effects, including his father's watch, he sold them and bought another watch with the proceeds:

That Auerbach in boyhood must have instinctively construed his own exile and his parents' deaths as their abandonment of him is likely, indeed certain; from the watch story, one can deduce an unassuageable, yearning aggression against the lost father. And just as Auerbach's early paintings seem, at root, to be attempts to contact his own infancy and put himself, through the metaphor of paint as a primal substance - the touch that precedes sight - once again in contact with the lost body of his mother, so the images in the final state of certain drawings, these blackened wraiths of ash, rendered into weightlessness over the long course of construction and disembodiment, carry an inescapable freight of pain: these images conjured out of the dust of burnt wood might come from inside the chimney, from within the final and unappeaseable loss of her body.³⁷

The tension between the 'touch that precedes sight' and the concrete world beyond the painting is analogous to that between the idealized vision and reality in Wordsworth. Both artists seek to reinstate what has been lost, or at least to heal the 'freight of pain' arising from loss. Auerbach's desire to re-establish 'contact with the lost body of his mother' carries its own emotional logic, and provides a psychological context for his early portraits in charcoal. Similarly, it was only through imagining his possession by the abyss of idealism, the world of shades, that Wordsworth was able to reclaim his dead parents, and to accommodate the guilt arising from the failure of his grief. Wordsworthian metamorphosis is the strategy by which he seeks to bridge the worlds of the living and the dead.

The obsessive overlay of successive versions of the same image in Auerbach's drawings, the scraping-away of earlier efforts, and reworked versions, is analogous with Wordsworth's repeated redrafting of successive versions of the same poem. (There are, according to Jonathan Wordsworth, 16 discrete versions of *The Prelude*.) For both artists, the cycle of deletion and renewal echoes the desire to reclaim, to repossess what has been lost. The finished work, whether it be a drawing or a poem, is thus part of a larger process - evidence of a magic that extends beyond the boundaries of the artefact itself. 'Early parental loss can be the most powerful of creative goads', writes Hughes. 'We patch together structures, solid or rickety, to fill the emotional void, and invest them with a degree of healing power'.³⁸

After the emotional crisis of July 1787, the abyss of idealism never again possessed the same compulsive attraction; perhaps Wordsworth felt that infatuation with the abyss of idealism had helped to suppress the grief deriving from his parents' deaths. In any case, he now decided to root his poetry in the concrete facts of his life - in the picturesque scenery surrounding him, and in the personal relationships he most valued. He was supported in this by his sister, and the closeness they enjoyed in adulthood probably dates from this period.

³⁷ Robert Hughes, *Frank Auerbach* (London, 1990), p. 18.

³⁸ Hughes 18.

The closing lines of the *Vale* contain a short section commemorating a new-found love arising from their shared grief:

Sister, for whom I feel a love
 That warms a Brother far above,
 On you, as sad she marks the scene,
 Why does my heart so fondly lean?
 Why but because in you is giv'n
 All, All my soul could wish from heav'n?
 Why but because I fondly view
 All, All that heav'n has claim'd in you?
 (*Vale* [iii] 111-18)

As the ultimate consolation for the loss of their parents, Dorothy mediates between the dead - 'All that heav'n has claim'd' - and the living. In effect, she assumes the role played formerly by the spectre-guide, guiding the poet towards his true destiny. Because she is a living being, his imaginative life becomes focused in the world of real objects surrounding them. The imaginative current that once confined Wordsworth to the abyss of idealism has been grounded in the palpable. At the same time the fond leaning of his heart towards his sister is a new source of strength: as John Beer has observed, William and Dorothy understood at this moment that tears 'provided a positive and very necessary *relief*'.³⁹ The crisis of 1787 bound them, Christopher and John, more closely than ever before. In 1792, Christopher wrote: 'far be it from me to recommend solitude. I think most pleasure may be reaped in social life, among sisters, brothers, children & friends, & from a quiet conscience'.⁴⁰ When, in February 1805, news came of John's death at sea, William confided to Christopher that he and Dorothy 'have done all that could be done to console each other by *weeping together*'.⁴¹ The consoling power of their tears recalls the catharsis of 1787 which they shared with Christopher, and confirms the enduring influence of early loss, described by Thomas De Quincey in 1845:

The bewildering romance, light tarnished with darkness, the semi-fabulous legend, truth celestial mixed with human falsehoods, these fade even of themselves as life advances. The romance has perished that the young man adored; the legend has gone that deluded the boy; but the deep, deep tragedies of infancy, as when the child's hands were unlinked for ever from his mother's neck, or his lips for ever from his sister's kisses, these remain lurking below all, and these lurk to the last.⁴²

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³⁹ *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* (London, 1978), p. 143.

⁴⁰ The quotation is from his *Outline of a Poem*; see Zera S. Fink, *The Early Wordsworthian Milieu* (Oxford, 1967), p. 106.

⁴¹ *EY* 543; my italics.

⁴² 'The Palimpsest of the Human Brain', Thomas De Quincey, *Collected Writings*, new and enlarged edn., ed. David Masson (14 vols., Edinburgh, 1889-90), xiii. 349.

The Stranger's Grave: Laying a De Quinceyan Ghost

By BARRY SYMONDS

FOR OVER A CENTURY now *The Stranger's Grave*, a novel published anonymously by Longman in 1823, has, with varying degrees of credibility, been attributed to Thomas De Quincey. From a tentative beginning, founded largely on anecdote, critical attention has focussed itself more and more sharply on the De Quinceyan elements in the story. Mortimer Collins first assigned the work to De Quincey in 1870.¹ De Quincey, Collins observes, was in Wetheral, the setting for much of the novel, 'for a while, and wrote a weird wild story, *The Stranger's Grave*, which is not to be found in his collected works'.

W. E. A. Axon picked up the thread earlier this century. Writing in *The Nation* in 1907,² he set out his rather slender anecdotal evidence, recording in the process the fact that a search of Longman's archives had proved inconclusive. Axon subsequently pressed James Hogg, publisher of the first British collected edition of De Quincey's works, on the subject. Hogg was 'altogether negative' about the attribution: 'In all our intercourse De Quincey never referred in any way to Edensor [the general setting of the novel] or this story - while he talked freely on the various "periods" of his life . . . there are no *De Quincey fangs* in this story'.³ He had originally, however, hesitated over pronouncing judgement: 'something haunts me about "The Stranger's Grave". I am pondering'.⁴ Whether or not Hogg's ghost was eventually exorcised, Axon assigned the work firmly to De Quincey in an extended article of 1914.⁵ One point of evidence offered in both of Axon's pieces was later to be confirmed by documentary evidence. This related to the tenancy of a house in Wetheral by De Quincey's brother Richard. The latter, it was now shown, had indeed rented a house in the village of Wetheral, in Cumberland, between 1814 and 1816, during which period residents 'actually saw Thomas De Quincey in the village'.⁶

De Quincey's own letters of the early 1820s contain enough general references to money paid for 'a novel', 'a considerable work' etc., for there to be at least a context to a possible financial gestation period for the (resurrected?) novel. In 1985 a detailed case for attributing the novel to De Quincey was made out by Grevel Lindop,⁷ who based his argument partly on stylistic similarities between the novel and De Quincey's known works, and partly on parallels between the hero's career and De Quincey's early life. The argument, though not altogether conclusive, established a presumption in favour of De Quincey's authorship. Since the appearance of the essay, discussion of *The Stranger's Grave* has been fully integrated into a number of critical studies; the most recent being John Barrell's *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey* (1991).

However, it has recently become clear that the novel is not in fact De Quincey's work. Longman's archive has yielded another writer: George Robert Gleig. The patient research

¹ See 'Praed's Country', *Belgravia: A London Magazine* 12 (1870) 445-52.

² Correspondence section, *The Nation* (New York) 85, No. 2217 (26 Dec. 1907) 586.

³ Manchester Central Library, MS item 994 in the De Quincey Collection: Hogg to Axon, 5 August 1908.

⁴ As fn3: Hogg to Axon, 16 May 1908.

⁵ 'The Canon of De Quincey's Writings . . .' *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom* 2nd series, 32 (1914) 1-46.

⁶ J. Scott Duckers, 'The De Quincey Family', *TLS* (21 October 1920) 684.

⁷ See 'Innocence and Revenge: The Problem of De Quincey's Fiction' in *Thomas De Quincey: Bicentenary Studies* ed. R. L. Snyder (London, 1985), pp. 213-38.

of Michael Bott, archivist at Reading University Library, where the papers are now held, has uncovered two letters relating to *The Stranger's Grave*, hitherto unexamined because legible only with the aid of ultraviolet light. The first is dated 21 August 1823 and runs: 'Your MS reached us yesterday quite safe. We are willing to undertake the publication of the work . . . We propose printing the Tale in a handsome Duodecimo Volume & risking a Thousand copies. The "Stranger's Grave" with the motto of "I saw a tale unfold" &c - will make an attractive title'. It is addressed from Longman to 'The Revd. G. Gleig - Ash near Wingham - Kent'. Another letter from Longman, dated 6 January 1827, informs Gleig that of the original print run of 1,000 'there remain 397 copies; & if you wish to clear that account we will discount your half of the books'.⁸

Born in Stirling in 1796 and ordained by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1820, Gleig was a prolific writer in that peculiarly nineteenth-century way. Following the success in 1826 of *The Subaltern*, a piece of 'faction' based in part on his own experiences in Wellington's Peninsular campaigns, Gleig published a stream of miscellaneous works. Novels, biographies, military histories, world histories, theological texts and manifold articles, appeared in quick succession. Some prospered: the novel *Allan Breck* (1834), for example, was a best seller for the publisher Richard Bentley, as too was Gleig's *The Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro* (1830). Others, like *The Life of Warren Hastings* (1841) proved dire failures. Gleig's biggest literary opportunity also proved something of a public catastrophe. Bentley appointed Gleig general editor of his new National Library series. Just twelve months after its launch in 1830, the series ground to an embarrassed halt. From the supposed improprieties in its first volume, Galt's *Life of Byron*, to the actual inaccuracies of Gleig's own *History of the Bible*, the Library was, to say the least, an ill-judged venture.⁹

Similarities between De Quincey's and Gleig's writing careers are obvious. Both were Ultra Tories of an unusual shade, who wrote for the Tory *and*, in some instances, for the so-called liberal-radical press . . . as Tories in each case. Both, one hardly need point out, were also polymaths who could write in about as many departments as the periodicals of the age could offer. And, even leaving aside an apparently similar penchant for self-destruction, both shared similar formative childhood experiences. Anyone aware of De Quincey's lifelong autobiographical obsession with his sister Elizabeth's death, will see something more than familiar in the following comment on Gleig: 'One of his earliest impressions was a feeling of extreme attachment to an elder sister, who died of a decline when he was five years old. He remembers going into her room the morning of her death, and finding her, as he thought, in a deep sleep, and being greatly horrified when her cheek, which he kissed, felt so cold. The funeral likewise he can call to mind at the moment . . .'¹⁰

As members of the original *Blackwood's* team it is more than likely that the two writers met, though there is no record of it. Beyond having been offered as the writer of Gleig's first novel for 120 years or so, De Quincey provides just one brief review of *The Subaltern* to link himself and Gleig: 'A *Subaltern in America* we read with less pleasure than usual; which we

⁸ University of Reading Library, Archives and Manuscripts, Longman Archive, letters for 1823 and 1827.

⁹ For details of Gleig's writing career see particularly Royal A. Gettmann's *A Victorian Publisher* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 33-38.

¹⁰ 'Memoir of the Rev. G. R. Gleig', Anon., *New Monthly Magazine* (1837) 220.

attribute in part to the disgust impressed upon us by the never-ending series of blunders which he records'.¹¹

Gleig was never happy with *The Stranger's Grave*. Perhaps the theme of incest, from which develop some of the major strands of the work, proved ultimately to be a little close to home: Gleig had married his father's ward in 1819. Perhaps also his conflating of fact and fiction in setting the novel in the same valley as the township of Rockcliffe, where he spent the first year of his marriage, proved an additional strain. It was anyway a daring book for the curate of Ash to be publishing. *The Stranger's Grave* was written after the failure in 1822 of what Gleig called his 'injudicious' pamphlet on the contemporary controversy between church conservatives and Evangelicals: 'My next produce was a novel in one small volume, called "The Stranger's Grave". The plot of the story was a repulsive one which would probably have found admirers in these days of sensational writing - for the style was good and the incidents natural; the public taste was not then so far advanced as it is now and "The Stranger's Grave" failed to serve the purpose for which it was intended'.¹² One can only wonder what now will become of the re-attributed work in its new context.

University of Manchester

¹¹ *Edinburgh Saturday Post*, 8 September 1827 (review of *Blackwood's Magazine*). See *New Essays by De Quincey* ed. S. M. Tave (Princeton, 1966), p. 98.

¹² National Library of Scotland, MS 3872 (fragment of Gleig's autobiography), f. 268.

The Society's Archives: The Open Day at Putney

By D. E. WICKHAM

THE OPEN DAY at the United Reformed Church in Putney on 3 April 1993 went remarkably well. It was good to see so many well-known faces but also some less well-known, at least in the flesh. It was a special pleasure to meet Winifred Courtney (of *Young Charles Lamb* and her husband, over from America for a short time, as well as the new owners of Lamb's Cottage in Edmonton. We were also delighted to see John Moxon, with his cousin, born a Moxon and wearing Emma Isola's bracelet, and her daughter Rachel, also of Moxon/Isola blood: 'small and dark', they summarised.

Madeline Huxstep had set up a buffet which ensured that none of us felt faint from lack of nourishment. A brief cabaret was provided by Deborah Hedgecock, who is being temporarily employed by the Society to sort and list our Collection at Guildhall Library: she told us what she has found and what she has done so far and then presented me with a 14-page typed report!

Before reaching the food and drink, however, one had to cross two other spaces. First was the vestry where we signed the Attendance Book and were able to buy copies of Prance's *Companion* and the Romantic Period books which had been deaccessioned and given to us by Edmonton Library. To set minds at rest, let me say that the firm of Huxstep and Branchini had listed most of the items by the Lambs and I had spent an hour or so sorting the wheat from the chaff. This was a subjective choice but inclined towards the ultra-conservative. For example, I retained all the (nominally 70) versions of *Tales from Shakespeare*, until we discover what is at Guildhall. The chaff sold well but the wheat remains, for the Library people to 'run against the database' (how quickly one picks up the jargon!), keep the volumes not already in the Society's collection, and return the duplicates for sale. In other words, no-one missed anything important in the book line by being absent on this occasion. The goodies are likely to turn up later.

Then we moved into the church, where Madeline had laid out a number of our particular treasures, some brought in for the day, and some that very few of us knew. Charles Lamb's chair, Mary Saywell's album, the Button Snap deed, and the threatening proposal sent to Fanny Kelly were all there, in addition to a series of paintings of buildings associated with the Lambs and probably made as illustrations, a portrait drawing of E. V. Lucas, and some early editions of books by Charles Lamb. The items which perhaps caused the most interest were the portraits in oils: a fine one of George Dyer; one believed to be of Mary Lamb (both owned by the Society); and the family heirloom brought by John Moxon and purported to be of John Lamb Sr., i.e. the father of John Jr., Mary, and Charles. It is reproduced in Barry Cornwall's *Charles Lamb: A Memoir* (1866), as being in the possession of Mrs Moxon but there are vague doubts about its age and the art historians had a good chew on it to give an appetite for lunch. Anyway, it looked very fine on display, with one of the four known copies of John Lamb Sr.'s *Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*.

I made a list of the categories into which the items at Putney have been roughly sorted during two working parties and reached 27. Some of these overlap with what is already at Guildhall Library, others do not. Then I brought away some of the Archives for better sorting, particularly the papers relating to The Elian (Society), the men-only dining club precursor of the CLS founded in 1925, the early days of our Society, and Edmund Blunden. These were a revelation.

Just turning over the papers of The Elian, there are letters, admittedly usually only one or two each, from Stanley Baldwin, Hilaire Belloc, Sir Frank Benson ('I shall be acting that night in the Provinces'), Augustine Birrell, Beresford Chancellor, A. J. Cronin, Walter de la Mare, Austin Dobson, St John Ervine, Edmund Gosse, John Hassall the artist, E. V. Knox, Alfred Noyes, Pinero, J. B. Priestley, Clement Shorter, Dame Ethel Smyth, J. C. Squire, Rebecca West *et hoc genus omne* (I had drafted 'and that sort of crowd' but thought it looked common - no! - *vulgar*, because 'common' is common). There is a letter from a great-nephew of Louisa Martin, 'whom I used to call "Monkey"', and another apparently locating the Hoxton Madhouse, the latter intended for publication in the *Bulletin*. There are numerous letters on Elian matters from E. V. Lucas. There is a typed letter from Trevor Leigh-Hunt, the 'Trevor' tripping one up mentally, annoyed about dealers' margins and proliferating locks of authenticated Keats hair. There is a handwritten letter from The Pines, Putney Hill, about the internal arrangements there and the presence of a portrait of George Dyer, but, alas, it is dated 1922 and from Clara Watts-Dunton.

There are two from Thomas J. Wise, the bookman, admitting to an interest in Lamb, and one from Buxton Forman about his edition of Keats' letters. Isn't that W. W. Jacobs? It is. And there is Anthony (*Zenda*) Hope Hawkins. The mauve ink of that 1924 signature looks familiar. Oh yes, Virginia Woolf, presumably unpublished and probably self-typed, since no secretary would get away with it, admitting that what she has written about George Dyer is substantially true 'but I may have arranged it a little to suit my purpose'. There is a very funny report by the founder-Secretary's wife, Mrs Downing, of the 1933 visit led by E. V. Lucas to Lamb's Cottage in Edmonton which they thought was to be left to the nation. It is hoped that this too will be published in the *Bulletin*. There are also nearly 100 original letters and communications from Edmund Blunden, most of them to Mr Downing, and dated between 1922 and 1958.

The beginnings of our own Society are represented by some remarkable ephemera actually circulated among likely first members and items referring to the earliest meetings. Sir James Barrie writes to refuse the office of first President and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch gladly accepts by telegram, the first of a series of telegrams and hand-written letters exchanged with him. There are letters from such as Sir John Betjeman, Vera Brittain, Lord Dunsany, A. P. Herbert, Georgette Heyer, Geoffrey Keynes, Desmond MacCarthy, Charles Morgan, Carola Oman, William Plomer, Stephen Potter, Anthony Powell, and many more: Ernest Crowsley, the great Honorary Secretary of the CLS, certainly cast wide his net for potential speakers. There also seem to be exactly 100 communications, usually hand-written and of some length and of the utmost warmth, from Edmund Blunden to Ernest Crowsley. These date from 1934 to 1970 and are generally on matters concerning Charles Lamb. We may assume that both lots of Blunden correspondence are entirely unpublished.

'And some I see that twofold balls and treble sceptres carry' - in other words, many of the items suggest further directions for research. A few press-cuttings had been mixed up with the early papers and not separately placed in their proper file. I picked one out at random. It was from *The Bookman's Journal & Print Collector* for 5 November 1920 and was an article on E. V. Lucas and his study, with just a few words of interview. It was of no immediate interest but my eye was caught by a statement that on his study wall was a large framed piece of paper on which Charles Lamb had written 'Dear Frank, Did you ever think I should be such a Dandy as to write upon a card?' Thinking back a few hours, surely I had seen this at the Putney exhibition? So here was a source for an item in our collection *and* at least a suggestion that we might have inherited things from E. V. Lucas, possibly his whole

Elian collection. Perhaps we should print here a little pictorial allegory of Time Revealing Truth?

These comments are simply the result of skimming one part of the Society's Archives. Deborah Hedgecock's primary sorting at Guildhall has meanwhile discovered, or perhaps I should say recovered, three pieces of Lamb holograph, including a draft paragraph from his essay *On the Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty*. I am either sorry or relieved to say that what she first believed to be the original manuscript letter from Charles and Mary Lamb to Sarah Hazlitt dated 10 December 1808 (Marrs ii 286-8, actually retained in the Huntington Library) is now thought to be an exceptionally good facsimile. However, we definitely own 18 letters from George Dyer (there is another one at Putney and I feel a limited edition beckoning), four letters from Alfred Ainger, three from Joseph Cottle, two from Barry Cornwall, and others from Croker, Hook, Charles Ollier, and from Hazlitt to Leight Hunt. Miss Hedgecock has collected together about 150 typescripts of lectures given at Society meetings. There is what she carefully describes as 'a manuscript copy' of Edward Moxon's privately printed pamphlet on Charles Lamb: I hope to find that a mere glance shows it to be in Moxon's own ornate hand. She has naturally reported the 15 volumes of the Rich Collection, most of them bound and indexed. She has found one collection of press cuttings which fills 25 lever arch files. This is merely one among several. And she has not finished yet!

I am glad to say that we are to take advantage of the offer of the Guildhall Library authorities to collect the part of the collection now at Putney and merge it with what we have already deposited in the Library. The split between the two is totally unjustifiable. Their combination will enhance the security of the possessions of the CLS while allowing easier access for research. The automatic professional cataloguing of these items will also allow us to fulfil our obligation to advance public knowledge of Charles Lamb and his circle. Apart from my suggestion about the Dyer letters, which will be discussed by the Council in due course, I look forward to writing up *The Elian* and the early history of the CLS. I also have two ideas about indexing.

Council members have consistently asked for reassurance about possible withdrawal of items for research and exhibition. No difficulties are envisaged about the first, given suitable circumstances and state of conservation. Loan applications are perhaps more likely to come from outside bodies than from this Society and I am assured that the Library authorities will not only ask our permission, but will actually advise us on the trustworthiness and security background of the applicant as well as complete the paperwork.¹

London

¹ This article refers only to the Society's collection of Archives and ephemera. The Society's Library was considered in my article published in the *CLB* NS 78 (1992) 206-10. Its cataloguing by Guildhall Library continues; completion of this catalogue in a form publishable by the Society is eagerly awaited.

Reviews

LUCY NEWLYN, *'Paradise Lost' and the Romantic Reader*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993. Pp. xii + 295. £35.00 hardback.

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY Milton became a cultural phenomenon, a moral and spiritual guide, an exemplar of sublimity and imagination of such magnitude that admiration came near to apotheosis, and reverence for *Paradise Lost* made that poem almost a third Testament. Romantic authors too responded to *Paradise Lost* as an enormously powerful statement of religious, political, moral and aesthetic values, not all of which, however, they could accept. The allusions to *Paradise Lost* which we find in Romantic texts therefore appear to constitute merely a 'meaningful register of the extent to which Milton's ideas are actively refuted, approved or discarded'. Thus Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for instance, can be understood both as a tribute and a declaration of independence.

Dr. Newlyn contends that it is wrong to see Romantic responses as simply discriminating between aspects of a closed text; she offers instead a review of Romantic allusion that reflects open-endedness and ambivalence in Milton's poetry as well as in the allusions. Her book is an attempt to assert the importance of such indeterminacy, to restore the subtext of the poem, and to show 'the ways in which Romantic writing reproduces, amplifies and prolongs the ambiguities of *Paradise Lost*'. This is a worthwhile enterprise, and Dr. Newlyn achieves her end; all that is excellent in her book (and there is much) serves to direct attention not merely to the indeterminacies themselves, but the fertilising nature of the majority of them.

In Chapter Two she points out that in modern critical commentary closed readings of *Paradise Lost* betray either a form of 'aspect blindness' in the sense that Wittgenstein uses the term, or, if the ambivalence is perceived, a didactic insistence that the reader must choose one reading and suppress his or her consciousness of its opposite. She insists that there is no need for choice, and that there is richness in indeterminacy. Such richness is found within the ambiguities of the text of *Paradise Lost* itself; for example in memories of the classical and Shakespearean traditions, such as the daylong fall of Mulciber, which brings Icarus to the reader's mind, or Satan's 'tears such as angels weep', recalling Isabella in *Measure for Measure* scourging authority whose tricks 'make the angels weep'. Such allusions fruitfully modify one's conception of the fallen spirits. More potent are the ambiguities in Miltonic anticipation and self-echoing: Eve's blush as Adam leads her to their first love-making looks forward to the 'short blush of morn' in Book XI. The echo is long, and most readers may not make the connection even after numerous readings; nevertheless once the anticipation has been pointed out, it intensifies the reader's delight in Eve's humanising blush as a colouring of 'proleptically fallen sexuality'.

Having established in this manner the indeterminacies in Milton's own text, Dr. Newlyn goes on to examine the ambiguities of Romantic allusions. To this end she constructs a taxonomy of her subject matter, the principal *genera* providing chapter headings, and the sub-species section headings within the chapters. Chapter Four, for example, is titled 'Religion', and contains sections headed 'Crime and Punishment', 'Injustice and Oppression', 'Responsibility', 'Authority', and 'Redemptive Possibilities'. Such lists rather naïvely betray what aspects of each topic the author has found congenial; nevertheless it is also a reminder of her courage in addressing a matter of such enormous scope. In fairness too, one must say that in the best parts of these chapters, the demonstration of ambivalences achieves a kind of

literary criticism that has become disastrously rare in our day, for we not only know more about both the allusions and *Paradise Lost*, we enjoy more.

There are, however, serious faults in this book, of which prolixity is the worst. It is a sensible thing for an author to provide in an Introduction a brief itinerary of the journey on which he or she proposes to escort the reader. Dr. Newlyn's summary occupies ten out of thirteen pages, and proceeds chapter by chapter in far more detail than seems necessary. It is additionally disconcerting to find that in some of the chapters themselves the author repeats her route map in greater detail, before embarking on the journey itself. One might compare p. 4 with p. 23, for example, p. 7 with p. 121, and pp. 7/8 with pp. 154/55. Such reiteration may be prompted by a kindly anxiety that the reader should not get lost, but the unhappy result is an outbreak of first person pronouns that rapidly becomes embarrassing, and never quite clears up.

A more serious fault consist in what one might call the 'writerly fallacy'. Let us take one paragraph from Chapter Three (Politics):

Wordsworth is not alone in seeing a tyrannical potential in the mind's creative powers. Coleridge shows a similar ambivalence in 'Kubla Khan', drawing attention to Kubla's act of appropriation, in constructing a pleasure house for his own uses ('twice five miles of fertile ground' are girdled with walls and towers), and pointing to its repetition, within the imagination of the poet, who seeks to replicate this paradisaical construction in language. As in *Paradise Lost*, two-way indeterminacy allows a mirroring process to take place, which elides specific political alignments even as it sets them up; Kubla's imperialism associates him with the tyranny of heaven, while the poet's ambition has Satanic overtones . . .

This raises awkward questions. If by the word 'replicate' Dr. Newlyn means that Coleridge imaginatively commits the same evil deed of thievish enclosure that his lines describe, then perhaps we are entitled to ask for more evidence that the poet is truly guilty of 'imperialism in the head'. We might also ask whether any form of human land-grab automatically associates the grabber with the tyranny of heaven, and why, precisely, an author's wish to write effective loco-descriptive verse is an ambition which has Satanic overtones. As things stand one is far from convinced.

A more distressing example occurs in Chapter Five (Sex), in which Dr. Newlyn describes Keats's Porphyro entering the castle where Madeline is preparing for St Agnes' Eve. As he 'ventures in', she tells us,

he transforms it, in his frightened imagination, into a place 'whose chambers held barbarian hordes, / Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords (ll. 85 - 6). The poetry deals playfully with fancy's gothicizing power, but at the same time the phrase 'mansion foul' (l. 89) takes one to Milton's hell, introducing unmistakable implications. Like Satan, Porphyro carries hell around with him: it is a state of mind.

Nothing in Keats's poem supports this reading; to accept it we must ignore the plainly indicated parallel with *Romeo and Juliet*, and, even more pertinently, we must suppose, on no textual grounds whatever, that old Angela's panic-stricken warnings in lines 98 - 108 are also products of Porphyro's imagination. The cause of the overstrained interpretation is that Porphyro must be shown to have Satanic affinities, and in *Paradise Lost* i 254-5, Satan declares 'The Mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven'. The creature who says this is surely boasting that he can control his imagination; he will never frighten himself with non-existent dangers. The affinity is simply not there.

Much too often Dr. Newlyn tortures the text to make it fit the thesis. One ought not to make every piece of literature a 'writerly' text; in the ember days of post-modernism, 'reading in' remains a critical misdemeanour. Nevertheless one's final comment must be that there is much excellent and enlightening observation among the unconvincing readings and prolixity, would patient readers observingly distil it out.

St Francis Xavier University

JEFFREY BAKER

Society News and Notes from Members

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

Annual General Meeting, 8th May 1993

The Society's AGM took place at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday 8 May 1993 at the Mary Ward Centre, Queen's Square, and proved to be both a pleasant and a heartening occasion as all the Society's Officers had good news to report.

After the Chairman's Report for 1992 (which had been circulated with the *April Bulletin*) had been accepted, the Hon. Treasurer reported that in view of the present satisfactory state of the Society's finances a proposal for an increase in subscriptions need not be considered before the 1994 AGM.

The Hon. Membership Secretary was able to report a steady membership, currently standing at 334.

The *Bulletin's* Editor was able to announce a healthy flow of excellent material for future numbers, coming from both at home and abroad.

The Chairman, acting as Library Liaison Officer, reported that all the archives, pictures and books currently housed (and recently displayed) at Putney were about to be transferred to the Guildhall Library after very cordial and helpful discussions with Ms. Irene Gilchrist and consultations with the Society's Treasurer and Hon. Secretary. The cataloguing of the ephemera at the Guildhall Library was proceeding, and articles on various aspects of this collection would appear in the *Bulletin* in due course. Some remarkable finds had already been made, including letters from Edmund Blunden and a number by George Dyer: the Society hopes to publish the latter at some point.

The existing Officers of the Society were re-elected, as were present Council members, with the exception of Mr. Charles Branchini and Miss Veronica Finch, who chose not to stand. Professor Roger Robinson was elected to membership and Miss Finch and Mr. Branchini were thanked for their valuable services to the Society hitherto.

The date and time of the 1994 AGM were announced as being 5.00 p.m. on Thursday 12th May at the Guildhall Library. Details of the 1993/4 lecture programme and the Luncheon would be circulated with the *July Bulletin* as in previous years.

The Chairman was warmly congratulated on the Publication of *Charles Lamb's London*.

A very great pleasure was given to all members by the presence at the AGM of Basil Savage and Florence Reeves, both in the best of health and spirits.

Madeline Huxstep

The AGM and Annual Conference of the Alliance of Library Societies, 24 April 1993

As usual this was held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute and once again I was the representative of the CLS. Attendance was slightly up on last year, though still rather disappointing. The Romantic period in English literature is invariably under-represented at these meetings and this year was no exception. The John Clare Society (which was hosting the conference) and the Charles Lamb Society are not the only members of the Alliance to fly the Romantic flag, but no other writer of the period (if one excepts Jane Austen) appeared to have an active supporter. Certainly, no other Romantics were being promoted on the stalls reserved for Alliance members. This is distinctly depressing as the Alliance represents an unrivalled opportunity for the exchange of ideas.

At an uneventful AGM the Alliance was reported to be financially healthy, though not exactly wealthy. Kenn Oultram, editor of *Chapter One*, the Alliance's excellent 'fanzine', seemed happier than last year with the responses of advertisers and member societies. However, he again emphasized that a more substantial publication would never be a possibility as long as editorial material and advertising continued to be in short supply. A 'Literary Weekend' to be held somewhere in Birmingham this coming autumn appeared to be a strong probability. (Might the CLS offer some speakers?) Also, a proposition that the Alliance approach the University of Warwick with a view to obtaining an honorary degree for Gabriel Woolf, the Alliance President, received enthusiastic support from everyone present. All the officers were re-elected without opposition and the committee of delegates was returned *en bloc*. Nevertheless, two vacancies now exist on this committee, which meets two or three times a year in Birmingham to discuss policy. Here, perhaps, is an opportunity for other key Romantic writers to be represented where it matters.

The conference that followed the AGM was ably conducted by leading figures in the John Clare Society, which this year is celebrating the poet's bicentenary with an ambitious programme of lectures, walks, plays and recitals. We were told how the Society put together a John Clare Information Pack using as a model the famous 'Jackdaw' wallets of the 1960s (remember them?). Another speaker attributed the success of the Society's journal to its happy blend of the seriously academic and the merely entertaining, to the fact that Society news was relegated to a separate 'newsletter', and (most significant in the opinion of your delegate) to the decision of the Society to admit adverts into the magazine. Far from vulgarising its pages, adverts added essential 'pace' and visual variety. The CLS (your very humble delegate suggests) could do worse than consider such an enterprise. Another venture which the CLS might look at has already been successfully accomplished by the John Clare Society. A cassette tape of readings from the poet's works can now be bought.

The conference ended with a slide show on the theme of 'Clare's Country' and readings given by members of the Society. Other societies are now invited to host future conferences. Might the CLS take the plunge?

R. M. Healey

Charles Lamb's London (Elian Booklet 2)

All members should have received a copy of David Wickham's booklet with their April *Bulletins*. Further copies are available on application to me (address, if forgotten, on the back cover of the present *Bulletin*) at a cost of £1.50, post and packaging included. Copies of Elian Booklet 1, *Charles Lamb and Emma Isola: A Survey of the Evidence relevant to their personal relationship* by Ernest Carson Ross, originally published by the Society in 1950 and reprinted in 1991, are also still available.

Madeline Huxstep

EDITOR'S NOTES

The John Clare Society

Robin Healey's report on the Alliance of Literary Societies' Conference pays tribute to the energetic efforts of the John Clare Society to mark the bicentenary of the poet's birth. Charles Lamb thought well of Clare, and Thomas Hood left an endearing account of them walking home arm in arm after a *London Magazine* dinner, Clare in his 'bright, grass-coloured coat and yellow waistcoat' and Lamb in his black 'to the amusement of the populace' (I glean these picturesque details from Claude Prance's *Companion* - how did one ever manage without it in the old days?). The 1994 issue of the *John Clare Society Journal* includes a remarkable series of 'Bicentenary Thoughts' by a distinguished group of writers, including the poets R. S. Thomas and Seamus Heaney, all very much written from the heart. Details of our fellow society and its activities may be had from its Hon. Treasurer and membership Secretary, Peter Moyses, at The Stables, 1a West Street, Helpston, Peterborough, PE6 7DU.

Beattie and his Friends; a special offer

The April *Bulletin* included a review by Roger Robinson of a recent reprint of Margaret Forbes's informative and still-valuable 1904 book *Beattie and his Friends*. Enclosed with the present *Bulletin* is a 'flyer' for the reissue from J. Martin Stafford, 67 Stockport Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 7LH. Mr. Stafford has kindly offered to make the book available to members of the CLS at the special price of £24 (postage included). Please mention your membership of the Society in writing to him.

BARS Conferences - and others

The British Association for Romantic Studies continues to arrange interesting conferences at which members of the CLS do their best to keep our activities in the public gaze by lecturing and distributing our publicity material. Nick and Jane Roe and the Editor made sure the 'Venetian Senator' leaflet circulated briskly at a very good one-day conference on 'Money and Romanticism' at Trevelyan College, Durham, on 17 April, and the same trio hope to do their stuff at a longer conference on 'Romanticism and Nationalism' at the University of Strathclyde, 8-11 July, at which Nick Roe will also be lecturing. Then, about 10 days later, as reported in the April *Bulletin*, Mary Wedd, Peter Larkin, and Nick Roe will be participating in the study weekend on 'Coleridge, the Wordsworths and their Friends' which Reggie Watters has organised at Kilve Court. And soon thereafter comes the Wordsworth Summer Conference. Doubtless other members of the Society have been active in representing us too. Details to me please!

Publications also!

We are also very much a group of friends who publish nowadays, and since information about books and articles often comes to hand late in the day, I tend to lose track. But a special word of congratulation this month to our 1993 Birthday Luncheon Guest of Honour and speaker, Professor Jonathan Bate, on the appearance a month or two ago of his book on *Shakespeare and Ovid*, the fruit of a dozen years' study and work. Once again, if you have been writing yourself, and especially if you have published on Charles Lamb and his circle, or have come across good material concerning them in out-of-the-way places where it might be overlooked, do please pass the word on to Duncan Wu or myself and we will duly circulate it.

Bill Ruddick

Isola-tes Facts

This note, the result of recent work, is meant to reinforce what is being said elsewhere about cataloguing the Charles Lamb collection and generally knowing what we have.

Preparing for the Isola Symposium in November 1991 I was astonished to find how many contradictions exist between the experts and within the work of single experts. Thus E. V. Lucas gives three different dates for the death of Emma Isola's father and it would take a fair amount of work to decide, or guess, from the dates of publication whether he became less certain or more certain of his facts as time passed. Emma's grandfather, Agostino Isola, is sometimes referred to as a political refugee and Charles Lamb says that he came from the Kingdom of Naples. His refugee status may be only traditional and he may in fact have come from Lombardy. These matters are not of earth-shattering importance but, to quote George Dyer from memory, it is of great importance that the world is not misled.

I wrote to Christ's Hospital, to see if their records say anything specific about the status of Emma's two brothers when they entered the school. During the symposium Dr Wilson volunteered the site of Emma's father's grave in Cambridge, knew that the final figure in the carved date of his death is difficult to read but appears to give a fourth date to add to Lucas's three, and promised to study the church registers in due course. Mr John Moxon showed me an Isola family tree.

A few days later Mr Moxon sent me photocopies of the family tree together with an exhaustive list of the family's genealogical dates reprinted from the *Cambridge Review* of 1915-16. A few days later again, I put my hand into some papers sent to me by Florence Reeves and pulled out a plum - three leaflets, of which one was an original of what Mr Moxon had photocopied. It seems to be an undated supplement printed for one of the old series of the *Charles Lamb Society Bulletin*.

Thus, within a week of my original remarks on contradiction and lack of knowledge, I had been so fortunate as to discover pointers from various members of the Society but also learned that the true factual details required had already been recorded and printed by the Society. Think of the effort that members were going to put into doing the work again. Think of what might be in the Society's Library and collection.

This is nothing new. Philip Larkin refused to write a review on two books about Thomas Hardy in 1974 because 'the Hardy industry is so productive nowadays that probably anything I said would simply be repeating the lucubrations of some logorrhoeic Middle-Westerner'.

Members who were present at the Isola Symposium may also like to know that our fellow-member Claude A. Prance's *Companion to Charles Lamb* has turned up trumps again. His references to Emma Isola's Album and Extract Book are indexed under E not under I. Thus I missed his note that the Extract Book, which included Charles Lamb's autograph copy of Edward Moxon's *Goff's Oak* which was displayed during the afternoon and which we knew Lucas saw complete in 1903, was broken up by Sotheran the book dealer in 1934. I think somebody, probably Mr Moxon, had previously written to me about Sotheran's Piccadilly Notes No. 13, which contained facsimiles of the sheets for sale, but the penny did not drop at the time.

Since then Dr Wilson has drawn my attention via Prance to the CLS *Bulletin* (Old Series), No. 206, April 1970, which gives many further details about the Isolas but confirms that considerable research had failed to discover more about their Italian background.

D. E. Wickham

Charles Lamb (10 February 1775 – 27 December 1834) was an English essayist, poet, and antiquarian, best known for his *Essays of Elia* and for the children's book *Tales from Shakespeare*, co-authored with his sister, Mary Lamb (1764–1847). Friends with such literary luminaries as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, and William Hazlitt, Lamb was at the centre of a major literary circle in England. He has been referred to by E. V. Lucas, his principal biographer, as "the most Charles (the real canting person of the scene – for the hypocrisy of Joseph has its ulterior legitimate ends, but his brother's professions of a good heart centre in downright self-satisfaction) must be loved and Joseph hated. To balance one disagreeable reality with – Saturnalia of two or three brief hours, well won from the world – to sit instead at one of our modern plays – to have his coward conscience (that forsooth must not be left for a moment) stimulated with perpetual appeals – dulled rather, and blunted, as a faculty without repose must be – and his moral vanity pampered with images of notional justice, notional beneficence, lives. saved without the spectators' risk, and fortunes given away that cost the author nothing?"