

Student Work

8-1-1965

The shallow fontlet of Charles Lamb

David Nicklin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork>

Recommended Citation

Nicklin, David, "The shallow fontlet of Charles Lamb" (1965). *Student Work*. 3205.
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/3205>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Work by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.



THE SHALLOW FONTLET OF CHARLES LAMB

by

David Nicklin

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

August, 1965

UMI Number: EP74604

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP74604

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies
of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for the degree Master of Arts.

Ralph M. Wardle English
Chairman Department

Graduate Committee

Ralph M. Wardle English
Name Department

Robert W. Harper - English

Richard McTellan English

Stanley Dickel (Hon. Con)
Representing Grad. Comm.

Table of Contents

A Tentative Manner	1
Essays and <u>The Essays of Elia</u>	21
Invocations of Solitude	21
Proselytes of the Gates	34
Discomforts of Moving	37
The Biggest Woman in Cambridge	43
"A Head Uniformly Wrong"	46
Cooke as Richard III	54
Culinaries	58
No Strings Attached	74
Conclusions	90

CHAPTER I

A TENTATIVE MANNER

When Charles Lamb was twenty-two years old, his sister killed his mother. Mary, who at thirty-two was almost entirely responsible for a senile father, an invalid mother, and an elderly aunt, broke under the strain, and attacked her apprentice with a case knife when the girl argued with her. When Mrs. Lamb called for help, Mary turned on her mother, stabbing her in the heart. The landlord, responding to the cries of the apprentice, found the mother dead, the father wounded on the forehead by one of Mary's wildly thrown forks, and Mary still standing over her mother.¹

According to his letter to Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the day after the tragedy, Charles "was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp."² The newspaper account, however, made no mention of his presence at the time of the murder. His brother John wanted Mary "put away" permanently, and would not help

¹From the newspaper account, reported by E. V. Lucas in The Life of Charles Lamb (New York, 1905), I, 130n--hereafter cited as Life.

²Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, The Letters of Charles Lamb to which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1935), I, 39--hereafter cited as Letters.

the family with an allowance. Charles assumed the sole responsibility for his father and his unstable sister.

Mary was at first placed in a madhouse, later with a private keeper. When their father died three years later, she was sufficiently recovered that Charles could bring her to live with him. For the rest of her life, however, she was to spend large periods of time in various hospitals and private asylums. As his house-keeper and confidant, she was subject to unforeseen absences because of her illness. Some idea of his feeling for Mary appears in these lines addressed to her:

I am a widow'd thing, now thou art gone!
 Now thou art gone, my own familiar friend,
 Companion, sister, help-mate, counsellor!³

His responsibility for his sister precluded any chance of marriage during his youth. His own fine idea of women would not let him take a mistress, as Crabb Robinson, the diarist, noted in reporting a Lamb conversation with Anthony Robinson, a friend of both:

Lamb expressed himself strongly against the keeping of a mistress, as more degrading and immoral than the most promiscuous intercourse, in which A.R. agreed. The holding a woman at once so near and yet at so great a distance is the most scandalous injustice

³Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, ed. E.V. Lucas (London, 1913), IV, 25-- hereafter cited as Works.

and greatest wickedness.⁴

Under these circumstances, it was not strange that Lamb adopted a tentative manner toward life. With his only emotional attachment, Mary, often sick and absent, he developed an empirical approach to life.

At first, Lamb turned to religion. When he told Coleridge of his mother's murder, he asked his friend to "write,--as religious a letter as possible--but no mention of what is gone and done with."⁵ But conventional religion could not console him for his experience nor for his loneliness when Mary was gone. Two years later, however, Lamb was able to encourage the younger brother of a poet-friend, young Robert Lloyd, who was dissatisfied with life: "You may extract honey from everything; do not go a gathering after gall."⁶

Life for Charles Lamb had taken a considerable adjustment. Even though he thought the world "a very pretty place," he had no intention of caring too deeply; he would not be burned twice.

On February 8, 1800, he wrote to Thomas Manning, the Cambridge mathematician and his newest friend:

⁴Life, I, 473.

⁵Letters, I, 39.

⁶Letters, I, 138.

To sum up my inferences from the above facts, I am determined to live a merry Life in the midst of Sinners. I try to consider all men as such, and to pitch my expectations from human nature as low as possible.⁷

More than a year later he wrote Manning again:

But seriously what do you think of this Life of ours? Can you make head or tail on't? How came we here (that I have some tolerable bawdy hint of) what came we here for (that I know no more than [an] Ideot).⁸

He could not take seriously those conventional shows and ceremonies which commanded general respect.

In August 1815, he wrote Robert Southey:

I am going to stand godfather; I don't like the business; I cannot muster up decorum for these occasions; I shall certainly disgrace the font. I was at Hazlitt's marriage, and had like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony. Any thing awful makes me laugh. I misbehaved once at a funeral. Yet I can read about these ceremonies with pious and proper feelings. The realities of life only seem the mockeries.⁹

The only reasonable approach to life in his situation seemed to be reliance on those experiences which would give him pleasure, and distrust of any seriousness. In Rosamund Gray, Allan Clare, the auto-

⁷Letters, I, 172.

⁸Letters, I, 271.

⁹Letters, II, 167.

biographical hero of Lamb's only novel, said:

I am a wandering and unconnected thing
on the earth. I have made no new friend-
ships, that can compensate me for the loss
of the old--and the more I know mankind,
the more does it become necessary for me
to supply their loss by little images,
recollections, and circumstances, of past
pleasures.¹⁰

In one of his poems, Lamb equated "innocence" with trust in mankind. "Innocence" was obviously lost through the process of maturing. In many of the Elia essays, he celebrated the memories of his childhood. "Innocence" is implicitly balanced with its opposite, "phoniness," which carries overtones of all the hypocrisy that the young of any generation find in accepted social conventions.

We were two pretty babes, the youngest she,
The youngest, and the loveliest far, I ween,
And INNOCENCE her name. The time has been,
We two did love each other's company;
Time was, we two had wept to have been apart.
But when by show of seeming good beguil'd,
I left the garb and manners of a child,
And my first love for man's society,
Defiling with the world my virgin heart--
My loved companion dropped a tear, and fled,
And hid in deepest shades her awful head.
Beloved, who shall tell me where thou art--
In what delicious Eden to be found--
That I may seek thee the wide world around?¹¹

In the second act of John Woodvil, a drama, Lamb

¹⁰Works, I, 31-32.

¹¹Works, IV, 9.

put in the mouth of Sir Walter, who is in exile in Sherwood Forest, these words which capture the essence of Lamb's attitude toward life at this time:

How quietly we live here,
 Unread in the world's business,
 And take no note of all its slippery changes.
 'Twere best we make a world among ourselves,
 A little world,
 Without the ills and falsehoods of the greater.¹²

Although Lamb was "naturally, beforehand, shy of novelties," as he explained in "New Year's Eve," his distrust of the new applied only to those alterations which tended to disrupt the tenor of his ways. But he had discovered the things he loved, and was reasonably content.

His tentative attitude toward life involved an "escape" to times past, to the "old writers," as he wrote Manning in March 1800:

I cannot make these present times present to me. I read histories of the past, and I live in them; although, to abstract senses, they are far less momentous than the noises which keep Europe awake.¹³

The escape was not only into the past, but into the realm of the imagination and the memory. In analyzing the essay as a genre and Lamb's contribution to the essay, Hugh Walker said that "in Lamb, imagination conquers

¹²Works, IV, 168.

¹³Letters, I, 176.

reality."¹⁴ Imagination is perhaps one of the more important ingredients of Lamb's essays.

Many of the essays were extended recollections of childhood experiences, embroidered by the thread of his imagination. The letters often told of past incidents; there were few mentions of plans and future projects. Lamb was turned toward the past, remembered and imagined, rather than the future. What he remembered about the past was its genuineness, its greater reality. He disliked ostentation. In November 1800, he wrote Manning:

If the inmates be courteous, and good liquors flow like the conduits at an old coronation; if they can talk sensibly and feel properly; I have no need to stand staring upon the gilded looking-glass (that strained my friend's purse-strings in the purchase), nor his five-shilling print over the mantelpiece of old Nabbs the carrier (which only betrays his false taste).¹⁵

Some men need stability of environment. Lamb was apparently one of those who never quite adjust to change, or who never adjust easily. His uncertain emotional and physical environment perhaps contributed also to a tentativeness in conversation.

¹⁴The English Essay and Essayists (London, 1928), p. 235.

¹⁵Letters, I, 223.

Lamb's attitude of tentativeness was underlined by a speech impediment. He stammered. To speak his words took a certain amount of time. In "Preface by a Friend of the Late Elia," he admitted his stammer, and explained his irreverence in the face of the pompous:

Your long and much talkers hated him. The informal habit of his mind, joined to an inveterate impediment of speech, forbade him to be an orator; and he seemed determined that no one else should play that part when he was present. He was petit and ordinary in person and appearance. I have seen him sometimes in what is called good company, but where he has been a stranger, sit silent, and be suspected for an odd fellow; till some unlucky occasion providing it, he would stutter out some senseless pun (not altogether senseless perhaps, if rightly taken), which has stamped his character for the evening. . . . His conceptions rose kindlier than his utterance, and his happiest impromptus had the appearance of effort. He has been accused of trying to be witty, when in truth he was but struggling to give his poor thoughts articulation.¹⁶

And in the posthumously printed "Charles Lamb's Autobiography," a sketch written for an autograph collector in 1827, he wrote again on his hesitant habit of speech:

[He] stammers abominably and is therefore more apt to discharge his occasional conversation in a quaint aphorism or a poor quibble, than in set and edifying speeches; has consequently been libelled as a person

¹⁶works (1903), II, 152.

always aiming at wit.¹⁷

There were means of baffling the stammer, Lamb pointed out in the conclusion of "Preface by a Friend":

Only in the use of the Indian weed he might be thought a little excessive. He took it, he would say, as a solvent of speech. Marry--as the friendly vapour ascended, how his prattle would curl up sometimes with it! the ligaments which tonguetied him, were loosened, and the stammerer proceeded a statist!¹⁸

Lamb himself admitted to a provisional attitude in his conversation. He had, after all, never gone beyond the level of Deputy Grecian at Christ's Hospital because his speech would have prevented his success in the Church, the goal of the Grecians. Further substantiation of his stammer comes from J. Fuller Russell in a detailed description of his meeting with Lamb in 1834:

On each visit I found he required to be drawn into conversation. He would throw out a playful remark, and then pause awhile. He spoke by fits and starts, and had a slight impediment in his utterance, which made him grunt once or twice before he began a sentence.¹⁹

The youthful Thomas Carlyle, as Lucas quotes from his Diary for November 2, 1831, was irritated, when he

¹⁷Works, I, 375.

¹⁸Works, II, 153.

¹⁹Life, II, 379-380.

met Lamb in the waning years of the essayist's fame, by the stammer as well as by Lamb's apparent frivolity:

Charles Lamb I sincerely believe to be in some considerable degree insane. A more pitiful, ricketty, gasping, staggering, stammering Tomfool I do not know. He is witty by denying truisms and abjuring good manners. His speech wriggles hither and thither with an incessant painful fluctuation.²⁰

Thomas DeQuincey in Biographical Essays pointed out that "that stammer was worth an annuity to him as an ally of his wit."²¹ It seems likely that Elia might have been a different stylist if Lamb had not stammered.

Even though he was not to speak at length except under the release of tobacco, Lamb took some pains to express himself in conversation. One might assume from his emphasis on sincerity that he always meant what he said; however, the hoaxes he perpetrated would belie the assumption. He admitted that he was no orator, that his mental processes were suggestive, not comprehensive. In "Imperfect Sympathies" he contrasted himself with the Caledonian conversationalist:

The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to, have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretences to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual

²⁰Life, II, 336.

²¹Boston, 1854, p. 205.

wardrobe . . . has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth. . . . Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they pretend to. . . . They will throw out a random word in or out of season, and be content to let it pass for what it is worth. They cannot speak always as if they were upon their oath--but must be understood, speaking or writing, with some abatement. . . . They are no systematizers, and would but err by attempting it.²²

He also contrasted the Caledonian to himself: "He never stoops to catch a glittering something in your presence, to share it with you, before he quite knows whether it be true touch or not."²³

Whatever Truth might prove to be for him, he did not feel justified in making plans by it. He had to be able to accept new truths as they occurred. Obviously a "lack" of seriousness was, in such a situation, an asset.

Anyway, could anyone take a stammerer seriously? Would anyone have time to take him seriously? He was thus forced by his physical liability to accept truths as tentative until they were disproved or replaced.

The stammer left its mark on Lamb's writing in his use of the dash (--) as a mark of punctuation. His letters, as well as the essays, made use of the dash ex-

²²Works, II, 59.

²³Works, II, 60.

tensively. Lamb used the dash frequently on nearly every page. None of the writers who reputedly influenced him--Browne, Bunyan, Burton, Sterne, or Walton--used the dash except infrequently. Sterne punctuated bizarrely, to say the least, but his use of the dash was of less compass than Lamb's.

Both Coleridge and Wordsworth used the dash in their prose, but to a lesser extent than Lamb. Hazlitt, as a means of conveying the hesitancy of speech and its revisionary nature, punctuated with the dash almost as broadly as Lamb.

One can argue that Lamb's over-use of the dash was linked to his stammer. The dash usually indicates an after-thought or a modification of an expressed idea. This is to say that Lamb hit upon the use of the dash because of his stammer. But he consciously used the dash for an after-thought or a modification because he used it artfully in the context of his style. In 1824, Lamb apologized to the poet Bernard Barton with "My pen stammers like my tongue."²⁴

If one must be tentative in his approach to life, if one cannot be serious about the ceremonies of existence, one must come to terms with it, may even make a game of it. Lamb played with words and with his correspondents.

²⁴Letters, II, 437.

In "Preface by a Friend" Lamb recognized that his apparently frivolous cast of mind did get him in trouble.

He too much affected that dangerous figure--irony. He sowed doubtful speeches, and reaped plain, unequivocal hatred.--He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it.²⁵

Here is a reasonable self-appraisal, but with no intimation of intent to reform.

Mario Praz, discussing Lamb's tentative style which he calls "Biedermeier" in The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, concludes:

Characteristic of the Essays of Elia . . . is the deliberate absence of emphasis, the anti-rhetorical quality, the refusal to go over to the full orchestra in the manner of the Romantics; the desire to preserve a muted tone, making use of humour to extinguish any over-adventurous flare-up.²⁶

Richard Haven, on the other hand, intimates that Lamb's emphasis in "Old China," for instance, was so artfully contrived that the reader-in-a-hurry may miss it altogether.²⁷ Haven contends that Lamb was typically Romantic in presenting the reader with a psychologically ordered movement of consciousness, rather than with a rationally ordered sequence.

²⁵Works, II, 152.

²⁶London, 1956, p. 74.

²⁷"The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb," ELH, XXX, no. 2 (June 1963), 137-146.

Lamb did distrust the apparent insincerity of much emotion, of the overt attempt to impress in self-consciously fine writing. There are not many instances in which Lamb put himself out on an emotional limb. His proposal to Fanny Kelly, the actress, is perhaps the only case in point. He acknowledged her refusal of his offer of marriage with a brief note, which included:

I feel myself in a lackadaisical no-how-ish kind of a humour. I believe it is the rain, or something. I had thought to have written seriously, but I fancy I succeed best in epistles of mere fun.²⁸

This particular letter reveals his response to the disappointments of life, but also it demonstrates the pathos of the man who has stumbled on humor as the only response to the back-stabbings of life. But this attitude gives the individual a chance to attack those more gullible than he.

Think of the many leg-pulling letters and essays. Whenever Manning was abroad, Lamb was forever writing him of the deaths of all their mutual friends in London. (One might recall here that Lamb warned the reader of "Imperfect Sympathies" that he was one who was to be understood with "some abatement.") An undated letter

²⁸Letters, II, 255.

to John Mathew Gutch, a friend in partnership with another man, reported all manner of difficulties occurring in the business while Gutch was on vacation; the joke was admitted on the second page.

Lamb was not above "cheating" close family friends. When Mary Novello married Charles Cowden Clarke, Lamb wrote her father, a musician, a letter in which he enclosed a poem to be set to Novello's music honoring the marriage. In The Cowden Clarks Richard D. Altick reports that Edmund Blunden discovered that the poem was "lifted" from the work of John Hughes, who wrote a century earlier.²⁹

But even the essays were also sometimes pure hoax. The "Biographical Memoir of Mr. Liston" appeared in the January 1825 London, and was, as Lamb told Sarah Hutchinson on January 20, "from top to toe, every paragraph, Pure Invention; and has passed for Gospel, has been republished in newspapers . . . as an authentic Account."³⁰ In February, he confirmed the lie to Barton:

The Author-mometer is a good fancy. I have caused great speculation in the dramatic . . . world by a Lying Life of Liston, all pure invention. The Town has swallowed it, and it is

²⁹London, 1948, p. 59.

³⁰Letters, II, 452.

copied into News Papers, Play Bills, etc., as authentic. . . . A life more improbable for him to have lived would not be easily invented.³¹

In the "Memoir" he had said:

. . . we think that some of the stories are of that whimsical, and others of that romantic nature, which, however diverting, would be out of place in a narrative of this kind, which aims not only at strict truth, but at avoiding the very appearance of the contrary.³²

In one of his essays on the actor Munden [appearing in the next issue] Lamb hinted at the joke with "I had only to thrust my tongue in my cheek."³³ To India House employee John Chambers, Lamb wrote in 1818:

I remain much the same as you remember, . . . the same steady adherence to principle, and correct regard for truth, which always marked my conduct, marks it still. If I am singular in anything it is in too great a squeamishness to anything that remotely looks like a falsehood.³⁴

By joking about life and writing, Lamb conveyed good sense to those who were willing to listen and understand. Those who didn't understand, who misunderstood, were not worth the bother.

³¹Letters, II, 460.

³²Works, I, 297.

³³Works, I, 316.

³⁴Letters, II, 231.

Lamb's attitude of tentativeness is demonstrated by his writings. This is true not only of the technical use of the dash to modify an expressed idea and of the hearkening back to earlier times, but in the body of his letters and essays. Frequently the germ of what was to become an Elian essay appeared first in a letter to a friend; often the idea was revised through several letters and one or more early essays which were not re-published. The Elian essays, then, were an evolvement from consciously or unconsciously experimental communications addressed to his friends.

While Lamb's essays as a rule point back into Time, his letters are generally concerned with events of the immediate past. These events he invested with an interest that is often still valid today, some 130 years after the last letters were written. The events in the letters were not, to be sure, the earth-shaking wars and politics of his time, but were the pedestrian adventures of everyday friendship, the peculiar spheres of his imagination, the anatomy of amusing anecdote. Although the letters included some pedantic analyses of poetry and "belle lettres" as well as a little amateur philosophizing at the time of his mother's murder, they generally were observations on daily happenings and on the events of his imagination.

His letters were by no means consciously critical experiments; their important quality as letters and as essays-in-embryo is their depiction of a personality and their concern with wit and humor. What Lamb seemed to be striving for in his letters was a high degree of entertainment for his friends' amusement. This same quality is important in the essays. Although his mode of expression was totally meshed in the idea he was conveying, what he said is sometimes of secondary importance to how he said it.

A man who could obviously cherish a phrase, Lamb wrote around an idea until, through experimentation, he found the best mode of phrasing his thought. He did, however, write a facetious comment on "style" to Peter George Patmore, a writer: "The order of our thoughts should be the order of our writing."³⁵

During the almost forty years of his letter-writing career, Lamb reiterated many ideas and expressions. Sometimes he dealt with an idea in a letter, even in subsequent letters, then took it up in a later essay that was not republished, and finally expanded it in an Elian essay, with further recapitulation in a later letter. Neil Bell, whose novel, So Perish the Roses,

³⁵Letters, III, 89.

is a fictionalized account of Lamb's life, under-evaluates the importance of the trial-runs in the letters:

The essays of Elia were born: that strange late flowering of genius which lasted no more than two years; but in those two years he wrote at a level he had not reached before nor did again, and he produced then the work to which he owes his fame; all the rest is now remembered only because of the harvest of those two abundant years.³⁶

Even Bell would agree that not all the Elian essays maintain the same quality of perfection. "Old China" is no more perfect in its way than is the December 25, 1815, letter to Thomas Manning. The letter, too, generates nostalgia with even more wry humor.

But the Elian essays were not "new" in those two years. Many of the essays had essentially been written several times before those "two abundant years." The point is that Lamb used the incidents of his experience, embroidered by the thread of his imagination, to entertain his friends and his readers.

During his youth, Lamb had tried his hand at many literary forms: poetry, a novel (Rosamund Gray), drama (John Woodvil, Mr. H-----, The Pawnbroker's Daughter, The Wife's Trial). At the same time he was producing letters; and the letters were more successful as letters than the other forms were as poetry, fiction, or drama.

³⁶New York, 1940, p. 360.

The letters to his friends were his best work in this period.

In an extensive analysis of the essay in PMLA, Charles E. Whitmore quotes Professor Northrup, editor of the Riverside edition of Bacon's Essays, who defined the Baconian essay as "literally an attempt, a trial . . . , an estimate of pros and cons, a debate which should determine the practical worth of motives and qualities and characters."³⁷ The Elian essays were, in truth, often second attempts, re-trials. In fact, in some instances, the Elian essay was, in opposition to Northrup's definition of the "essay," a final product. George L. Barnett in his recent thorough treatment of Lamb's development indicates that the Elian essays were "letters" to the public.

. . . and the "letters" partook of the self-revelatory and personal qualities of the genuine familiar letter. In consequence, we can say that while the new essay carried on some of the traditional features, and was a logical development of what went before rather than a distinct, new type, it was differentiated mainly by the romantic treatment and, in its features of familiarity and self-revelation, was a rebirth of the tradition of Montaigne and his seventeenth-century followers.³⁸

What follows will be a look at eight ideas that interested Lamb, at their earliest expression in a letter, at subsequent revisions and expansions in essays, and ultimately at the final Elian essays.

³⁷"The Field of the Essay," XXXVI (1921), 552n.

³⁸Charles Lamb: the Evolution of Elia, Bloomington, 1964, p. 36.

CHAPTER II

ESSAYS AND THE ESSAYS OF ELIA

Not all the essays published under the signature of Elia have "originals" in the letters to friends. Although many Lamb letters have been published, many others may have been destroyed, or may yet turn up. Conceivably, each essay may have had its original in a letter; but for the moment there are many essays for which no models can be found. Barnett reviews eighteen essay-letter relationships, as well as other verbal parallels in which the tie was not total. Eight of the attempts are of interest here.

INVOCATIONS OF SOLITUDE

The first idea-complex is Lamb's ambivalent attitude toward companionship. He was devoted to his own privacy and solitude, but he did like, on occasion, the company of his friends. The company of non-friends, enemies, hangers-on, friends' friends, and friends' families was anathema to him. In 1801, Lamb wrote to Manning:

There I shall have all the privacy of a house without the encumbrance, and shall be able to lock my friends out as often as I desire to hold free converse with my immortal mind; for my present lodgings resemble a minister's levee, I have so increased my acquaintance (as they call 'em), since I

have resided in town. Like the country mouse, that had tasted a little of urban manners, I long to be nibbling my own cheese by my dear self without mouse-traps and time-traps.¹

Seventeen years later, in 1818, Lamb wrote Mrs. William Wordsworth from the East India House. The complaint was only more emphatic:

The reason why I cannot write letters at home is, that I am never alone. . . . Except my morning's walk to the office, which is like treading on sands of gold for that reason, I am never so. I cannot walk home from the office but some officious friend offers his damn'd unwelcome courtesies to accompany me. All the morning I am pestered. I could sit and gravely cast up sums in great BOOKS, . . . and yet reserve in some 'corner of my mind' some darling thoughts all my own--faint memory of some passage in a Book--or the tone of an absent friend's Voice--a snatch of Miss Burrell's singing--a gleam of Fanny Kelly's divine plain face--The two operations might be going on at the same time without thwarting . . . but there are a set of amateurs of the Belle Lettres--the gay science-- who come to me as a sort of rendezvous, putting questions of criticism, of British Institutions, Lalla Rooks &c., what Coleridge said at the Lecture last night-- who have the form of reading men, but, for any possible use Reading can be to them but to talk of, might as well have been Ante-Cadmeans born. . . . These pests worrit me at business and in all its intervals, perplexing my accounts, poisoning my little salutary warming-time at the fire, puzzling my paragraphs if I take a newspaper, cramming in between my own free thoughts and a column of figures which had come to an amicable compromise but for them. Their noise ended, one of them,

¹Letters, I, 250.

as I said, accompanys me home lest I should be solitary for a moment; he at length takes his welcome leave at the door, up I go, mutton on table, hungry as hunter, hope to forget my cares and bury them in the agreeable abstraction of mastication, knock at the door, in comes Mrs. Hazlitt, or M. Burney, or Morgan, or Demogorgon, or my brother, or somebody, to prevent my eating alone, a Process absolutely necessary to my poor wretched digestion. O the pleasure of eating alone!--eating my dinner alone! let me think of it. But in they come, and make it absolutely necessary that I should open a bottle of orange-- for my meat turns into stone when any one dines with me, if I have not wine--wine can mollify stones. Then that wine turns into acidity, acerbity, misanthropy, a hatred of my interrupters (God bless 'em! I love some of 'em dearly), and with the hatred a still greater aversion to their going away. . . . Come never, I would say to these spoilers of my dinner, but if you come, never go. . . . Evening Company I should always like had I any mornings, but I am saturated with human faces (divine forsooth) and voices all the golden morning, and five evenings in a week would be as much as I should covet to be in company, but I assure you that is a wonderful week in which I can get two, or one, to myself. I am never C.L. but always C.L. and Co.²

In "The Old and New Schoolmaster," which appeared in 1821, Lamb did not bemoan friends, did not wish for solitude. He did, however, point out the disparity between youth and age as mutual companions. "Boys are capital fellows in their own way, among their mates; but they are unwholesome companions for grown people."³ This idea will appear with the complaint of too little

²Letters, II, 224-226.

³Works, II, 53.

solitude in a later "Pathetic Fallacy."

The New Times of January 8, 1825, carried the essay "Many Friends" by Lamb. This essay was the first published expression of the complaint of friends. It appeared some twenty-four years after the Manning letter and seven years after the letter to Mrs. Wordsworth.

Truly society is the balm of human life.
 . . . I am an elderly gentleman--not old--
 a sort of middle-aged-gentleman-and-a-half
 . . . My day times are entirely engrossed
 by the business of a public office, where
 I am any thing but alone from nine till five.
 I have forty fellow-clerks about me during
 those hours; and, though the human face be
 divine, I protest that so many human faces
 seen every day do very much diminish the
 homage I am willing to pay to that divinity.
 It fares with these divine resemblances as
 with a Polytheism. Multiply the object and
 you infallibly enfeeble the adoration. . . .
 I go home every day to my late dinner,
 absolutely famished and face-sick. I am
 sometimes fortunate enough to go off un-
 accompanied. The relief is restorative like
 sleep; but far oftener, alas! some one of my
 fellows, who lives my way (as they call it)
 does me the sociality of walking with me.
 He sees me to the door; and now I figure to
 myself a snug fire-side--comfortable meal--
 a respiration from the burthen of society--
 and the blessedness of a single knife and
 fork. I sit down to my solitary mutton,
 happy as Adam when a bachelor. I have not
 swallowed a mouthful, before a startling
 ring announces the visit of a friend. . . .
 But these accursed friends, or fiends, that
 torture me thus! They come in with a full
 consciousness of their being unwelcome. . . .
 My digestive powers fail. I have enough to

do to maintain them in any healthiness when alone. Eating is a solitary function; you may drink in company. Accordingly the bottle soon succeeds; and such is my infirmity, that the reluctance soon subsides before it. The visitor becomes agreeable. I find a great deal that is good in him; wonder I should have felt such aversion on his first entrance; we get chatty, conversible; insensibly comes midnight; and I am dismissed to the cold bed of celibacy (the only place, alas! where I am suffered to be alone) with the reflection that another day has gone over my head without the possibility of enjoying my own free thoughts in solitude even for a solitary moment. O for a Lodge in some vast wilderness! the den of those Seven Sleepers (conditionally the other six were away)--a Crusoe solitude.⁴

In the 1801 letter to Manning, there is the sentence:

"I have so increased my acquaintance (as they call 'em)."

The 1825 essay retains the parenthetical expression in "some one of my fellows, who lives my way (as they call it)." Otherwise, the early letter merely presents the problem briefly, and hopes its solution is to be found in the new lodgings. The "country mouse" simile is not carried over to the later revisions.

The letter of 1818 to Mrs. Wordsworth is much closer to the content of the essay. The friend (fellow) who insists civilly on walking home with him is there. Lamb no longer, however, attributes a motive of courteous altruism to his companion. The catalogue of his "darling thoughts" in the letter is echoed in the essay's

⁴Works, I, 317-318.

catalogue of his anticipated comforts as he opens the door. The brief comment in the letter on "human faces (divine forsooth)" becomes in the essay an extended simile, which concludes: "Multiply the object and you infallibly enfeeble the adoration." That "eating is a solitary function" remains in the essay a basic premise. In both the letter and the essay, Lamb insists on the evil that company could do his digestion. The reversionary effect of wine upon his irritation appears in both examples; the letter identifies the wine as "orange wine," but the essay does not specify the type of wine. The initial effect of the wine, indicated in the letter, is omitted from the essay. The "agreeable abstraction of mastication" phrase is not carried over to the essay; nor is the slogan: "Come never, but if you come, never go."

By postulating in the essay the one place where he is unwillingly alone, Lamb emphasizes the humor of the situation. In the essay he makes greater use of words of aloneness: "unaccompanied," "single," "solitary," "bachelor," "solitude," "Crusoe"; Lamb uses more variety in the "solitary" vocabulary of the essay, and more frequency of the idea of "aloneness." The essay also makes its point more emphatically by more frequent use of words conveying the contrasting idea: "society,"

"sociality," "friend," "company," "visitor." Mutton is the chief course of the meal in both letter and essay.

The next paragraph of the 1825 essay seems to be an outgrowth of his comments on "boys" in "The Old and New Schoolmaster."

What most disturbs me is, that my chief annoyers are mostly young men. Young men, let them think as they please, are no company singly for a gentleman of my years. They do mightily well in a mixed society, and where there are females to take them off, as it were. But to have the load of one of them to one's own self for successive hours conversation is unendurable.⁵

Then he gives a specific example of those who had been abusing him:

There was my old friend Captain Beacham-- he died some six years since, bequeathing to my friendship three stout young men, his sons, and seven girls, the tallest in the land. . . . The brothers are proportionably taller. I have sometimes taken the altitude of this friendship; and on a modest computation I may be said to have known at one time a whole furlong of Beachams. . . . The brothers are left. Nothing is more distasteful than these relics and parings of past friendships-- . . . by a refinement of persecution, they contrive to come singly; and so spread themselves out into three evenings molestation in a week. Nothing is so distasteful as the sight of their long legs, couched for continuance upon my fender. They have been mates of Indiamen; and one of them in particular has a story of a shark swallowing a boy in the bay of Calcutta. I wish the shark had swallowed

⁵Works, I, 318.

him. Nothing can be more useless than their conversation to me, unless it is mine to them. We have no ideas (save of eating and drinking) in common. The shark story has been told till it cannot elicit a spark of attention; but it goes on just as usual. When I try to introduce a point of literature, or common life, the mates gape at me. When I fill a glass, they fill one too. Here is sympathy. And for this poor correspondency of having a gift of swallowing and retaining liquor in common with my fellow-creatures, I am to be tied up to an ungenial intimacy, abhorrent from every sentiment, and every sympathy besides. But I cannot break the bond. They are sons of my old friend,⁶

The conclusion of this essay written in 1825, becomes the center of a modification of the original objection to "company." The modification was taken up in two "Popular Fallacies," both of which appeared in the 1826 New Monthly Magazine, one in February and the other in March. The March "Fallacy" is "That Home Is Home Though It Is Never So Homely," and is much closer in spirit to the essay just discussed. In view of the relationship, the March "Fallacy" will be reviewed first.

After a discussion of the homes of the poor, which in point of view is reminiscent of "Modern Gallantry," Lamb turned once again to his plague of visitors. The point of attack is different:

⁶Works, I, 318-319.

There is yet another home, which we are constrained to deny to be one. . . . It is-- the house of the man that is infested with many visitors. May we be branded for the veriest churl, if we deny our heart to the many noble-hearted friends that at times exchange their dwelling for our poor roof! It is not of guests that we complain, but of endless, purposeless visitants; droppers in, as they are called. . . . At our time of life, to be alone sometimes is as needful as sleep. It is the refreshing sleep of the day. . . . We are willing to barter our good time with a friend, who gives us in exchange his own. Herein is the distinction between the genuine guest and the visitant. This latter takes your good time, and gives you his bad in exchange. . . . The inferior functions of life begin to move heavily. We cannot concoct our food with interruptions. Our chief meal, to be nutritive, must be solitary. With difficulty we can eat before a guest; and never understood what the relish of public feasting meant. Meats have no savor, nor digestion fair play, in a crowd. The unexpected coming in of a visitant stops the machine. . . . Our knife and fork drop instinctively, and we feel that we have swallowed our latest morsel. . . . It were well if the effect of intrusion were simply co-extensive with its presence; but it mars all the good hours afterwards. These scratches in appearance leave an orifice that closes not hastily.⁷

Lamb has worked his way once again to the evil influence of visitors on his digestion. As in the previous essay and as in the first letter, Lamb ironically used the "parenthetical" phrase as they are called follow-

⁷Works, II, 265-266.

ing a term that was then possibly a cliché. Solitude is again equated with sleep in its power to revive. In the previous essay, Lamb used the phrase "single knife and fork" in his catalogue of the prospective pleasures of home-coming; but in the present essay, he used the knife and fork to indicate a reaction to the visitors. The passage about the effect of company on his digestive system is greatly expanded from the barely exclamatory reference in the letter to Mrs. Wordsworth, and the explanation in the first essay of "my digestive powers fail." Also in the first essay, Lamb had contrasted eating and solitude with drinking and company. The "eating is a solitary function" of the first essay is echoed closely in the second essay's "our chief meal, to be nutritive, must be solitary."

It is important to note Lamb's growing discriminatory powers from the letters to the final essay. At first he made no effort to distinguish between visitors; all were unwelcome. In the second essay, however, he introduced the factor of selectivity, which he had hinted at in the Beacham passage in the first essay, and which he detailed in the next "Popular Fallacy," "That You Must Love Me and Love My Dog."

. . . we have had frequent occasions of breaking off an agreeable intimacy by

reason of these canine appendages. . . . they sometimes wear the more plausible and human character of kinsfolk, near acquaintances, my friend's friend, his partner, his wife, or his children. . . . The good things of life are not to be had singly, but come to us with a mixture. . . . What a delightful companion is ****, if he did not always bring his tall cousin with him! . . . Misfortunes seldom come alone. 'Tis hard when a blessing comes accompanied. . . . must my friend's brethren of necessity be mine also? must we be hand and glove with Dick Selby the parson, or Jack Selby the calico-printer, because W.S., who is neither, but a ripe wit and a critic, has the misfortune to claim a common parentage with them? Let him lay down his brothers; and 'tis odds but we will cast him in a pair of our's [sic] (we have a superflux) to balance the concession. Let F. H. lay down his garrulous uncle; and Honorius dismiss his vapid wife, and superfluous establishment of six boys--things between boy and manhood--too ripe for play, too raw for conversation--that come in . . . and will neither aid, nor let alone, the conference; that we may once more meet upon equal terms, as we were wont to do in the disengaged state of bachelorhood.⁸

⁸Works, II, 267-268. In a letter to Bernard Barton on March 20, 1826, Lamb added:

My tirade against visitors was not meant particularly at you. . . . So in another thing I talked of somebody's insipid wife, without a correspondent object in my head: and a good lady, a friend's wife, whom I really love (don't startle, I mean in a licit way) has looked shyly on me ever since. The blunders of personal application are ludicrous. I send out a character every now and then, on purpose to exercise the ingenuity of my friends. (Letters, III, 37-38.)

Here Lamb has in a sense combined his comment on boys from "The Old and New Schoolmaster" with the objections to young men, especially the Beachams, from "Many Friends" to add a new dimension to his irritation, a further refinement of discrimination between guests and visitants. The final "disengaged state of bachelorhood" in this essay has overtones of "happy as Adam when a bachelor" in the 1825 essay.

In spite of Lamb's disclaimer in the letter to Barton (note 8), his public works, as opposed to the letters, required that he disguise names; furthermore, the published essays were open to misinterpretation, as witness the reassurance given Barton. He could not afford to offend Mrs. Hazlitt or Martin Burney, two close friends he mentioned in the letter to Mrs. Wordsworth. But his irritation was finally directed at the source; his friends did not really unsettle his digestion as much as their companions did. At this point, Lamb exercised his natural powers of discrimination in the essays to attack, not the invited, but the visitants.

Finally, Lamb took up the idea again in a letter to Walter Savage Landor. To this letter Lucas has assigned a date early in 1833, although the letter is undated. Only a portion of the letter is pertinent to

the present idea-aggregate, and then only to the passage about the Beachams in "Many Friends."

Next I forgot to tell you I knew all your Welch annoyancers, the measureless Beethams. I knew a quarter of a mile of them. 17 brothers and 16 sisters, as they appear to me in memory. There was one of them that used to fix his long legs on my fender, and tell a story of a shark, every night, endless, immortal. How have I grudged the salt sea ravener not having had his gorge of him! The shortest of the daughters measured 5 foot eleven without her shoes. Well, some day we may confer about them. But they were tall. Surely I have discover'd the longitude.⁹

Lamb used here the real name of the family. The incident of the long legs of the son on his fender is carried over to the present letter, as is the fact of the young man's fondness for the shark story. Eight years after writing the original essay, Lamb expressed his wish that the shark had eaten the teller rather less simply than in the original essay. The "quarter of a mile of them" in the letter to Landor is a doubling of the length of his acquaintance reported in the essay. One other modification: Lamb had, in the essay, "taken the altitude of this friendship," while in the letter he had "discover'd the longitude" of it.

To evaluate the literary merits of the letters and the essays would be difficult without the entire transcript of each. Even then, the letters are less con-

⁹Letters, III, 361.

trolled. As literary forms, the two "Fallacies" and "Many Friends" are intentionally more artful than the letter to Mrs. Wordsworth; but the letter has an engaging candor which the essays do not have. To compare the 1801 letter to Manning in its pristine simplicity to the elaborately expressed complexities of either "Fallacy" is to attempt the impossible. Generally, the letters contain the germ of an idea or incident as part of a diverse expression of several incidents; the essays, taken in their individual totality, are less various in ideas, and are more controlled and directed toward a given end.

PROSELYTES OF THE GATE

Just why most of the editors of Lamb's Essays of Elia do not find it necessary to define "proselytes of the gate" is hard to understand; however, many editions do not explain the term. The N. E. D. does define it: "a proselyte who did not submit to all the ordinances of the law, especially to circumcision, nor participate in all the privileges of an Israelite." It is a strange expression to the modern and gentile eye. Unfortunately, Lucas did not define it in his edition of the Letters, where it appears twice; he did, however, supply the meaning in his notes to the Elian

essays, a volume only recently available in this area.

Lamb first used the term in a letter to Manning in December 1815:

. . . my zeal is great against the unedified heathen. Down with the Pagodas--down with the idols--Ching-chong-fo and his foolish priesthood! Come out of Babylon, O my friend! for her time is come, and the child that is native, and the Proselyte of her gates, shall kindle and smoke together.¹⁰

In a letter to Coleridge previously assigned to 1824, but dated by Lucas in 1820 (based on the fact of the absence of Hartley Coleridge from London in 1824, and of his presence in London in the letter), Lamb revised the phrase slightly:

. . . for why should I be so bigoted as to allow rites of hospitality to none but my own books, children, etc.?--a species of egotism I abhor from my heart. No; let 'em all snug together, Hebrews and Proselytes of the gate; no selfish partiality of mine shall make distinction between them; I charge no warehouse-room for my friends' commodities; they are welcome to come and stay as long as they like, without paying rent. . . . I am none of these churlish landlords that advertize the goods to be taken away in ten days' time, or then to be sold to pay expenses. So you see I had no right to lend you that book; I may lend you my own books, because it is at my own hazard, but it is not honest to hazard a friend's property; I always make that distinction.¹¹

Lamb used the expression for a last time in "The

¹⁰Letters, II, 182.

¹¹Letters, II, 285.

Two Races of Men" in the London for December 1820, later in the same year that he wrote Coleridge, but five years after writing the phrase to Manning in China:

One justice I must do my friend, that if he sometimes, like the sea, sweeps away a treasure, at another time, sea-like, he throws up as rich an equivalent to match it. I have a small under-collection of this nature (my friend's gatherings in his various calls), picked up, he has forgotten at what odd places, and deposited with as little memory as [at] mine. I take in these orphans, the twice-deserted. These proselytes of the gate are welcome as the true Hebrews. There they stand in conjunction; natives, and naturalized. The latter seem as little disposed to inquire out their true lineage as I am.--I charge no warehouse-room for these deodands, nor shall ever put myself to the ungentlemanly trouble of advertising a sale of them to pay expenses.¹²

This example is one in which the essay passage is little more than a minor revision of the passage in the letter. The idea of the "orphan" book is made more specific in the essay than in the letter, where it is merely someone else's book in need of hospitality. The phrase concerning the "proselytes of the gate" and the "true Hebrews" is an echo of the "Hebrews and Proselytes of the gate" phrase in the letter. The essay goes back to the contrasting phrase of the 1815 letter of "native and Proselyte of her gates" with "natives, and naturalized."

¹²Works, II, 26.

The letter to Coleridge has "I charge no warehouse-room for my friends' commodities," which the essay strongly echoes with "I charge no warehouse-room for these deodands." The letter's abdication of the landlord's right to dispose of surviving goods is condensed in the essay to a clause. The letter's "no selfish partiality of mine shall make distinction between them" is extended in the essay to "the latter seem as little disposed to inquire out their true lineage as I am."

DISCOMFORTS OF MOVING

Lamb was forced by circumstances to move frequently during his adult years. No matter how many times he moved, he never learned to accept the necessity with equanimity. The unsettling of his physical, mental, and social habits was a source of irritation.

In 1809, he wrote two letters describing such interruptions; one letter in March was addressed to Manning, the other in June to Coleridge.

While I think on it, let me tell you we are moved. . . . We are at 34, Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, and shall be here till about the end of May; then we remove to No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, where I mean to live and die; for I have such horror of moving, that I would not take a benefice from the King, if I was not indulged with nonresidence. What a dislocation of comfort is comprised in that word moving! Such a heap of little nasty things, after you think all is got into the cart; old dredging-boxes,

worn-out brushes, gallipots, vials, things that it is impossible the most necessitous person can ever want, but which the women, who preside on these occasions, will not leave behind if it was to save your soul; they'd keep the cart ten minutes to stow in dirty pipes and broken matches, to show their economy. Then you can find nothing you want for many days after you get into your new lodgings. You must comb your hair with your fingers, wash your hands without soap, go about in dirty gaiters. Was I Diogenes, I would not move out of a kilderkin into a hogshead, though the first had had nothing but small beer in it, and the second reeked claret. Our place of final destination,--I don't mean the grave, but No. 2 [sic] Inner Temple Lane,--looks out upon a gloomy churchyard-like court, called Hare Court, with three trees and a pump in it. Do you know it? I was born near it, and used to drink at that pump when I was a Rechabite of six years old.¹³

The letter to Coleridge was written after the prospective move mentioned to Manning. In this letter, Lamb dealt with the details of the new apartment. The discomforts of moving were apparently less fresh in his mind when he wrote Coleridge:

I have been turned out of my chambers in the Temple by a landlord who wanted them for himself; but I have got other at No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, far more commodious and roomy. I have two rooms on third floor and five rooms above, with an inner staircase to myself. . . . I came into them on Saturday week; and on Monday following, Mary was taken ill with fatigue of moving, and affected, I believe, by the novelty of the new home; she could not sleep, and I am left alone with a maid quite a stranger to me, and she has a month or two's sad distraction to go through. What sad large pieces it cuts out of life--out of her life, who is getting rather old; and we may not have many years to live to-

¹³Letters, II, 69.

gether! I am weaker, and bear it worse than I ever did. But I hope we shall be comfortable by and bye. The rooms are delicious, and the best look backwards into Hare Court, where there is a pump always going. Just now it is dry. Hare Court trees come in at the window, so that it's like living in a garden. I try to persuade myself it is much pleasanter than Mitre Court; but, alas! the household gods are slow to come in a new mansion. They are in their infancy to me; I do not feel them yet; no hearth has blazed to them yet. How I hate and dread new places.¹⁴

The personal inconvenience of moving magnified in the letter to Manning is discounted by his consideration of the disadvantages of the new quarters for Mary in the letter to Coleridge. There is a shift of emphasis, which will lead the way into the melancholy essay "New Year's Eve."

The letter to Manning describes Hare Court in more pessimistic terms; "a gloomy churchyard-like court," "with three trees and a pump in it." In the letter to Coleridge, however, Lamb seemed to emphasize, perhaps ironically, the brighter aspects: "where there is a pump always going," "trees come in at the window," "it's like living in a garden." The pump, the fountain, "captured" water, were images from his childhood that occurred in several essays. Note in this letter that "just now it is dry." One is reminded of "The Old

¹⁴Letters, II, 74.

Benchers of the Inner Temple" and the fountains which are "fast vanishing," are "dried up, or bricked over,"¹⁵

The next attempt on this idea-complex was "New Year's Eve," which appeared in the January 1821 London. In his comments following the letter to Manning, Lucas said that "Lamb later elaborated and condensed his passage in the Elia essay 'New Year's Eve'."¹⁶ The comment seems, however, more appropriate to the passage in the letter to Coleridge.

I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods, like misers' farthings. In proportion as the years both lessen and shorten, I set more count upon their periods, and would fain lay my ineffectual finger upon the spoke of the great wheel. I am not content to pass away "like a weaver's shuttle." Those metaphors solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide, that smoothly bears human life to eternity; and reluct at the inevitable course of destiny. I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends; to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age; or drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave.--Any alteration, on this earth of mine, in diet or in lodging, puzzles

¹⁵Works, II, 84.

¹⁶Letters, II, 70n.

and discomposes me. My household-gods
plant a terrible fixed foot, and are not
rooted up without blood. . . . A new
state of being staggers me.¹⁷

The letter to Manning, while it describes Hare Court in pessimistic terms, does not dwell upon growing old, as does the letter to Coleridge. The Coleridge letter is much closer in tone to the essay, which appeared twelve years later. Lamb's speculations in the Coleridge letter undoubtedly pointed him in the direction of the essay. There is no specific repetition of phrase in the essay until one reaches the "household gods," but there is an over-all echo of the letter in the essay. (The only specific way in which Lucas might have seen an initiation in the Manning letter is in the word-play on "our place of final destination." But even though this phrase moves on to the "gloomy" courtyard, it seems to have been introduced for humor's sake.) There is, of course, the possibility that the humorous conclusion of the letter to Manning set Lamb upon a course of musing which took him through the Coleridge letter and had its fruition in the essay. The "household-gods" phrase is a direct echo in the essay of the phrase in the Coleridge letter; the emphasis is shifted from entering "a new mansion" to leaving the old, but

¹⁷Works, II, 29.

the parallel is evident.

Six years later, in a letter to Thomas Hood, the poet, on September 18, 1827, Lamb dealt again with the problem of moving. But in this letter, his conclusion was reversed:

We have got our books into our new house. I am a drayhorse if I was not asham'd of the indigested dirty lumber, as I toppled 'em out of the cart, and blest Becky that came with 'em for her having an unstuff'd brain with such rubbish. We shall get in by Michael's mass. Twas with some pain we were evuls'd from Colebrook. You may find some of our flesh sticking to the door posts. To change habitations is to die to them, and in my time I have diéd seven deaths. But I dont know whether every such change does not bring with it a rejuvenescense. Tis an enterprise, and shoves back the sense of death's approximating, which tho' not terrible to me, is at all times particularly distasteful. My house-deaths have generally been periodical, recurring after seven years, but this last is premature by half that time. Cut off in the flower of Colebrook. The Middletonian stream and all its echoes mourn. Even minnows dwindle.¹⁸

The "indigested dirty lumber" of the 1827 letter recalls the "heap of little nasty things" of the 1809 letter to Manning. In each letter, there is a good-humored complaint: (to Manning) "then you can find nothing you want for many days"; (to Coleridge) "but we shall be comfortable by and bye"; and (to Hood) "we shall get in by Michael's mass."

¹⁸Letters, III, 131-132.

Although the letter to Hood is concerned with death, whether of his "houses" or himself, Lamb reached the optimistic concept of "rejuvenescence," an entirely new idea for this complex. The 1827 letter ends on a note of rueful humor, perhaps of joking.

Taking into consideration the intentional differences of the letters to Manning and Coleridge on the one hand and the essay on the other, one would agree that the essay is more successful, even in the brief excerpts quoted here. The mood, the tone, the atmosphere of the essay become important products, which the letters have, if at all, in much lesser degree. Again, it is the matter that a private letter is diverse in its approach, while the essay (a public letter, perhaps) is a literary form, and as such, has ulterior motives.

THE BIGGEST WOMAN IN CAMBRIDGE

Lamb was fascinated by the extra-obese female personage who haunted the walks at Cambridge. The first reference to this pan-woman was in a letter to Dorothy Wordsworth in 1821:

Ask anybody you meet, who is the biggest woman in Cambridge--and I'll hold you a wager they'll say Mrs. Smith. She broke down two benches in Trinity Gardens, one on the confines of St. John's, which occasioned a litigation between the societies as to repairing it. In warm weather she retires into an ice-cellar (literally!) and

dates the returns of the years from a hot Thursday some 20 years back. She sits in a room with opposite doors and windows, to let in a thorough draught, which gives her slenderer friends toothaches. She is to be seen in the market every morning at 10, cheapening fowls, which I observe the Cambridge Poulterers are not sufficiently careful to stump.¹⁹

This rather brief description was worked into a full essay by Lamb. "The Gentle Giantess" appeared in the London for December 1822. But as Lamb had done in another essay on Cambridge, he shifted the setting to Oxford:

The Widow Blacket, of Oxford, is the largest female I ever had the pleasure of beholding. . . . She hath Atlantean shoulders; and, as she stoopeth in her gait--with as few offences to answer for in her own particular as any of Eve's daughters--her back seems broad enough to bear the blame of all the peccadillos that have been committed since Adam. She girdeth her waist--or what she is pleased to esteem as such--nearly up to her shoulders. . . . Her person is a burthen to herself, no less than to the ground which bears her. To her mighty bone, she hath a pinguitude withal, which makes the depth of winter to her the most desirable season. Her distress in the warmer solstice is pitiable. During the months of July and August, she usually renteth a cool cellar, where ices are kept, whereinto she descendeth when Sirius rageth. She dates from a hot Thursday--some twenty-five years ago. Her apartment in summer is pervious to the four winds. Two doors, in north and south direction, and two windows, fronting the rising and the setting sun, never closed, from every cardinal point,

¹⁹Letters, II, 288-289.

catch the contributory breezes. She loves to enjoy what she calls a quadruple draught. That must be a shrewd zephyr, that can escape her. I owe a painful face-ach, which oppresses me at this moment, to a cold caught, sitting by her, one day in last July, at this receipt of coolness. Her fan in ordinary resembleth a banner spread, which she keepeth continually on the alert to detect the least breeze. . . . Her delight at Oxford is in the public walks and gardens, where, when the weather is not too oppressive, she passeth much of her valuable time. There is a bench at Maudlin, or rather, situated between the frontiers of that and ****'s college--some litigation latterly, about repairs, has vested the property of it finally in ****'s--where at the hour of noon she is ordinarily to be found sitting--so she calls it by courtesy--but, in fact, pressing and breaking of it down with her enormous settlement; as both those Foundations, who, however, are good-natured enough to wink at it, have found, I believe, to their cost.²⁰

The essay, while retaining every point made in the letter with the exception of her bargaining for fowls, amplifies the germ of the letter, and adds several extensive points which are not quoted here. The Widow expanded the horizon to include every female the essayist had ever seen, while Mrs. Smith was merely the biggest woman in Cambridge. In the essay she broke only one bench (and that incident is more subtly expressed than her breaking of two benches in the letter). The ultimate result of the broken bench is in both the letter and the essay "litigation."

²⁰Works, I, 248-249.

The "ice-cellar" passage is expanded, but there are repetitions from the letter: "and dates the returns of the years from a hot Thursday some 20 years back" becomes "she dates from a hot Thursday,--some twenty-five years ago."

The description of the cross-ventilation in her room is more complexly expressed in the essay, but the echo of the letter is there. The "thorough draught" becomes a "quadruple draught." "Toothaches" changes to "face-ach."

The essay adds detail of description and humorous comment, such as the modifications of her waist and her sitting, while the letter presents the behemoth unadorned. The essay adds other details, such as the contrast between her voice and her body, and her enjoyment of walking with the aid of a portable chair. As a result of the wealth of detail, the essay gives greater amusement than does the letter with its bare essentials.

"A HEAD UNIFORMLY WRONG"

George Dyer, the poet who passed rather rapidly into oblivion (the general public thus confirming Lamb's critical powers anent his absent-minded friend's literary abilities), provided much entertainment for

Lamb and his correspondents throughout his letter-writing career. Lamb once wrote of Dyer: "O, George, George, with a head uniformly wrong and a heart uniformly right . . ."21 Lamb recognized his friend's various good attributes, his sincerity, his loyalty, his always good intentions; but he was amused by Dyer's foibles, among which were an ability to lose himself (sometimes literally) and a proclivity for promiscuous and un-directed enthusiasms.

Dyer often took an interest in some phase of learning (Manning's Algebra, the "lyric," a comparison of English and German drama),--a momentary but violent enthusiasm--but he invariably failed to prepare himself before he "took off." One example: Dyer planned to compare English and German drama. Lamb found the idea silly because, while Dyer admitted to having once read Shakespeare some time back, he had never read Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Shirley, Ford. Lamb commented on this incident to both Manning and Coleridge in several letters.

The particular occasion of interest here was first reported to Sarah Hazlitt in November 1823. Keep in mind that Dyer was not only an absent-minded scholar, but was partially blind. This last fact is at best

21Letters, I, 205.

only hinted by Lamb, but is supplied by Lucas in a burst of misguided sympathy.

You have seen our house. What I now tell you is literally true. Yesterday week George Dyer called upon us, at one o'clock (bright noon day). . . . He sat with Mary about half an hour, and took leave. The maid saw him go out from her kitchen window; but suddenly losing sight of him, ran up in a fright to Mary. G.D., instead of keeping the slip that leads to the gate, had deliberately, staff in hand, in broad open day, marched into the New River. He had not his spectacles on, and you know his absence. Who helped him out, they can hardly tell; but between 'em they got him out, drenched thro' and thro'. A mob collected by that time and accompanied him in. 'Send for the Doctor!' they said; and a one-eyed fellow, dirty and drunk, was fetched from the Public House at the end, where it seems he lurks, for the sake of picking up water practice, having formerly had a medal from the Humane Society for some rescue. By his advice, the patient was put between blankets; and when I came home at four to dinner, I found G.D. a-bed, and raving, light-headed with the brandy-and-water which the doctor had administered. He sung, laughed, whimpered, screamed, babbled of guardian angels, would get up and go home; but we kept him there by force; and by next morning he departed sobered, and seems to have received no injury. All my friends are open-mouthed about having paling before the river, but I cannot see that, because a . . . [sic] lunatic chooses to walk into a river with his eyes open at midday, I am any more likely to be drowned in it, coming home at midnight.²²

In December 1823, the London carried the essay "Amicus Redivivus." In the essay, Lamb made his usual

²²Letters, II, 405-406.

tamperings with actual fact in order to heighten his astonishment and shock that such an event could transpire.

I do not know when I have experienced a stranger sensation, than on seeing my old friend G.D., who had been paying me a morning visit a few Sundays back, at my cottage in Islington, upon taking leave, instead of turning down the right hand path by which he had entered--with staff in hand, and at noon day, deliberately march right forwards into the midst of the stream that runs by us, and totally disappear.

A spectacle like this at dusk would have been appalling enough; but, in the broad open daylight, to witness such an unreserved motion towards self-destruction in a valued friend, took from me all power of speculation.

How I found my feet, I know not. Consciousness was quite gone. Some spirit, not my own, whirled me to the spot. I remember nothing but the silvery apparition of a good white head emerging; nigh which a staff (the hand unseen that wielded it) pointed upwards, as feeling for the skies. In a moment (if time was in that time) he was on my shoulders, and I--freighted with a load more precious than his who bore Anchises.

And here I cannot but do justice to the officious zeal of sundry passers by, who, albeit arriving a little too late to participate in the honours of the rescue, in philanthropic shoals came thronging to communicate their advice as to the recovery; prescribing variously the application, or non-application, of salt, &c., to the person of the patient. Life meantime was ebbing fast away, amidst the stifle of conflicting judgments, when one, more sagacious than the rest, by a bright thought, proposed sending for the Doctor. Trite as the counsel was, and impossible, as one should think, to be missed on,--shall I confess?--in this emergency, it was to me as if an Angel had spoken.

* * *

MONOCULUS--for so, in default of catching his true name, I choose to designate the medical gentleman who now appeared--is a grave, middle-aged person, who, without having studied at the college, or truckled to the pedantry of a diploma, hath employed a great portion of his valuable time in experimental processes upon the bodies of unfortunate fellow-creatures, in whom the vital spark, to mere vulgar thinking, would seem extinct, and lost for ever. He omitteth no occasion of obtruding his services, from a case of common surfeit-suffocation to the ignobler obstructions, sometimes induced by a too wilful application of the plant Cannabis outwardly. But though he declineth not altogether these drier extinctions, his occupation tendeth for the most part to water-practice; for the convenience of which, he hath judiciously fixed his quarters near the grand repository of the stream mentioned, where, day and night, from his little watch-tower, at the Middleton's-Head, he listeneth to detect the wrecks of drowned mortality--partly, as he saith, to be upon the spot--and partly, because the liquids which he useth to prescribe to himself and his patients, on these distressing occasions, are ordinarily more conveniently to be found at these common hostelryes, than in the shops and phials of the apothecaries. His ear hath arrived to such finesse by practice, that it is reported, he can distinguish a plunge at a half furlong distance; and can tell, if it be casual or deliberate. He weareth a medal, suspended over a suit, originally of a sad brown, but which, by time, and frequency of nightly divings, has been dinged into a true professional sable. He passeth by the name of Doctor, and is remarkable for wanting his left eye. His remedy--after a sufficient application of warm blankets, friction, &c., is a simple tumbler, or more, of the purest Cognac, with water, made as hot as the convalescent can bear it. Where he findeth . . . a squeamish subject, he condescendeth to be the taster; and showeth, by his own example, the innocuous nature of the prescription. Nothing can be more kind or encouraging than this procedure. It addeth confidence to the

patient, to see his medical adviser go hand in hand with himself in the remedy. When the doctor swalloweth his own draught, what peevish invalid can refuse to pledge him in the potion? In fine, MONOCULUS is a humane, sensible man, who, for a slender pittance, scarce enough to sustain life, is content to wear it out in the endeavour to save the lives of others--his pretensions so moderate, that with difficulty I could press a crown upon him, for the price of restoring the existence of such an invaluable creature to society as G.D.

It was pleasant to observe the effect of the subsiding alarm upon the nerves of the dear absentee. It seemed to have given a shake to memory, calling up notice after notice, of all the providential deliverances he had experienced in the course of his long and innocent life. Sitting up in my couch--my couch which, naked and void of furniture hitherto, for the salutary repose which it administered, shall be honoured with costly valance, at some price, and henceforth be a state-bed at Colebrook,--he discoursed marvelous escapes--by carelessness of nurses--by pails of gelid, and kettles of the boiling element, in infancy--by orchard pranks, and snapping twigs, in schoolboy frolics-- by descent of tiles at Trumpington, and of heavier tomes at Pembroke--by studious watchings, inducing frightful vigilance--by want, and the fear of want, and all the sore throbbings of the learned head.--Anon, he would burst out into little fragments of chaunting--of songs long ago--ends of deliverance-hymns, not remembered before since childhood, but coming up now, when his heart was made tender as a child's--for the tremor cordis, in the retrospect of a recent deliverance, as in a case of impending danger, acting upon an innocent heart, will produce a self-tenderness, which we should do ill to christen cowardice; and Shakespeare, in the latter crisis, has made his good Sir Hugh to remember the sitting by Babylon, and to mutter of shallow rivers.²³

²³Works, II, 209-211.

The point of view is shifted from the maid's in the letter to the immediacy of the personal in the essay. In the essay there are parallels and echoes of the first account. "Instead of keeping the slip that leads to the gate" becomes "instead of turning down the right hand path by which he had entered." With a few minor shifts of phrase, the essay closely echoes the rest of the sentence: "had deliberately, staff in hand, in broad open day, marched into the New River" becomes "with staff in hand, and at noon day, deliberately march right forwards into the midst of the stream" The next sentence in the letter, an aside to Mrs. Hazlitt, is strangely echoed in the essay with the use of one word in a different sense: "he had not his spectacles on" and "a spectacle like this at dusk would have been appalling enough."

"Who helped him out, they can hardly tell" is acknowledged in the essay with "I remember nothing." The "mob" of the letter becomes the "philanthropic shoals thronging" of the essay.

The "doctor" is one-eyed in both versions, but the essay dresses him up in words, whereas in the letter he is "dirty and drunk." The doctor's "water practice" is mentioned in both versions. The doctor's "office" is modified in the letter with "where he lurks," but

in the essay the modification is "where, day and night, from his little watch-tower, at the Middleton's-Head, he listeneth to detect the wrecks of drowned mortality." The letter's "the patient was put between blankets" is slightly changed to "after a sufficient application of warm blankets." The entire matter of the letter's brandy-and-water treatment is expanded and embroidered in the essay. The same comment is true for Dyer's reaction to the treatment. The catalogue of his behavior from the letter becomes in the essay a catalogue of his reminiscences under the effect of the treatment.

This idea-complex is interesting because the letter was written just a short time before the essay. There are over-tones of similarity of treatment of the doctor in this essay and of the Widow Blacket in the essay of the previous idea-complex. While a year separates the two essays, the Widow Blacket "passeth much of her valuable time" in the public walks, while MONOCULUS "hath employed a great portion of his valuable time in experimental processes." In both essays, Lamb used the Middle English ending for the present indicative third person singular applying to the "hero" and his actions. This technique gives a definite tongue-in-cheek flavor to the essays, and in part explains the quite different tone of the preceding letters in both instances.

COOKE AS RICHARD III

Lamb was an enthusiastic play-goer; he was also an avid play-reader. Many of his letters and essays deal in dramatic criticism. In English Literature 1789-1815,

W. L. Renwick comments on Lamb's critical ability:

He never discusses a play as a constructed entity but always as a source of individual characters, moments of emotional power, bursts of poetic expression, and happy touches of wit or nature. He describes--and none better--the manners of individual actors--Bannister, Munden, Bensley--and how they took their individual parts, but never the tone and balance of a whole production.²⁴

This evaluation is reasonably just. This approach was used in a "review" written to Robert Lloyd, the younger brother of Charles Lloyd, a poet associated with Lamb and Coleridge, and of Plumstead Lloyd. Lamb wrote the letter on June 26, 1801.

Cooke in 'Richard the Third' is a perfect caricature. He gives you the monster Richard, but not the man Richard. Shakspeare's bloody character impresses you with awe and deep admiration of his witty parts, his consummate hypocrisy, and indefatigable prosecution of purpose. You despise, detest, and loathe the cunning, vulgar, low and fierce Richard, which Cooke substitutes in his place. He gives you no other idea than of a vulgar villain, rejoicing in his being able to overreach, and not possessing that joy in silent consciousness, but betraying it, like a poor villain, in sneers and distortions of the face, like a

²⁴Oxford, 1963, p. 232.

droll at a country fair; not to add that cunning so self-betraying and manner so vulgar could never have deceived the politic Buckingham nor the soft Lady Anne; both bred in courts, would have turned in disgust from such a fellow. Not but Cooke has powers; but not of discrimination. His manner is strong, coarse, and vigorous, and well adapted to some characters.

* * *

I want to have your opinion and Plumstead's on Cooke's Richard the Third. I am possessed with an admiration of the genuine Richard, his genius, and his mounting spirit, which no consideration of his cruelties can depress. Shakspeare has not made Richard so black a Monster as is supposed. Wherever he is monstrous, it was to conform to vulgar opinion. But he is generally a Man. . . . All the inconsistency is, that Shakspeare's better genius was forced to struggle against the prejudices which made a monster of Richard. He set out to paint a monster, but his human sympathies produced a man. . . . Richard itself is totally metamorphosed in the wretched acting play of that name, which you will see, altered by Cibber.²⁵

The next exhibit is a review which appeared in the Morning Post of January 4, 1802, some six months after Lamb wrote to young Lloyd.²⁶

. . . we attended the first appearance of Mr. Cooke, in the character of Richard the Third, last winter. . . . we propose to enter into the question--whether that popular actor is right or wrong in his conception of the great outlines of the character; those strong essential differences which separate Richard from all the other creations of Shakespeare. We say of Shakespeare; for though the Play,

²⁵Letters, I, 259-261.

²⁶Lucas gives January 8, 1802, in his note to the letter, but correctly in his note to the review. Two letters to John Rickman (Letters, I, 292-293) verify the accuracy of January 4; but Lucas annotates the letters with July 8!

which passes for his upon the Stage, materially differs from that which he wrote under the same title, being in fact little better than a compilation . . . all together producing an inevitable inconsistency of character . . . this Actor presents us with a very original and very forcible portrait (if not of the man Richard, whom Shakespeare drew, yet) of the monster Richard, as he exists in the popular idea, in his own exaggerated and witty self-abuse, in the overstrained representations of the parties who were sufferers by his ambition; and, above all, in the impertinent and wretched scenes, so absurdly foisted in by some, who have thought themselves capable of adding to what Shakespeare wrote. . . .

"He has a tongue can wheedle with the DEVIL." It has been the policy of that antient and grey simulator, in all ages, to hide his horns and claws. The Richard of Mr. Cooke perpetually obtrudes his. . . . The hypocrisy is too glaring and visible. It resembles more the shallow cunning of a mind which is its own dupe, than the profound and practised art of so powerful an intellect as Richard's. It is too obstreperous and loud, breaking out into triumphs and plaudits at its own success, like an unexercised noviciate in tricks. It has none of the silent confidence, and steady self-command of the experienced politician; it possesses none of that fine address, which was necessary to have betrayed the heart of Lady Anne, or even to have imposed upon the duller wits of the Lord Mayor and Citizens.

. . . This character of unlaboured mirth Mr. Cooke seems entirely to pass over, and substitutes in its stead the coarse, taunting humour, and clumsy merriment, of a low-minded assassin. . . .²⁷

The balancing of the "the monster Richard," "the man Richard" is repeated in the review. The review's "it

²⁷Works, I, 41-43.

is too obstreperous and loud, breaking out into triumphs and plaudits at its own success, like an unexercised noviciate in tricks" echoes the letter's "rejoicing in his being able to overreach, and not possessing that joy in silent consciousness, but betraying it, like a poor villain, in sneers and distortions of the face, like a droll at a country fair."

Instead of pairing Lady Anne with Buckingham as in the letter, Lamb, in the essay, contrasted her with the Lord Mayor and Citizens; but in both versions, the matter at hand is Richard's successful ability to deceive. The review's "the monster Richard, as he exists in the popular idea" parallels the letter's "wherever he is monstrous, it was to conform to vulgar opinion."

Twice in the letter, Lamb described Cooke's Richard with similar adjectives: "cunning, vulgar, low and fierce" and "strong, coarse, and vigorous." The review echoes these characteristics in the comment about the "coarse, taunting humour, and clumsy merriment, of a low-minded assassin."

In the letter, there are hints of Lamb's dissatisfaction with the Shakespearean productions of his time. The review devotes forty lines to his irritation.

The letter, perhaps because of its length and use

of detail, is more interesting to read. Perhaps immediacy has some effect as well. But the "professional" writing of the review, in spite of some good phrases, is dull. In attacking Cooke's performance and the abuses of the current Shakespearean productions, Lamb undertook too much for a single review. Related though the problems are, the reader is more interested in the Cooke performance. The letter, written shortly after Lamb saw the performance, rings true, while the review gives an impression of "grand-standing."

CULINARICS

Lamb's interest in gourmet food extended as far back as 1800 in the letters. He early developed a gastronomic rapture and expressed it the rest of his life; it was the subject of an essay in his last year.

The first example is from a letter to Thomas Manning on September 22, 1800, in which, not pig, but birds are the subject of his comments:

Your fine hare and fine birds (which just now are dangling by our kitchen blaze) discourse most eloquent music in your justification. You just nicked my palate. For, with all due decorum and leave may it be spoken, my worship hath taken physic for his body, to-day, and being low and puling, requireth to be pampered. Poh! how beautiful and strong those buttered onions come to my nose! For you must know we extract a divine spirit of gravy from those materials which, duly compounded with a

consistence of bread and cream (y'clept bread-sauce), each to each giving double grace, do mutually illustrate and set off (as skilful goldfoils to rare jewels) your partridge, pheasant, woodcock, snipe, teal, widgeon, and the other lesser daughters of the ark. My friendship, struggling with my carnal and fleshly prudence (which suggests that a bird a man is the proper allotment in such cases), yearneth sometimes to have thee here to pick a wing or so. I question if your Norfolk sauces match our London culinartic. . . .

God bless me, here are the birds, smoking hot! all that is gross and unspiritual in me rises at the sight! Avaunt friendship! and all memory of absent friends!²⁸

Again on February 23, 1805, Lamb wrote Manning, to thank him for a gift of brawn which Manning sent through the cook of Trinity Hall at Cambridge. This letter introduces a phrase to be used in "A Dissertation upon Roast Fig."

At first, I thought of declining the present; but Richard [the cook] knew my blind side when he pitched upon brawn. 'Tis of all my hobbies the supreme in the eating way. He might have sent sops from the pan, skimmings, crumplets, chips, hog's lard, the tender brown judiciously scalped from a fillet of veal . . . the tops of asparagus, fugitive livers, run-away gizzards of fowls, the eyes of martyred pigs, tender effusions of laxative woodcocks, the red spawn of lobsters, leverets' ears, and such pretty filchings common to cooks; but these had been ordinary presents, the everyday courtesies of dishwashers to their sweethearts. Brawn was a noble

²⁸Letters, I, 214-216.

thought. It is not every common gullet-fancier that can properly esteem it. . . . I hope to see you to supper in London soon, where we will taste Richard's brawn, and drink his health in a cheerful but moderate cup. . . . gifts are like nails. Praesens ut absens, that is your Present makes amends for your absence.²⁹

The next exhibit is an undated letter to Charles Chambers, brother of a fellow India House employee; but Lucas assigns it a date of September 1817. Lamb informed his friend of his attitude toward John-dory, the fish he here mentioned for the first time.

Else in itself, and trusting to my own poor single judgment, it hath not that moist oleaginous gliding smooth descent from the tongue to the palate, thence to the stomach, &c., that your Brighton Turbot hath, which I take to be the most friendly and familiar flavor of any that swims--most genial and at home to the palate.

Nor has it on the other hand that fine falling off flakiness, that oleaginous peeling off (as it were, like a sea onion) . . . You understand me--these delicate subjects are necessarily obscure.

But it has a third flavor of its own, perfectly distinct from Cod or Turbot, which it must be owned may to some not injudicious palates render it acceptable--but to my unpractised tooth it presented a crude river-fish-flavor, like your Pike or Carp, and perhaps like them should have been tamed & corrected by some laborious & well chosen sauce. Still I always suspect a fish which requires so much of artificial settings-off. Your choicest relishes . . . need not the foreign aid of ornament, but are when unadorned . . . then adorned the most. . . .

²⁹Letters, I, 385-386.

I like you for liking hare. I esteem you for disrelishing minced veal. Liking is too cold a word.--I love you for your noble attachment to the fat unctuous juices of deer's flesh & the green unspeakable of turtle. I honour you for your endeavours to esteem and approve of my favorite, which I ventured to recommend to you as a substitute for hare, bullock's heart, and I am not offended that you cannot taste it with my palate. A true son of Epicurus should reserve one taste peculiar to himself. . . . But I have made one discovery which I will not impart till my dying scene is over, perhaps it will be my last mouthful in this world; delicious thought, enough to sweeten (or rather make savoury) the hour of death. It is a little square bit about this size [see Macdonald's edition for the square; Lucas's note] in or near the knuckle bone of a fried joint of . . . fat I can't call it nor lean neither altogether, it is that beautiful compound, which Nature must have made in Paradise, Park venison, before she separated the two substances, the dry & the oleaginous, to punish sinful mankind; Adam ate them entire & inseparate, and this little taste of Eden in the Knuckle bone of a fried . . . seems the only relique of a Paraisaical state. When I die, an exact description of its topography shall be left in a cupboard with a key, inscribed on which these words, 'C. Lamb dying imparts this to C. Chambers as the only worthy depository of such a secret.' You'll drop a tear.

. . . 30

This particular idea-syndrome is interesting in Lamb because the various letters do not echo or parallel each other, but the Elian essay uses phrases from all the letters. The tone of the letters is often, indefinably, carried over from letter to letter.

³⁰Letters, II, 211-213. The ellipses following the brackets in the last paragraph are Lamb's.

A letter to Coleridge on March 9, 1822, prepared the way for the dissertation on "roast pig" rather than "brawn" or "knuckle bone of a fried joint of" A pig, intended for Lamb, had been delivered to Coleridge; Lamb, responding to his friend's mistaken gratitude, wanted the record set straight.

It gives me great satisfaction to hear that the pig turned out so well--they are interesting creatures at a certain age--what a pity such buds should blow out into the maturity of rank bacon! You had all some of the crackling--and brain sauce--did you remember to rub it with butter, and gently dredge it a little, just before the crises? Did the eyes come away kindly with no Oedipean avulsion? Was the crackling the colour of the ripe pomegranate? Had you no complement of boiled neck of mutton before it, to blunt the edge of delicate desire? Did you flesh maiden teeth in it? Not that I sent the pig, or can form the remotest guess what part Owen [Lamb's landlord] could play in the business. I never knew him give anything away in my life. He would not begin with strangers. I suspect the pig, after all, was meant for me; but at the unlucky juncture of time being absent, the present somehow went round to Highgate. To confess an honest truth, a pig is one of those things I could never think of sending away. Teals, wigeons, snipes, barn-door fowl, ducks, geese--your tame villatic things--Welsh mutton, collars of brawn, sturgeon, fresh or pickled, your potted char, Swiss cheeses, French pies, early grapes, muscadines, I impart as freely unto my friends as to myself. They are but self-extended; but pardon me if I stop somewhere--where the fine feeling of benevolence giveth a higher smack than the sensual rarity--there my friends (or any good man) may command me; but pigs are pigs, and I myself therein am nearest to myself. Nay, I should think it an affront, an undervaluing done to Nature

who bestowed such a boon upon me, if in a churlish mood I parted with the precious gift. One of the bitterest pangs of remorse I ever felt was when a child--when my kind old aunt had strained her pocket-strings to bestow a sixpenny whole plum-cake upon me. In my way home through the Borough, I met a venerable old man, not a mendicant, but thereabouts--a look-beggar, not a verbal petitioner; and in the cock-combry of taught-charity I gave away the cake to him. I walked on a little in all the pride of an Evangelical peacock, when of a sudden my old aunt's kindness crossed me--the sum it was to her--the pleasure she had a right to expect that I--not the old imposter--should take in eating her cake--the cursed ingratitude by which, under the colour of a Christian virtue, I had frustrated her cherished purpose. I sobbed, wept, and took it to heart so grievously, that I think I never suffered the like--and I was right. It was a piece of unfeeling hypocrisy, and proved a lesson to me ever after. The cake has long been masticated, consigned to the dunghill with the ashes of that unseasonable pauper.

But when Providence, who is better to us all than our aunts, gives me a pig, remembering my temptation and my fall, I shall endeavour to act towards it more in the spirit of the donor's purpose.

Yours (short of pig) to command in everything, C.L. 31

In the London for September 1822, "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" appeared. Portions of the conclusion of the essay are germane to this discussion:

There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, crackling,

³¹Letters, II, 317-318.

as it is well called--the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance--with the adhesive oleaginous-- O call it not fat--but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it--the tender blossoming of fat--fat cropped in the bud--taken in the shoot--in the first innocence--the cream and quintessence of the child-pig's yet pure food--the lean, no lean, but a kind of animal manna--or, rather, fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result, or common substance.

.....

Pig--let me speak his praise--is no less provocative of the appetite, than he is satisfactory to the criticalness of the censorious palate. The strong may batten on him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices.

.....

I am one of those, who freely and ungrudgingly impart a share of the good things of this life which fall to their lot (few as mine are in this kind) to a friend. I protest I take as great an interest in my friend's pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own. "Presents," I often say, "endear Absents." Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chicken (those "tame villatic fowl"), capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste them, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend. But a stop must be put somewhere. One would not, like Lear, "give every thing." I make my stand upon pig. Methinks it is an ingratitude to the Giver of all good flavours, to extra-domiciliate, or send out of the house, slightly, (under pretext of friendship, or I know not what) a blessing so particularly adapted, predestined, I may say, to my individual palate--It argues an insensibility.

I remember a touch of conscience in this kind

at school. My good old aunt, who never parted from me at the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweet-meat, or some nice thing, into my pocket, had dismissed me one evening with a smoking plum-cake, fresh from the oven. In my way to school (it was over London bridge) a grey-headed old beggar saluted me (I have no doubt at this time of day that he was a counterfeit). I had no pence to console him with, and in the vanity of self-denial, and the very coxcombry of charity, school-boy-like, I made him a present of--the whole cake! I walked on a little, buoyed up, as one is on such occasions, with a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction; but before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned, and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go and give her good gift away to a stranger, that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I--I myself, and not another--would eat her nice cake--and what should I say to her the next time I saw her--how naughty I was to part with her pretty present--and the odour of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven, and how disappointed she would feel that I had never had a bit of it in my mouth at last--and I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness, and above all I wished never to see the face again of that insidious, good-for-nothing, old grey impostor.

.....

His sauce should be considered. Decidedly, a few bread crumbs, done up with his liver and brains, and a dash of mild sage. But, banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shalots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank and guilty garlic; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are--but consider, he is a weakling--a flower.³²

³²Works, II, 123-126.

There are obviously several echoes. One of these is the catalogue which appears in many of the letters and in the essay as well: in the 1800 letter to Manning, "partridge, pheasant, woodcock, snipe, teal, widgeon, and other lesser daughters of the ark"; in the 1805 letter to Manning,

sops from the pan, skimmings, crumplets, chips, hog's lard, the tender brown judiciously scalped from a fillet of veal . . . the tops of asparagus, fugitive livers, run-away gizzards of fowls, the eyes of martyred pigs, tender effusions of laxative woodcocks, the red spawn of lobsters, leverets' ears, and such pretty filchings common to cooks;

in the March 1822 letter to Coleridge,

teals, wigeons, snipes, barn-door fowl, ducks, geese--your tame villatic things --Welsh mutton, collars of brawn, sturgeon, fresh or pickled, your potted char, Swiss cheeses, French pies, early grapes, muscadines;

and in the September 1822 essay,

hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chicken (those "tame villatic fowl"), capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters.

Another "repetition" involves the play on "presence" and "absence"; the expression in the 1800 letter is only a hint which becomes fully developed by 1822. "Avaunt, friendship! and all memory of absent friends" in the 1800 letter becomes by 1805, "praesens ut absens, that is your Present makes amends for your absence." The

March 1822 letter does not retain the same form of the pun, but tries a different tack: "but at the unlucky juncture of time being absent, the present somehow went round to Highgate." The essay shifts back to the form of the original pun as expressed in the 1805 letter: "'Presents, ' I often say, 'endear Absents'."

The proper sauce for complementing the gourmet dish is another idea that Lamb mentioned frequently. In the 1800 letter, he praised onion.

How beautiful and strong those buttered onions come to my nose! For you must know we extract a divine spirit of gravy from those materials which, duly compounded with a consistence of bread and cream (y'clept bread-sauce), each to each giving double grace, do mutually illustrate and set off (as skilful goldfoils to rare jewels) your partridge. . . .

The 1817 letter to Chambers introduces a new concept.

Still I always suspect a fish which requires so much of artificial settings-off. Your choicest relishes . . . need not the foreign aid of ornament, but are when unadorned . . . then adorned the most.

The 1822 essay rejects the idea of onion altogether.

His sauce should be considered. Decidedly, a few bread crumbs, done up with his liver and brains, and a dash of mild sage. But, banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shalots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank and guilty garlic; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are. . . .

Another echo involves Lamb's reluctance to share

certain bounties of Nature. There is a hint of this in the 1800 letter, where he wrote, "My friendship, struggling with my carnal and fleshly prudence (which suggests that a bird a man is the proper allotment in such cases)." His intention in the 1817 letter to keep the secret of the "knuckle bone of a fried joint of . . ." carries the concept of exclusiveness which he demonstrated in the letter and essay written in 1822.

To confess an honest truth, a pig is one of those things I could never think of sending away. . . . [these] I impart as freely unto my friends as to myself. They are but self-extended; but pardon me if I stop somewhere--where the fine feeling of benevolence giveth a higher smack than the sensual rarity--there my friends (or any good man) may command me; but pigs are pigs, and I myself therein am nearest to myself. Nay, I should think it an affront, an undervaluing done to Nature who bestowed such a boon upon me, if in churlish mood I parted with the precious gift.

I am one of those, who freely and ungrudgingly impart a share of the good things of this life which fall to their lot . . . to a friend. I protest I take as great an interest in my friend's pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own. . . . [These] I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste them . . . upon the tongue of my friend. But a stop must be put somewhere. . . . I make my stand upon pig. Methinks it is an ingratitude to the Giver of all good flavours, to extra-domiciliate . . . a blessing so particularly adapted, predestined . . . to my individual palate.

Lamb also repeated with variations his comments on the fat-lean quiddity. The 1817 letter has "fat I can't

call it nor lean neither altogether"; this concept is echoed by the 1822 essay's catalogue beginning "O call it not fat . . . or, rather, fat and lean . . . so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result, or common substance."

A final parallel passage exists in the repeated story of the "good old aunt," which in the letter begins near the top of the page, page 63, ending the letter, and in the essay starts at the top of page 65. "Kind old aunt" becomes "good old aunt." The "venerable old man" becomes a "grey-headed old beggar." "Coxcombry of taught-charity" becomes "coxcombry of charity." The letter's reflection was "the pleasure she had a right to expect that I--not the old impostor--should take in eating her cake." The essay put it: "the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I--I myself, and not another--would eat her nice cake." Finally, "it was a piece of unfeeling hypocrisy" becomes "I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness."

Of interest are several letters which Lamb wrote after the essay.³³

³³These include: August 31, 1822, letter to John Clare in praise of frog (Letters, II, 327); September 22, 1822, to Bernard Barton on frogs (Letters, II, 333); November 11, 1822, to Thomas Robinson on pig (Letters, II, 345); Twelfth Day, 1823, to the J. D. Colliers on pig (Letters, II, 360); and October 28, 1823, to John Bates Dibdin on pig (Letters, II, 404).

In 1826, Lamb published in the March New Monthly Magazine the "Popular Fallacy" 'That We Must Not Look a Gift-Horse in the Mouth.' This essay continued the attitude of the 1822 letter and essay on the matter of sharing certain gifts.

There are favours, short of the pecuniary-- a thing not fit to be hinted at among gentlemen-- which confer as much grace upon the acceptor as the offerer; the kind, we confess, which is most to our palate, is of those little conciliatory missives, which for their vehicle generally choose a hamper--little odd presents of game, fruit, perhaps wine--though it is essential to the delicacy of the latter that it be home-made. We love to have our friend in the country sitting thus at our table by proxy; to apprehend his presence (though a hundred miles may be between us) by a turkey, whose goodly aspect reflects to us his "plump corpusculum;" to taste him in grouse or woodcock; to feel him gliding down in the toast peculiar to the latter; to concorporate him in a slice of Canterbury brawn. This is indeed to have him within ourselves; to know him intimately; such participation is methinks unitive, as the old theologians phrase it. For these considerations we should be sorry if certain restrictive regulations, which are thought to bear hard upon the peasantry of this country, were entirely done away with. A hare, as the law now stands, makes many friends. Caius conciliates Titius (knowing his gout) with a leash of partridges. Titius (suspecting his partiality for them) passes them to Lucius; who in his turn, preferring his friend's relish to his own, makes them over to Marcius; till in their ever widening progress, and round of unconscious circum-migration, they distribute the seeds of harmony over half a parish. We are well disposed to this kind of sensible remembrances; and are the less apt to be taken by those little airy tokens--impalpable to the palate-- . . . rings, lockets. . . . We could never away with these indigestible trifles. They are the very

kickshaws and foppery of friendship.³⁴

Here again Lamb punned on "presence" as he had in the 1805 letter to Manning, the 1822 letter to Coleridge, and the 1822 essay. The "I love to taste them . . . upon the tongue of my friend" in the 1822 essay is broadened in the Fallacy to the two sentences in the middle of the preceding page beginning "We love to have our friend" and ending "as the old theologians phrase it."

"Thoughts on Presents of Game, &c." appeared in the Athenaeum of November 31, 1833. In the person of Elia (although the essay was never included in either of the collections), Lamb acknowledged a basket of game from an unknown correspondent:

But a hare roasted hard and brown--with gravy and melted butter!--old Mr. Chambers, the sensible clergyman in Warwickshire . . . used to allow a pound of Epping to every hare. Perhaps that was over-doing it. . . . Time was, when Elia was not arrived at his taste, that he preferred to all luxuries a roasted Pig. But he disclaims all such green-sickness appetites in future, though he hath to acknowledge the receipt of many a delicacy in that kind from correspondents--good, but mistaken men--in consequence of their erroneous supposition, that he had carried up into mature life the prepossessions of childhood. . . . Noble will I call [the hare], in spite of her detractors, who from occasional demonstrations of the principle of self-preservation (common to all animals) infer in her a defect of heroism. Half a hundred horsemen with thrice the number of dogs, scour the country in pursuit of puss across three countries; and because the well-flavoured beast, weighing the odds, is willing to evade the hue and cry, with

³⁴Works, II, 262-263.

her delicate ears shrinking from discord-- comes the grave Naturalist, Linnaeus perchance or Buffon, and gravely sets down the Hare as a--timid animal. Why, Achilles or Bully Dawson, would have declined the preposterous combat.

In fact, how light of digestion we feel after a hare! How tender its processes after swallowing! What chyle it promotes! How ethereal! as if its living celerity were a type of its nimble coursing through the animal juices. The notice might be longer. It is intended less as a Natural History of the Hare, than a cursory thanks to the country "good Unknown." The hare has many friends, but none sincerer than

Elia. 35

This essay goes back to the letter to Charles Chambers in 1817, in which Lamb had written, "I honour you for your endeavours to esteem and approve of my favorite, which I ventured to recommend to you as a substitute for hare, bullock's heart. . ." The comments on the hare's "cowardice" call to mind the "self-tenderness" of George Dyer at the end of "Amicus Redivivus."

On July 19, 1834, the Athenaeum carried a final selection of Elia's "Table Talk." Lamb died in December. This brief essay deals with the suitable sauce:

It is a desideratum in works that treat de re culinaria, that we have no rationale of sauces, or theory of mixed flavours; as to show why cabbage is reprehensible with roast beef, laudable with bacon;

why the haunch of mutton seeks the alliance of currant jelly, the shoulder civilly declineth it; why loin of veal . . . being itself unctuous, seeketh the adventitious lubricity of melted butter; and why the same part in pork, not more oleaginous, abhorreth from it; why the French bean sympathizes with the flesh of deer; why salt fish points to parsnip, brawn makes a dead set at mustard; why cats prefer valerian to heartsease, old ladies vice versa--though this is rather travelling out of the road of the dietetics, and may be thought a question more curious than relevant;--why salmon (a strong sapor per se.) fortifieth its condition with the mighty lobster sauce, whose embraces are fatal to the delicater relish of the turbot; why oysters in death rise up against the contamination of brown sugar, while they are posthumously amorous of vinegar; why the sour mango and the sweet jam [yam] by turns court, and are accepted by, the compliable mutton hash--she not yet decidedly declaring for either. We are as yet but in the empirical stage of cookery. We feed ignorantly, and want to be able to give a reason of the relish that is in us; so that if Nature should furnish us with a new meat, or be prodigally pleased to restore the phoenix, upon a given flavour, we might be able to pronounce instantly, on philosophical principles, what the sauce to it should be--what the curious adjuncts.³⁶

Note the use of "oleaginous" in the 1817 letter to Chambers, the 1822 essay, and the final 1834 essay. This particular essay has echoes of all the letters and essays in which Lamb discussed sauces, and it illustrates his life-long interest in gastronomic delights-- and gentle foolery.

³⁶Works, I, 406.

Lamb's work in 1822 is interesting because there is such a close parallel between the letter and the essay. At the same time, in comparing the letter and that portion of the essay that is relevant, one must admit that the essay, through the use of detail and expansion, is a more effective piece of writing. On the other hand, the letters, generally, have a more personal warmth than the essays, especially the last two. Perhaps because the letters on food were so entirely personal, especially the two early ones to Manning, they demonstrate a charming egoism that would never be possible in an essay where the readers are largely assumed and mostly unknown, even in a "tight little island" of authors who married sisters and were otherwise closely associated.

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

The final idea-complex involves his retirement, and culminates in "The Superannuated Man." Lamb often complained in his letters about the necessity of his employment, but with a letter to Matilda Betham, an author and miniature-painter as well as a member of that long tribe who worried Lamb, he began to look forward to a life of leisure. The undated letter is assumed by internal evidence to have been written in

the autumn of 1815.

My head is in such a state from incapacity for business that I certainly know it to be my duty not to undertake the veriest trifle in addition. I hardly know how I can go on. I have tried to get some redress by explaining my health, but with no great success. No one can tell how ill I am, because it does not come out to the exterior of my face, but lies in my skull deep & invisible. I wish I was leprous & black jaundiced skin-over, and that all was as well within as my cursed looks. You must not think me worse than I am. I am determined not to be overset, but to give up business rather and get 'em to allow me a trifle for services past. O that I had been a shoe-maker or a baker, or a man of large independt fortune. O darling Laziness! heaven of Epicurus! Saint's Everlasting Rest! that I could drink vast potations of thee thro' unmeasured Eternity. . . . Scandalous, dishonorable, any-kind-of-repose. I stand not upon the dignified sort. Accursed, damned desks, trade, commerce, business--Inventions of that old original busybody brainworking Satan, sabbathless restless Satan--37

A letter to fellow-employee Henry Dodwell on July 5, 1816 (presumed dating accepted by Lucas), was written when a Lamb vacation was nearly over:

I have been in a lethargy this long while, and forgotten London, Westminster, Marybone, Paddington--they all went clean out of my head, till happening to go to a neighbor's in this good borough of Calne, for want of whist players, we fell upon Commerce: the word awoke me to a remembrance of my professional avocations and the long-continued strife which I have been these 24 years endeavoring to compose between those grand Irreconcilables Cash and Commerce; I instantly called for an almanack, which with

some difficulty was procured at a fortune-teller's in the vicinity (for the happy holyday people here having nothing to do, keep no account of time), and found that by dint of duty I must attend in Leadenhall on Wednesday morning next, and shall attend accordingly. . . . Heigh Ho! Lord have mercy upon me, how many does two and two make? I am afraid I shall make a poor clerk in future, I am spoiled with rambling among haycocks and cows and pigs. . . .

I come, I come, Don't drag me so hard by the hair of my head, Genius of British India! I know my hour is come, Faustus must give up his soul, O Lucifer, O Mephistopheles!³⁸

While there is much good-humored irony in this letter, Lamb indicated that he wished his holiday could go on forever.

Two years later, the shoe, from Lamb's eyelet view, was on the other foot. He was writing from work to vacationing colleague John Chambers, brother of Charles Chambers. The unfinished letter is undated; but on the basis of internal evidence, Lucas assigns it to 1818.

The Committee have formally abolish'd all holydays whatsoever--for which may the Devil, who keeps no holydays, have them in his eternal burning workshop. When I say holydays, I mean Calendar holydays, for at Medley's instigation they have agreed to a sort of scale by which the Chief has power to give leave of absence, viz.:--

Those who have been 50 years and upwards to be absent 4 days in the year, but not without leave of the Chief.

35 years and upward, 3 days,

25 years and upward, 2 days,

18 years and upward, 1 day,

which I think very Liberal. We are also to

³⁸Letters, II, 193-194.

sign our name when we go as well as when we come, and every quarter of an hour we sign, to show that we are here. . . . It annoys Dodwell amazingly; he sometimes has to sign six or seven times while he is reading the Newspaper--39

On March 20, 1822, Lamb wrote to William Wordsworth that he was contemplating retirement:

I grow ominously tired of official confinement. Thirty years have I served the Philistines, and my neck is not subdued to the yoke. You don't know how wearisome it is to breathe the air of four pent walls without relief day after day, all the golden hours of the day between 10 and 4 without ease or interposition. . . . these pestilential clerk faces always in one's dish. O for a few years between the grave and the desk! . . . I dare not whisper to myself a Pension on this side of absolute incapacitation and infirmity, till years have sucked me dry. . . . I had thought in a green old age (O green thought!) to have retired to Ponder's End--emblematic name how beautiful! in the Ware road, there to have made up my accounts with Heaven and the Company, toddling about between it and Cheshunt, anon stretching on some fine Izaak Walton morning to Hoddesdon or Amwell, careless as a Beggar, but walking, walking ever, till I fairly walkd myself off my legs, dying walking!

The hope is gone. I sit like Philomel all day (but not singing) with my breast against this thorn of a Desk, with the only hope that some Pulmonary affliction may relieve me. 40

³⁹Letters, II, 231-232.

⁴⁰Letters, II, 319-320.

From India House on September 11, 1822, Lamb wrote Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet:

I am, like you, a prisoner to the desk. I have been chained to that gally thirty years, a long shot. I have almost grown to the wood. If no imaginative poet, I am sure I am a figurative one. . . . I am very tired of clerking it, but have no remedy.⁴¹

Barton at one point wrote Lamb that he planned to "throw himself on the world without any rational plan of support, beyond what the chance employment of Booksellers would afford" him. Lamb, quoting this passage in his reply of January 9, 1823, set out to discourage the poet from such a fool-hardy venture. The letter ends:

Keep to your Bank, and the Bank will keep you. Trust not to the Public, you may hang, starve, drown yourself, for anything that worthy Personage cares. I bless every star, that Providence, not seeing good to make me independent, has seen it next good to settle me upon the stable foundation of Leadenhall. Sit down, good B.B., in the Banking Office; what, is there not from six to Eleven P.M. 6 days in the week, and is there not all Sunday? Fie, what a superfluity of man's time if you could think so! Enough for relaxation, mirth, converse, poetry, good thoughts, quiet thoughts. O the corroding torturing tormenting thoughts, that disturb the Brain of the unlucky wight, who must draw upon it for daily sustenance. Henceforth I retract all my fond complaints of mercantile employment, look upon them as Lovers' quarrels. I was but half in earnest. Welcome, dead timber of a desk, that makes me live. A little grumbling is a wholesome medicine for the spleen, but in my inner heart do I approve and embrace this our close

⁴¹Letters, II, 332.

but unharassing way of life. I am quite serious.⁴²

This viewpoint is an about-face for Lamb, but an about-face in which he retains many of the phrases of the "alternative."

Again to Barton, Lamb wrote on February 10, 1825:

Your Gentleman Brother sets my mouth a watering after Liberty. O that I were kicked out of Leadenhall with every mark of indignity, and a competence in my fob. The birds of the air would not be so free as I should. How I would prance and curvet it, and pick up cowslips, and ramble about purposeless as an idiot! . . .

I have been harassed more than usually at office, which has stopt my correspondence lately. I write with a confused aching head, and you must accept this apology for a Letter.⁴³

A little more than a month later, Lamb wrote to Barton yet again. The letter is postmarked March 23, 1825:

I have had no impulse to write, or attend to any single object but myself, for weeks past. My single self. I by myself I. I am sick of hope deferred. The grand wheel is in agitation that is to turn up my Fortune, but round it rolls and will turn up nothing. I have a glimpse of Freedom, of becoming a Gentleman at large, but I am put off from day to day. I have offered my resignation, and it is neither accepted nor rejected. Eight weeks am I kept in this fearful suspence. Guess what an absorbing stake I feel it. I am not conscious of the existence of friends present or absent. The E.I. Directors alone can be that thing to me--or not.--

⁴²Letters, II, 364.

⁴³Letters, II, 460.

I have just learn'd that nothing will be decided this week. Why the next? Why any week? It has fretted me into an itch of the fingers, I rub 'em against Paper and write to you, rather than not allay this Scorbuta.⁴⁴

The final letter in this series was written April 6, 1825, from Colebrook Cottage to Wordsworth, over a week after his retirement on March 29:

Here I am then after 33 years slavery, sitting in my own room at 11 o'Clock this finest of all April mornings a freed man

I came home for ever on Tuesday in last week. The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelm'd me. It was like passing from life into Eternity. Every year to be as long as three, i.e. to have three times as much real time, time that is my own, in it! I wandered about thinking I was happy, but feeling I was not. But that tumultuousness is passing off, and I begin to understand the nature of the gift. Holydays, even the annual month, were always uneasy joys: their conscious fugitiveness--the craving after making the most of them. Now, when all is holyday, there are no holydays. I can sit at home in rain or shine without a restless impulse for walkings. I am daily steadying, and shall soon find it as natural to me to be my own master, as it has been irksome to have had a master. Mary wakes every morning with an obscure feeling that some good has happened to us.

. . . I eat, drink, and sleep sound as ever. I lay no anxious schemes for going hither and thither, but take things as they occur. Yesterday I excursed 20 miles, to day I write a few letters. Pleasuring was for fugitive play days, mine are fugitive only in the sense that life is fugitive. . . .

⁴⁴Letters, II, 463-464.

. . . this hurrying event in my life came, and for the time has absorpt all interests. In fact it has shaken me a little. My old desk companions with whom I have had such merry hours seem to reproach me for removing my lot from among them. They were pleasant creatures, but to the anxieties of business, and a weight of possible worse ever impending, I was not equal. Tuthill and Gilman gave me my certificates. I laughed at the friendly lie implied in them, but my sister shook her head and said it was all true. Indeed this last winter I was jaded out, winters were always worse than other parts of the year, because the spirits are worse, and I had no daylight. In summer I had daylight evenings. The relief was hinted to me from a superior power, when I poor slave had not a hope but that I must wait another 7 years with Jacob--and lo! the Rachel which I coveted is brot. to me.⁴⁵

"The Superannuated Man" appeared in the May 1825 London. This essay is the apogee of Lamb's freedom-from-work syndrome, which the letters dealt with. The interval between the first complaining letter and the essay is ten years; between the final letter announcing his freedom and the essay, less than a month.

If . . . it has been thy lot to waste the golden years of thy life . . . in the irksome confinement of an office; to have thy prison days prolonged through middle age . . . to have lived to forget that there are such things as holidays . . . then, and then only, will you be able to appreciate my deliverance.

It is now six and thirty years since I took my seat at the desk in Mincing-lane. . . .

⁴⁵Letters, II, 466-468.

But time partially reconciles us to anything. I gradually became content--doggedly contented, as wild animals in cages.

It is true I had my Sundays to myself; but Sundays . . . are . . . the very worst adapted for days of unbending and recreation. In particular, there is a gloom for me attendant upon a city Sunday, a weight in the air. I miss the cheerful cries of London, the music, and the ballad-singers--the buzz and stirring murmur of the streets. Those eternal bells depress me. The closed shops repel me. . . . No book-stalls deliciously to idle over--No busy faces to recreate the idle man who contemplates them ever passing by--the very face of business a charm by contrast to his temporary relaxation from it. Nothing to be seen but unhappy countenances--or half-happy at best--of emancipated 'prentices and little tradesfolks, with here and there a servant maid that has got leave to go out, who, slaving all the week, with the habit has lost almost the capacity of enjoying a free hour; and livelily expressing the hollowness of a day's pleasuring. The very strollers in the fields on that day look anything but comfortable.

But besides Sundays I had a day at Easter, and a day at Christmas, with a full week in the summer to go and air myself in my native fields of Hertfordshire. . . . But when the week came round, did the glittering phantom of the distance keep touch with me? . . . Before I had a taste of it, it was vanished. I was at the desk again, counting upon the fifty-one tedious weeks that must intervene before such another snatch would come. . . . Without it . . . I could scarcely have sustained my thralldom.

Independently of the rigours of attendance, I have ever been haunted with a sense (perhaps a mere caprice) of incapacity for business. This, during my latter years, had increased to such a degree, that it was visible in all the lines of my countenance. My health and my good spirits flagged. I had perpetually a dread of some crisis, to which I should be found unequal. . . . I was fifty years of age, and no prospect of emancipation presented itself. I had grown to my desk, as it were; and the wood had entered into my soul.

My fellows in the office would sometimes rally me upon the trouble legible in my countenance; but I did not know that it had raised the suspicions of any of my employers, when, on the 5th of last month . . . L---, the junior partner . . . directly taxed me with my bad looks, and frankly inquired the cause of them. So taxed, I honestly made confession of my infirmity, and added that I was afraid I should eventually be obliged to resign his service. He spoke some words of course to hearten me, and there the matter rested. All whole week I remained labouring under the impression that I had acted imprudently in my disclosure; that I had foolishly given a handle against myself, and had been anticipating my own dismissal. A week passed in this manner, the most anxious one . . . in my whole life, when on the evening of the 12th of April . . . I received an awful summons to attend the presence of the whole assembled firm in the formidable back parlour. . . . and at just ten minutes after eight I went home--for ever. . . .

For the first day or two I felt stunned, overwhelmed. I could only apprehend my felicity; I was too confused to taste it sincerely. I wandered about, thinking I was happy, and knowing that I was not. I was in the condition of a prisoner in the old Bastille, suddenly let loose after a forty years' confinement. I could scarce trust myself with myself. It was like passing out of Time into Eternity--for it is a sort of Eternity for a man to have his Time all to himself. It seemed to me that I had more time on my hands than I could ever manage. From a poor man, poor in Time, I was suddenly lifted up into a vast revenue; I could see no end of my possessions; I wanted some steward, or judicious bailiff, to manage my estates in Time for me. . . . and now that those first giddy raptures have subsided, I have a quiet home-feeling of the blessedness of my condition. I am in no hurry. Having all holidays, I am as though I had none. If Time hung heavy upon me, I could walk it away; but I do not walk all day long, as I used to do in those old transient holidays,

thirty miles a day, to make the most of them. If Time were troublesome, I could read it away, but I do not read in that violent measure, with which, having no Time my own but candle-light Time, I used to weary out my head and eyesight in by-gone winters. I walk, read or scribble (as now) just when the fit seizes me. I no longer hunt after pleasure; I let it come to me. . . .

.
 . . . For that is the only true Time, which a man can properly call his own, that which he has all to himself. . . .

.
 . . . I am now as if I had never been other than my own master. . . .⁴⁶

Where the letter to Miss Betham in 1815, had "no one can tell how ill I am, because it does not come out to the exterior of my face, but lies in my scull deep & invisible," the essay put it that his sense of an incapacity for business of late years "had increased to such a degree, that it was visible in all the lines of my countenance."

Again the 1815 letter commented, "My head is in such a state from incapacity for business"; the 1822 letter to Wordsworth echoed this with "but to the anxieties of business, and a weight of possible worse ever impending, I was not equal"; the essay went back

⁴⁶Works, II, 193-197.

to the 1815 letter and varied the words slightly, "I have ever been haunted with a sense (perhaps a mere caprice) of incapacity for business."

On the subject of his offering to resign, the letter of 1815: "I have tried to get some redress by explaining my health . . . I am determined . . . to give up business rather and get 'em to allow me a trifle for services past." The February 10, 1825, letter: "O that I were kicked out of Leadenhall with a competence in my fob." The March 23, 1825, letter: "I have a glimpse of Freedom, of becoming a Gentleman at large, but I am put off from day to day. I have offered my resignation, and it is neither accepted nor rejected." The essay (1825): "So taxed, I honestly made confession of my infirmity, and added that I was afraid I should eventually be obliged to resign his service. He spoke some words of course to hearten me, and there the matter rested."

But the closest parallel is in his references to the desk, the "wooden" metaphor. To Miss Betham, Lamb had written in 1815: "Accursed, damned desks . . .". In 1822, he wrote to Wordsworth: "I sit like Philomel all day (but not singing) with my breast against this thorn of a Desk . . .". In the 1822 letter to Barton, Lamb wrote: "I am, like you, a prisoner to the desk."

I have been chained to that gally thirty years, a long shot. I have almost grown to the wood." A year later, in the reversal letter to Barton, he wrote: "Welcome, dead timber of a desk, that makes me live." In the essay, Lamb said: "I had grown to my desk, as it were; and the wood had entered into my soul."

Another echo is his attitude toward holidays, free time, Sundays. The 1815 letter: "O darling Laziness! Heaven of Epicurus! Saint's Everlasting Rest! that I could drink vast potations of thee thro' unmeasured Eternity." The 1816 letter: "(For the happy holyday people here having nothing to do, keep no account of time.)" The 1818 letter: "The Committee have formally abolish'd all holydays whatsoever--for which may the Devil, who keeps no holydays, have them in his eternal burning workshop." The January 1823 letter: "What, is there not from six to Eleven P.M. 6 days in the week, and is there not all Sunday? Fie, what a superfluity of man's time if you would think so!" The February 1825 letter: "The birds of the air would not be so free as I should. How I would prance and curvet it, and pick up cow-slips, and ramble about purposeless as an idiot!" The March 1825 letter: "I have a glimpse of Freedom, of becoming a Gentleman at large." The April 1825 letter: "It was like passing from life into

Eternity. Every year to be as long as three, i.e. to have three times as much real time, time that is my own, in it! . . . Now, when all is holyday, there are no holydays. . . . Freedom and life co-existent." The May 1825 essay: "It is true I had my Sundays to myself. . . . Besides Sundays I had a day at Easter and a day at Christmas, with a full week in the summer. . . . But when the week came round . . . Before I had a taste of it, it was vanished. . . . It was like passing out of Time into Eternity--for it is a sort of Eternity for a man to have his Time all to himself. . . . For that is the only true Time, which a man can properly call his own, that which he has all to himself."

The attraction for Lamb of an eternity of time, a phrase appearing in the 1815 letter, and then with increasing expansion in later letters, was finally expressed in the simile "like passing out of Time into Eternity," which appeared in both the April 1825 letter and the May 1825 essay. The essay condenses the tripling of the years into the concept of eternity as having Time all to one's self.

Another repetition and echo is in the number of years he had worked at the desk.

There are many similarities between the letter to Wordsworth and the essay, some of which have been noted:

The idea of "33 years slavery" is echoed in "to have thy prison days prolonged." An intimation of eternity appears in the letter's "I came home for ever on Tuesday in last week" and in the essay's echo "and at just ten minutes after eight I went home--for ever." His condition in both the letter and the essay "overwhelms" him. "Now, when all is holyday, there are no holydays" becomes "having all holidays, I am as though I had none." "I . . . shall soon find it natural to me to be my own master" becomes "I am now as if I had never been other than my own master."

Another curious echo is the reference to the seven days of the week in many of the letters and in the essay and the coupling of the seven days to the metaphor at the end of the letter to Wordsworth of Jacob's serving another seven years for Rachel.

In general, the letters might be said to deal less good-humoredly with the situation than the essay. The essay does not show the rancor of disappointed hope, as the letters often do. In the essay, Lamb managed to appear more objective as far as his request was concerned--perhaps through condensation of what in the letters altogether took ten years. It is interesting that some expressions were retained almost entire from the 1815 letter; interesting, too, is the expected

closeness of the April letter and the May essay in
expression and incident and detail.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

That Charles Lamb was forced by circumstances to adopt a tentative attitude toward life is a reasonable assumption, although he made no private confession that would substantiate such a contention. That Lamb stuttered is demonstrable. That he used the dash in punctuation is also demonstrable.

Because circumstances made him adopt a tentative manner, because he stuttered, Lamb sought an outlet in humor. His hoaxing letters and essays, as well as the everyday puns and jokes in other letters and essays, support this contention.

Furthermore, his tentative manner, his stutter, and his humor all contributed to a tentative "style" of writing. His letters and essays exhibit a tendency to repeat an idea, a concept, a phrase again and again, even within an essay or letter. Often enough, Lamb worked at the concept until he had modified or expanded it to a considerable degree. But some phrases were favorites from his youth. Sometimes Lamb had used, as early as 1800, a phrase which he repeated, modified, or extended in an essay twenty to thirty years later.

It is true that the more closely the phrase in an

essay echoes a previously used phrase, the more closely related in time are the examples. This result is, perhaps, to be expected in the work of any author. But in the personal essay, Lamb had an opportunity to express his personality, an opportunity like that which his letters gave him. Lamb as a person is discernible in the body of his letters and essays as no other author is.

Although Lamb tried various literary forms, especially during his early writing years, he wrote letters from his youth. On a smaller, more compressed scale, the letters were essays-in-embryo. The Elia essays were expanded and more artistically unified letters. His best work was epistolary, whether private or public.

Lamb's unique quality is his refusal in his later years, and perhaps even in his youth, to feel the "right" response, to give the socially acceptable answer. His puns and hoaxes, his tentative manner, his stutter, his search for the "true" expression of an idea, his attempts to say what he had to say without regard to convincing the auditor or reader, all these contributed to his unique quality. The rueful comments in the "Preface" and the "Autobiography" about his conversation in company ("not altogether senseless . . . if rightly taken" and "and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in

ears that could understand") indicate that he maintained his personal integrity--or wanted to.

Artistically the Elian essays generally show more careful structure and more literary diction, but a reading of the letters gives a picture of Lamb's literary development, of the nature of his revisions. Granting the expected literary supremacy of the Elian essays, one can return to the letters as valuable in themselves, and not as preliminary exercises which led indubitably to the flowering of the essays.¹

In his essay "Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago," Lamb made an observation that is applicable to himself 130 years later:

Not more refreshing to the thirsty curiosity of the traveller is the tracing of some mighty waters up to their shallow fontlet, than it is to a pleased and candid reader to go back to the inexperienced essays, the first callow flights in authorship, of some established name in literature.²

¹George L. Barnett, in Charles Lamb: the Evolution of Elia, Bloomington, 1964, p. 79, points out that

. . . where parallels of thought or phrase occur, it is the subconscious that is responsible for the retention. There is no evidence that Lamb kept copies of any letters he wrote; to have done so would have been inconsistent with his character as we know it. Moreover, there is his statement . . . that he did not keep his own letters. Consequently, such parallels must be considered the result, not of revision, but of his ability to retain ideas and phrases, even over a period of years, in that 'deep well of unconscious cerebration.'

²Works, II, 221.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altick, Richard D. The Cowden Clarkes. London, 1948.
- Barnett, George L. Charles Lamb: the Evolution of Elia. Bloomington, 1964.
- Barnett, George L. "Corrections in the Text of Lamb's Letters," The Huntington Library Quarterly, XVIII (1954-55), 147-158.
- Barnett, George L. "A Disquisition on Punch and Judy Attributed to Charles Lamb," The Huntington Library Quarterly, XXV (May 1962), 225-247.
- Bauer, Josephine. The London Magazine 1820-29. Copenhagen, 1953.
- Bell, Neil. So Perish the Roses. New York, 1940.
- DeQuincey, Thomas. Biographical Essays. Boston, 1854.
- Doran, Dr. Annals of the English Stage from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean, ed. Robert W. Lowe, 3 vols. London, 1888.
- Fr  chet, Rene. "Lamb's 'Artificial Comedy'," Review of English Literature, V, no. 3 (July 1964), 27-41.
- Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton, 1957.
- Hartnoll, Phyllis, ed. The Oxford Companion to the Theater. London, 1951.
- Haven, Richard. "The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb," ELH, XXX, no. 2 (June 1963), 137-146.
- Jordan-Smith, Paul. Bibliographia Burtoniana, a Study of Robert Burton's THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY with a Bibliography of Burton's Writings. Stanford, 1931.
- Houtchens, C. W. and L. H. Houtchens. The English Romantic Poets and Essayists. New York, 1957.
- Lamb, Charles and Mary Lamb. The Letters of Charles Lamb to which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb, ed. E. V. Lucas. 3 vols. London, 1935.

- Lamb, Charles and Mary Lamb. The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, ed. E. V. Lucas, 5 vols. London, 1905-13.
- Lucas, E. V. The Life of Charles Lamb. 2 vols. New York, 1905.
- Morley, Edith J. Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers. 3 vols. London, 1938.
- Mott, Frank Luther. A History of American Magazines, 1741-1885. 3 vols. New York, 1930.
- Praz, Mario. The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction. London, 1956.
- Renwick, W. L. English Literature 1789-1815. Oxford, 1963.
- Stang, Lewis C. Players and Plays of the Last Quarter Century. 2 vols. Boston, 1903.
- Trevelyan, George Macaulay. British History in the Nineteenth Century and After (1782-1919). London, 1937.
- Walker, Hugh. The English Essay and Essayists. London, 1928.
- Whitmore, Charles E. "The Field of the Essay," PMLA, XXXVI (1921), 551-564.