THE PROSE STYLE OF CHARLES LAMB

DISSERTATION

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>DICTION</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>SYNTAX</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>IMAGERY</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>EPISTOLARY INFLUENCE</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

I

Whatever the variations in Charles Lamb's popularity among readers in general, scholarly interest in him and his writings has remained fairly constant. The most important change to be found in the recent books and articles on Lamb is one of emphasis: from the man himself to his writings in prose. Readers have never totally ignored the qualities of his prose style, and indeed some of the earliest comments upon his style are among the most perceptive of all: those of Hazlitt certainly are. But until fairly recently there has been a tendency to avoid anything resembling detailed analysis of his essays and other prose writings. Stuart Tave has summarized this tendency as follows:

The refusal to criticize is a major tradition in the literature about Lamb. The best known expression of it, the one most often quoted in justification, is Swinburne's (Miscellanies, 1886): "No good criticism of Lamb, strictly speaking, can ever be written; because nobody can do justice to his work who does not love it too well to feel himself capable of giving judgment on it." And so love renders impotent. Closely related is the tradition of Lamb as the shade of Creusa, eluding the touch, dainty gossamer defying the analytical grasp; he is absorbed, rather, as an odor or flavor. Scholarship itself is hesitant to identify Lamb's literary allusions, lest "the dissolving process of analysis" destroy the charm of the essays.
It is perhaps all too easy to disparage the tradition described by Tave, and before rejecting Swinburne's comment altogether one should ask whether the most detailed analysis ever does "justice" to works of any subtlety. Moreover, scholarship has not been entirely negligent in identifying Lamb's allusions, as E. V. Lucas' edition of the works shows. But Tave's comments have a wide validity, and his encouragement of a different attitude is no doubt partly responsible for the closer attention now being given to Lamb's prose.

Recent studies of Lamb's prose have resulted in a number of new conclusions, or at least modifications of traditional views. Of these, three seem especially important in an attempt to understand his prose style. First, in place of the predominantly gentle, whimsical Lamb, who "accepted life's little pleasures as they appeared and did not hesitate to make 'sects' of the ones that appeared most appealing," scholars such as Ernest Bernbaum and Bertram Jessup have emphasized the toughness of his mind, its tendency toward realism and skepticism. These qualities, however, are sometimes attributed only to the man himself, to his thought as distinct from his actual published writings; and because they are qualities which provide a welcome antidote to the supposed "escapist" qualities of the essays, many readers prefer the letters, where the skepticism is quite evident. But not only does this tendency appear also in the essays, the very form of the essay as Lamb adapted it entails an
almost consistently questioning or skeptical point of view. Not only the announced thesis, when there is one, but the very elements of style are those of a writer whose purpose is to go against the grain of orthodox opinion.

The second result of recent studies of Lamb's prose is that its indebtedness to the conventions of his own time is now better understood. The older view is perhaps best expressed by Lucas:

...Hazlitt was in the direct line from Dryden, Addison, Steele, Goldsmith; Lamb was an individual sport. Hazlitt wrote the prose of his own day as well as he could; Lamb played many pranks, annihilated "Progress," in his own words wrote "for antiquity."4

In different ways, Melvin Watson, George Barnett, and Huntington Brown have shown that Lamb, despite his "pranks," was not entirely outside any tradition. Watson is one of the few scholars to give attention to the essays written before Elia, and he clearly demonstrates that they owe much to the Spectator tradition as it had developed through the eighteenth century. He also shows that Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt were conforming, more or less, to the same conventions, a fact which places Lamb all the more solidly in a historical context.5

In referring to Lamb as "an individual sport," Lucas of course has in mind chiefly the Elia essays. But George Barnett points out that there are features of even these essays which are anticipated in such late eighteenth-century periodicals as the European Magazine and the Monthly Mirror. He finds "a tendency toward the personal element" in the
"Man of the Town" series in the former; and in the latter he cites such anticipations of Elia as an essay on "The Wretched Situation of the Chimney-Sweepers" (including an account of an annual feast, rather like that of Elia's Jem White), biographical sketches of actors (including Elliston), and a list of "Antipathies," resembling Elia's "Popular Fallacies." Such details do not mean, of course, that Elia is thoroughly in the tradition of the eighteenth-century essay, and indeed Barnett fully recognizes Lamb's originality and idiosyncrasy of style. But they do somewhat weaken Lucas' pat summary of Lamb as "an individual sport."

The idiosyncrasy of Lamb's style is also recognized by Huntington Brown, and in some ways his comments represent a return to the older view: Lamb's style is contrasted with "the elegant periodical essays of the Addisonian tradition." But what Brown sees as Lamb's rejection of this tradition is itself, he contends, a part of the "Romantic Revival," and as such is "simply a phase of the general revival of interest in all things pre-Augustan." In Brown's opinion, Lamb belongs historically neither in the Spectator tradition nor alone as a "sport." He belongs with Southey, Hazlitt, Coleridge, and Carlyle, writers who in varying degrees were influenced by the "'humours' of the seventeenth-century prose-men, their outworn erudition, their love of strange words, their delight in paradox and pun, and their unbuttoned syntax...." In placing Lamb's style in the Romantic tradition, Brown offers an historical context which is different from
that suggested by Watson and Barnett, As this study will show, both have considerable validity.

The third result of recent studies is that Lamb may now be given greater credit for craftsmanship than has usually been accorded. Although there were exceptions, earlier critics tended to emphasize the whimsical element in his style, on occasion even apologizing for it, and to consider the style as in some way a natural and unconscious extension of Lamb's character or sensibility. And indeed Lamb does have Elia refer to the essays as "any thing but methodical." But Barnett's study of the manuscripts has demonstrated that Lamb took pains in revising both them and the finished essays which reappeared in the collections, Elia and Last Essays of Elia. Moreover, there is now reason to believe that at least some of the Elia essays are "methodical" in structure, although Richard Haven sees the method as being essentially Romantic. Haven's study, like other recent ones by Daniel Mulcahy and Donald Reiman, offers what has been most conspicuously lacking in most criticism of Lamb: a careful and detailed analysis of specific essays. The discovery that some of the essays are both carefully constructed and thematically unified in itself modifies the traditional view of the essays as "unlicked, incondite things," as the "Friend of the Late Elia" calls them. It also suggests that essays other than the six or seven which are considered in detail by Haven, Mulcahy, and Reiman might be constructed with similar care.
This study of Lamb's prose style will go further than previous studies have done in giving detailed attention to the style of individual essays. But it will also attempt to do more than this: not only the Elia essays but all of Lamb's published prose, with the exception of the writings for children, and that part of his correspondence which influences the essays will be considered. The aim is to discover more about the essential qualities of his prose style as a whole—what they are, how they came to be, and how Lamb uses them—than has been convincingly shown in the past. Generalizations about this style often appear inconsistent: to some it is a simple, natural style, to others it is complex and artificial; some speak of Lamb's imitation of seventeenth-century writers, others of the eighteenth-century basis of his style; some emphasize his realism, others his imaginative transcendence of the concrete and particular. It seems worth-while to deal with these inconsistencies, if they are such, by beginning with the basic elements of his style. But before this can be done, some clarification of the concept of prose style is necessary.

II

In studying the prose style of an imaginative writer such as Lamb, one may avoid some confusion by rejecting two contrasting dogmas at the start: first, that meaning or content is one thing and its verbal expression something
entirely different; and second, that meaning and style are absolutely inseparable. The first dogma, the older one of traditional rhetoricians, has the disadvantage of reducing style to a question of mere technique or choice of devices. Its basic assumption, that the writer begins with a precise idea of what he wishes to say and that he proceeds to say it well or poorly, depending upon his skill in applying the devices, is false in many cases. It is certainly false as applied to Lamb, whose meaning is often very closely involved with the style itself. But the more recent organicist dogma, that style and content are one, or as one writer put it, that "every statement is a unique style of its own," leads not to a new way of studying style, but to a dead end. Style as a concept disappears altogether.

The second of these dogmas, despite the consequences of carrying it through to its logical end, has a certain superficial plausibility in its application to Lamb's prose. For example, the following account of a legless beggar in "A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars" seems to fit the organicist theory:

He seemed earth-born, an Antaeus, and to suck in fresh vigour from the soil which he neighboured. He was a grand fragment; as good as an Elgin marble. The nature, which should have recruited his reft legs and thighs, was not lost, but only retired into his upper parts, and he was half a Hercules. I heard a tremendous voice thundering and growling, as before an earthquake, and casting down my eyes, it was this mandrake reviling a steed that had started at his portentous appearance. He seemed to want but his just stature to have rent the offending quadruped in shivers.
He was as the man-part of a Centaur, from which the horse-half had been cloven in some dire Lapithan controversy. (II,118)

The allusive diction and the highly figurative sentences are intended, not to convey factual information or even to give a clear account of the beggar's appearance, but to express the wonder with which he impressed the spectator. "Seemed" and "was" are used interchangeably, as though no distinction between the apparent and the real were being observed. Without the diction and the figurative language, is not all of the "meaning" gone? In this example, at least, are not content and style one?

Not quite, surely. Even an inadequate paraphrase--"He gave to the awed spectator an impression of heroic strength and size, even though, or perhaps because, he had lost his legs"--is recognizably part of the meaning of the passage. The fact that one can express it so that it is recognizable suggests that there is at least a residue of meaning which is not dependent upon the style.

On the other hand, the following passage, which begins "Stage Illusion," has a meaning which is apparently not dependent upon Lamb's style:

A play is said to be well or ill acted in proportion to the scenic illusion produced. Whether such illusion can in any case be perfect, is not the question. The nearest approach to it, we are told, is, when the actor appears wholly unconscious of the presence of spectators. In tragedy--in all which is to affect the feelings--this undivided attention to his stage business, seems indispensable. Yet it is, in fact, dispensed with every day by our cleverest tragedians;... (II,163)
Lamb obviously has a definite idea, which this passage introduces, and devising a quite accurate paraphrase would present no difficulty—in fact, would not be at all necessary because of the extreme clarity of the passage. And yet, just as the style is not everything in the first passage, so the "content" is not everything in this. The passive voice, for example—"is said to be," "we are told"—contributes to the meaning, since it is a significant way of introducing the orthodox critical opinion which Lamb intends to shatter with his forthright "Yet it is, in fact, dispensed with every day...." The orthodox opinion could, of course, have been expressed in the active voice: "Most people believe," or "People usually say." But the idea that orthodox opinions are often accepted without a clear understanding of how valid they are or upon what authority they rest is best conveyed by not referring, even in general terms, to the people who hold them. Although most of the meaning could have been expressed in other words and in other sentence patterns, the ones Lamb chooses are at least a part, though a peripheral one, of the total meaning. This part no doubt corresponds to W. K. Wimsatt's concept of style as "the last and most detailed elaboration of meaning." 14

If style is not entirely separate and yet not identical with meaning, then what is it? How does one identify the elements of a particular prose writer's style and select those which are worth study? If there is no simple answer
to these questions, there is at least one fact which is evident: no study of a prose writer's style can be entirely empirical. Statistical evidence, as Wimsatt has convincingly explained, is a process "of gathering items under a head, and only according to a definition may the items be gathered. Only by the definition have they any relevance."15 The problem is in deciding what to define, and this decision must come from one's own experience in reading the works under study and from whatever help other scholars and general readers can provide. Lamb has had readers for a century and a half, and they provide considerable help. A choice of stylistic elements or qualities which ignored what these readers have found remarkable in his style would at best be a questionable one.

The choice of approaches to Lamb's style which is the basis of the present study is not inevitable, but in a few cases it is very nearly so. Almost no one who has referred to his style at all has failed to mention his diction, or at least to remark upon the archaic quality which presumably results from his diction. This is almost as true of the epistolary influence upon the essays. Of the other headings—syntax, structure, figurative language, and imagery—only imagery has been neglected, and this only because critics have not customarily thought of the word in the sense used in this study. These headings are hardly exhaustive, but they do have some claim to be considered the most important
elements of Lamb's style.

Finally, there has been no attempt in the discussions that follow to exclude rigidly any reference to Lamb the man. Reaction against the earlier biographical emphasis should not lead to his banishment. He is one of the most personal of writers, though in a sense different from that which is sometimes assumed, and a study of his style should take this into account.

Notes


Chapter One

Fiction

Few discussions of Lamb's prose style have had an influence comparable to that of Hazlitt's essay "On Familiar Style." Although disapproving of the "cautious display of nothing but rich and rare phraseology" as practiced by some writers, Hazlitt finds Lamb's use of archaic diction successful:

Words, like clothes, get old-fashioned, or mean and ridiculous, when they have been for some time laid aside. Mr. Lamb is the only imitator of old English style I can read with pleasure; and he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the idea of imitation is almost done away.¹

The view that in his writings Lamb "is not wholly a modern"² has long been a general one, and many critics have considered the oddity of his diction to be an essential element of his style. Hazlitt's grandson, for example, continued the emphasis upon diction by prophesying a day when many words in Elia would "be barely intelligible, in the sense in which the writer employed them."³ George Barnett also calls attention to Lamb's pedantic and archaic words,"⁴ and quite recently Huntington Brown has included the "love of strange words" among the characteristics of seventeenth-century prose writers which are revived by Lamb.⁵
Besides the critics who have commented upon Lamb's
diction, there must be many readers whose impression of the
essays, especially those in Elia, is that they are filled
with archaic words. This impression is surely a response to
a quality which really exists in Lamb's prose, but it is
hardly susceptible of quantitative proof. One reason is that
the currency, or lack of it, of many words in Lamb's day is
difficult to establish. The O. E. D. is often unable to
identify the period during which a word became obsolete or
old-fashioned. Certain words used by Lamb, "prosperity" for
example, were perhaps becoming less common in his time, but
it is uncertain whether he and his readers considered them
learned, old-fashioned, or peculiarly Johnsonian. The dis-
tinction between recognizing and using a word might be im-
portant: educated readers, who would have had no difficulty
with "philosophick" words used by Browne or with many obso-
lete words in Shakespeare's plays, might still have consid-
ered the same words odd in contemporary prose; or, more im-
portant, they might have responded to the oddity as Lamb in-
tended. But just which of Lamb's words were so regarded
cannot readily be proven.

Another reason for the difficulty of making quantitative
tests is that factors other than diction sometimes establish
an archaic or old-fashioned tone. Odd syntactical devices
and figures of speech, not to mention the subject matter it-
selves, are likely at times to be even more influential than
the diction: "antique modes and phrases" is one of Lamb's own terms for the style of Elia. The first essay in Elia, "The South-Sea House," is one of the most archaic in theme and in spirit; and yet an analysis of its vocabulary shows that of its approximately three thousand words only three were unquestionably archaic or obsolete in Lamb's time.

There are a few words which may have been slightly old-fashioned, although probably not archaic, and including them raises the total to ten. Finally, to be as inclusive as possible, one might add the pronouns and verbs found primarily in poetry--"ye," "thee," "quittedst," "sangest," etc.--and the total rises to fifty-four (counting every occurrence of each word). The percentage of such words is thus about 1.8. But the archaic quality of a prose style is not to be measured in this way. The figure is meaningless, partly because it ignores other elements of style, but mainly because there is no standard by which to evaluate it. As a key, 1.8 per cent is inadequate to explain the peculiar appropriateness with which Elia says of his subjects, "Their importance is from the past."

It is very probable that the archaism of Lamb's diction has been overemphasized or considered too exclusively by many who have written about his style. Hazlitt admits that there are exceptions to his generalization, such as "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," and a remark by Oliver Elton goes much further: "The regular staple of his English is
plain eighteenth century, with an antique turn or two thrown in; otherwise his language is of no particular period."8 This is not to say that archaisms are of no importance in his prose; some may even be intended to carry with them echoes of particular writers or styles. As examples, "agnize" may recall Othello, "tristful" probably echoes Hamlet, and "arride" is no doubt taken from Every Man Out of His Humour.9 But the same is occasionally true of words which were not archaic. When Elia compares books in the Bodleian to "those sciential apples" of the Tree of Knowledge,10 there is a clear echo of Paradise Lost, where the Tree contains "sciential sap" (IX.837). But the word had some currency in the nineteenth century and is not listed as archaic by the O. E. D. Moreover, both Hazlitt and Elton refer to Lamb's assimilation of older styles and modes of thought, as distinct from mere imitation. In a broad sense this means that archaism is an extremely important quality of his style, but it also means that a study restricted to his archaic words is unlikely to be very revealing. Lamb's assimilation of various older styles limits the importance of studying the sources of particular words, with a few exceptions such as those listed above. Although his memory was well stocked, it is not certain that he was always conscious of his sources; it would surely be wrong to assume that he used old books as reference works, deliberately seeking archaic nuggets for use in his essays.11
Studying the sources of Lamb's words, then, would not be particularly valuable. Studying their currency in his day, although answers would be extremely valuable, is not likely to be conclusive because of the lack of detailed knowledge about changes in vocabulary and morphology during this period. There is, however, one way of considering his diction which is both practicable and worthwhile. Its contribution to the distinctive, though highly variable, idiom of the Elia essays and its effect upon the tone of individual passages throughout Lamb's prose are of immediate importance in a study of his style. His "pedantic and archaic words," to use Barnett's inclusive phrase, are occasionally striking in themselves, as shown by the lists which some scholars have compiled. But it is only in context that his words assume their full character and become true elements of style. When the context is a list of odd words, a misleading impression is the almost inevitable result.

To say this is to acknowledge that in studying a writer's diction, one is studying other elements of style as well. Particular words or classes of words do affect the context—meaning, in part, other words—but they are also affected by it. For example, a student of Johnson's style lists "an-nuitant" as one of his "musty curiosities," but in its appearance in Idler No. 24 it does not seem at all curious:

...and whence shall we furnish materials for the meditation of the glutton between his meals, of
the sportsman in a rainy month, of the annuitant between the days of quarterly payment, of the politician when the mails are detained by contrary winds.16

Although the immediate context includes more concrete and sensory words than Johnson is often assumed to use, they are actually used in a way which W. K. Wimsatt calls "dryly non-sensory" and "semimetaphorical."17 The representative function of "the annuitant," emphasized by the definite article, parallels that of "the glutton" and "the politician" so naturally that it loses any aura of strangeness that it might have had. If the word was indeed rare or "musty" in Johnson's day, its inclusion here gives it new life as a name for one of the permanent classes of mankind.

The effect is quite different when Lamb uses the word, as he does in the first sentence of Elia:

Reader, in thy passage from the Bank--where thou hast been receiving thy half-yearly dividends (supposing thou art a lean annuitant like myself)...didst thou never observe a melancholy looking, handsome, brick and stone edifice, to the left--where Threadneedle-street abuts upon Bishopsgate? (II,1)

The context here draws out whatever oddity or curious formality is latent in the word "annuitant." In itself the word is perhaps only an example of the many learned words in Lamb's prose, but here the particular details, the semi-confessional tone of the author, with his old-fashioned pronouns and verbs, and the individual character imparted to the word by means of the indefinite article and the epithet "lean"--in short, the impression that the man who calls
himself an "annuitant" is a rather odd person—all have a strong effect upon it. To employ a word as a general term can be very different from using it to identify oneself.18 At the same time, the word is acting as well as being acted upon: a synonym, or phrase such as "receiver of an annuity," would not serve as well.

Making the proper allowances for this mutuality of effect, this chapter will first consider those qualities of Lamb's diction which have a specific function in Elia. Because variety is one of its essential qualities, generalizations are difficult, but certain conclusions may be made. There is another quality of his diction which is fairly constant, although it too is related to other elements of style. Lamb's is an intensely word-centered style, one which Jules Dorocquigny calls "un style de mots."19 Even when an archaic or old-fashioned tone is not very evident, the words call attention to themselves in a way that is foreign to a relaxed, speech-based prose such as that of the Spectator tradition. In its word-centeredness Lamb's prose has an affinity with poetry, in which such elements as meter, rhyme, and compressions of syntax normally give individual words a greater prominence and make their selection more crucial than is the case in prose. This quality will be studied in the latter part of the chapter.
It is in Elia that Lamb's diction, like his style generally, has attracted the most attention. This is partly because Elia is his best known, as well as his best, body of writing, but Ian Jack gives a more specific reason why its diction is interesting:

His style is designed to create and sustain his persona, and as Elia is wayward and old-fashioned the style in which he writes is full of echoes and archaisms, ellipses and nuances, periphrases and calculated familiarities.20

The idea that archaisms and other oddities of diction are characteristic of the persona is consistent with the portrayal of Elia in the Preface to Last Essays, where the "Friend" speaks of the naturalness of his "self-pleasing quaintness." The fact that Lamb's letters and other essays sometimes contain similar traits is not really an argument against the idea. Everyone agrees that there is much of Lamb's own waywardness and predilection for the antique in the character of Elia, but a persona should be accepted for what he does and says, not for what his creator does and says when he is simply himself.

Jack's comment concerns more than diction, of course, but at times a single word or phrase is strikingly indicative of Elia's manner. In "The Two Races of Men," he refers to the "mumping visnomy" of the borrower whose lack of confidence in himself invites one's refusal.21 Elia's somewhat antiquarian or literary verbal playfulness is shown not only
by "visnomy," which was archaic or old-fashioned in Lamb's time, but also by "mumping," which seems to combine two senses which are both appropriate here: "grimacing," "sullen," or possibly "toothless"; and "begging." The phrase is effectively and wittily descriptive of the kind of beggar Elia has in mind, but its ironic and old-fashioned tone reveals something about the persona as well.

Other words have a similar effect in some passages, especially when Elia is speaking of himself and his tastes. In "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," he confesses his affection for "Sir Philip Sydney, Bishop Taylor, Milton in his prose works, Fuller," authors who "have not endenizened themselves...in the national heart"; not only the slightly eccentric choices, but also the old-fashioned word "endenizened" are indicative of his character. In the same essay he condemns the "sapient trouble-tombs" who, led by Malone, painted white an old colored bust of Shakespeare. The word "sapient" was used ironically by contemporaries of Lamb, and its history as a learned word makes it appropriate for expressing Elia's scorn of a scholar's misguided standards of propriety.

It is easy to find other archaic and pedantic words which seem to be the characteristic idiom of the "wayward and old-fashioned" Elia. But the idea that Elia is a persona should not be understood too simply or literally. For one thing, Lamb is evidently uninterested in consistency of
detail: as noted earlier, Elia appears in "The South-Sea House" as "a lean annuitant," but in the next essay he is "a notched and cropt scrivener"; while in "The Superannuated Man" he duplicates Lamb's recent experience by becoming once again an annuitant. Moreover, the old-fashioned idiom is inconstant. "Stage Illusion," "The Tombs of the Abbey," and "The Genteel Style of Writing" have practically none of the qualities mentioned by Ian Jack, and other essays have them only intermittently. As another indication that Lamb does not attempt to create a dramatically distinct character, the old-fashioned idiom appears on one occasion when another person is assumed to be speaking: in the Preface to Last Essays. Words and phrases such as "villainously pranked," "e'en," and "Marry" (as an interjection) are used by the "Friend," although he is given no very distinct identity.

The portrayal of Elia in the Preface is said to be "a key to explicate some of his writings," and it does help one to understand the sense in which he is a persona. When the Friend refers to "the first person" as Elia's "favourite figure," both the phrase and the defense which follows imply a certain flexibility:

If it be egotism to imply and twine with his own identity the griefs and affections of another—making himself many, or reducing many unto himself—then is the skillful novelist, who all along brings in his hero, or heroine, speaking of themselves, the greatest egotist of all; who yet has never, therefore, been accused of that narrowness.

(II,151)
Instead of being a consistent, discrete character, Elia is redefined repeatedly throughout the essays. Although the charge of egotism is denied, he is partly a series of projections of Lamb's own character. But the well-worn phrase "self-revelation" is misleading. As a persona Elia does have an identity of a sort, and it may even be true that his character is, as Ian Jack says, the "deepest and truest theme" of the essays. As the above quotation implies, however, it is an identity which assumes several forms.

One of the most direct and effective means of controlling the identity of Elia is through the level of diction. Phrases such as "pedantic and archaic" give no real indication of the variety and flexibility of Elia's language, which often changes radically within a brief passage. Here, for example, is the opening paragraph of "Imperfect Sympathies," whose epigraph, from Religio Medici, expresses Browne's lack of "antipathy, or rather idiosyncracy in any thing":

That the author of the Religio Medici, mounted upon the airy stilts of abstraction, conversant about notional and conjectural essences; in whose categories of Being the possible took the upper hand of the actual; should have overlooked the impertinent individualities of such poor conceptions as mankind, is not much to be admired. It is rather to be wondered at, that in the genus of animals he should have condescended to distinguish that species at all. For myself--earth-bound and fettered to the scene of my activities,--

Standing on earth, not rapt above the sky, I confess that I do feel the differences of mankind, national or individual, to an unhealthy excess. I can look with no indifferent eye upon
things or persons. Whatever is, is to me a matter of taste or distaste; or when once it becomes indifferent, it begins to be disrelishing. I am, in plainer words, a bundle of prejudices—made up of likings and dislikings—the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies. In a certain sense, I hope it may be said of me that I am a lover of my species. I can feel for all indifferently, but I cannot feel towards all equally. The more purely-English word that expresses sympathy will better explain my meaning. I can be a friend to a worthy man, who upon another account cannot be my mate or fellow. I cannot like all people alike.

The descent in diction from "the airy stilts" of abstract and philosophic words—"conjectural essences," "individualities," "concretions"—to the more homely "bundle," "mate," "fellow," and "like" is both a search for precision of meaning and an attempt to define Elija's character. In effect, the reader is led from a realm of intellectuality wherein Elija professes to be lost to a "plainer," more familiar world of irrational "likings and dislikings." This, for the moment, represents Elija's identity. He is of course not a naive man of feeling only: the "airy stilts" metaphor suggests an ironic amusement at Browne's lofty impartiality, and this tone persists in the old-fashioned "disrelishing" and the literary "veriest thrall," as well as in the pun upon "like." Some of the plainness of both his language and his feelings is intentionally deceptive. But the passage is fundamentally an honest acknowledgment of "antipathies." The plainer diction effectively introduces the straightforward admission of the next paragraph: "I have been trying all my life to like
Scotchmen...."

This passage is exceptional in that the change in diction is explicitly referred to by Elia. But Lamb's technique of defining him by means of his language is used many times. "New Year's Eve" illustrates the complexity of the persona and his language in a more sustained manner than the preceding example does. In this essay, Lamb later tells Southey, he is speaking as a representative of "the merely natural man," 26 but there are actually several viewpoints within the general one implied by the phrase.

The first few sentences do establish a general point-of-view, but some of the words convey a more distinct tone:

Every man hath two birth-days: two days, at least, in every year, which set him upon revolving the lapse of time, as it affects his mortal duration. The one is that which in an especial manner he termeth his. (II,27)

Lamb's "hath"s and other old-fashioned or poetic verbs and pronouns have been objected to by some critics, such as Edmund Blunden, because they "clog the attention." 27 Blunden feels that they are used excessively, which is perhaps only a personal opinion, but in fact they have an effect upon Lamb's style because they are not used consistently. If Elia always used "thou" and "wert," one would soon accept such words as a part of his normal idiom, just as a frequent reader of Johnson soon forgets the jokes about "adscititious" and "indiscerptible." But Elia rarely uses his poetic pronouns and verbs consistently for more than a paragraph at a
time. When they do appear they are usually extremely sensi-
tive to the context. In the passage quoted above, the
third-person pronouncement has the effect of a proverb. The
words are simple, the sentences are brief, and there is a
slightly oracular tone before the "two birth-days" are iden-
tified; in such a context, both "hath" and "termeth" become
proverbial in tone.

However, the essay quickly shifts to a confessional, per-
sonal tone. Elia becomes a witness to the previous changes
in his own identity, contemplating himself first as a youth
and then as "the child Elia--that 'other me,' there, in the
background." The old-fashioned persona mentioned by Ian
Jack is very evident here, as the diction suggests the senti-
mental reminiscence of a rather quaint, bookish man:

Methinks, it is better that I should have pined
away seven of my goldenest years, when I was
thral to the fair hair, and fairer eyes, of
Alice W--n, than that so passionate a love-
adventure should be lost. (II,28)

The combination of ardor and mildly ironic detachment from
the experience of the "love-adventure" itself is made possible
largely by words such as "Methinks" and "thral."

The diction helps to convey the essential separation of the essayist and
his former selves. It is emphatically an idiom of maturity,
as the reflections upon Elia's childhood show very clearly:

I can cry over [the child Elia's] patient small-
pox at five, and rougher medicaments. I can lay
its poor fevered head upon the sick pillow at
Christ's, and wake with it in surprise at the
gentle posture of maternal tenderness hanging
over it, that unknown had watched its sleep.
I know how it shrank from any the least colour
of falsehood.--God help thee, Elia, how art
thou changed! Thou art sophisticated. (II,28)

Used in the second-person and in an emotionally charged pas-
sage like this one, the old-fashioned pronouns and verbs are
not proverbial and formal but very intimate. At the same
time, there is a persistent though gentle irony in the pas-
sage, resulting partly from the phrase "rouglier medicaments"--
the adult's amused reflection upon the relative harshness of
illnesses and their treatments--and from the literary tone of
"sophisticated," with its accompanying echo of A Midsummer
Night's Dream. It is of course sophistication that separates
the man from the child, but even as he laments this separation,
Elia employs a diction which both emphasizes it and suggests
compensations: not Wordsworth's "sober eye," but in the words
of the essay, "innocent vanities, and jests, and irony itself."

And yet, for all the playfulness of its diction and its
style as a whole, the essay does have its sobriety. It is
Elia's awareness of the inevitability of death, the ultimate
destroyer of jests and irony, that causes him to look back-
ward instead of toward the new year. The tone of the essay
is thus somber enough to have disturbed several of its first
readers. In dealing with this aspect of his subject, Elia
adopts a role which is perhaps his most characteristic, and
again the diction is an essential part of it:

That I am fond of indulging, beyond a hope of
sympathy, in such retrospection, may be the symptom
of some sickly idiosyncrasy....If these speculations seem fantastical to thee, reader—(a busy man, perchance), if I tread out of the way of thy sympathy, and am singularly-conceited only, I retire, impenetrable to ridicule, under the phantom cloud of Elia.

The persona is at this point not merely an old-fashioned sentimentalist, nor does he speak in the proverbial tone of the first paragraph. His ideas, as well as his words, are too odd and forbidding to be easily accepted by the practical and the orthodox. He therefore appears as a "humourist," an eccentric whose views are "sickly"; but these views are nevertheless intended to awaken similar, though unacknowledged, thoughts in the mind of the "busy man," his reader. "Thee" and "thy" are in this case examples of the "calculated familiarities" mentioned by Ian Jack. As in the address to the reader by the "lean annuitant," cited earlier, they are rather disquietingly intimate. Certain other words, such as "fantastical" and "singularly-conceited," are also parts of Elia's "phantom cloud."

Elia does not often appear in so many guises within a single essay, but variety of viewpoint, of mood, and of diction are essential qualities of the series. Learned words such as "scaturient" and "pinguitude" are found in proximity with "sallying forth" and "something awful," and archaic and poetic diction is mingled with allusions to contemporary actors and the state lottery. As a result, words of all classes have a stronger effect upon the style than they
would have in a more uniform context. If there is such a thing as a typical sentence in Elia, instead of containing a large number of archaic and poetic words it would probably resemble the following from "Witches, and Other Night-Fears":

That the prince of the powers of darkness, passing by the flower and pomp of the earth, should lay preposterous siege to the weak fantasy of indigent eld--has neither likelihood nor unlikeliness a priori to us, who have no measure to guess at his policy, or standard to estimate what rate those anile souls may fetch in the devil's market. (II,65)

To concentrate upon diction is of course to miss much of the wit of the passage, but the archaism "eld," the Latin-Saxon phrase "anile souls"--especially effective because "souls" is used in two senses, one of them very homely--and the even more homely "fetch," thus combined, contribute heavily to the wit.

In general, then, Elia's identity is a result, not of actions or of speeches in a dramatic context, but of the quality of his language. Lamb's only other attempt to sustain a persona through several essays, the "Lepus" papers of 1825, is largely a failure because the equally old-fashioned, humorous author has no very distinct vocabulary or idiom. Of course the essay was not traditionally a narrative or dramatic form, and it could be said of Mr. Spectator also that his identity is based mainly upon his style. But the variations in language which have just been described owe little to the Spectator tradition; they quite possibly owe a
great deal to Sterne. As Percy Fitzgerald first noted, the Preface to Last Essays echoes the portrayal of Yorick in Tristram Shandy, and Elia's "fantastical" appearance to the eyes of practical men is a quality he shares with Yorick. Henri Fluchère has discussed the complexity of Sterne's use of personae, saying that he "oscillates between Yorick and Tristram, slipping into now one body, now the other, putting on their masks, adopting their tones of voice and turns of mind"—all this while Tristram is technically the narrator. The parallel with Lamb's practice is not exact, but in both cases the effect is less that of a dramatic character than of a pervasive quality. The "Elian" quality of the essays is as real and unmistakable as the "Shandean" quality of Sterne's novel. Lamb's archaic and old-fashioned words have at least one other important use. The past is a favorite theme throughout his prose, and it is often treated in a way which justifies Ian Jack's reference to the "felt presence" of time in Elia. Those who consider him an imitator of seventeenth-century writers have a simple explanation of this "felt presence": one senses the models when reading Lamb. But in his treatment of the past, as in his manipulation of the personae, Lamb varies the diction and other elements of style considerably. A. C. van Kranendonk, who discounts the influence of Lamb's supposed models, acknowledges that "a curious old word or turn of phrase remembered from his favourite authors
often stood him in good stead, when he wanted to suggest an atmosphere of antiquity...." The use of such words varies in complexity, but as in the preceding examples the context has a considerable effect.

In a review of Original Letters...of Sir John Falstaff, a comic imitation by James White, perhaps written with Lamb's assistance, Lamb's diction has an obvious purpose. After quoting several of the letters, he asks:

How say you, reader, do not these inventions smack of Eastcheap? Are they not nimble, forgetive, evasive? Is not the humour of them elaborate, cogitabund, fanciful? Carry they not the true image and superscription of the father which begat them? (I,193)

Lamb's intention is of course to make the comment, like the letters themselves, "smack of Eastcheap." This brief passage is in part an echo of Falstaff's "sherria" speech in 2 Henry IV (IV.iii.92-135), which includes a similar group of adjectives. The Shakespearean word "forgetive" is taken from the speech, as is "nimble," and they tend to make "elaborate," "cogitabund," and "fanciful" share the "superscription of the father which begat them."

Even in the preceding passage, Lamb is not merely imitating: he is combining something of Falstaff's idiom with one of his own. In Elia the theme of the past is still less an occasion for imitation. As noted earlier, words are sometimes borrowed from specific sources, including Shakespeare, but the past is rarely the age of Shakespeare or of Browne.
More often than not, it is Elia's own past which is evoked in archaic or old-fashioned language, the aim being to apprehend a period of time, even in the very recent past, with as intense a feeling of antiquity as the imagination can given it. A recurring paradox in Lamb's essays is that "the past is everything, being nothing." This paradox is not an exclusive concern in Elia, and the larger aim of which it is a part will be considered later. But it does account for the quality of Lamb's diction in some passages.

Lamb's belief in the vitality of the past is best seen in such essays as "The South-See House" and "Blakesmoor in H—shire," where it is contrasted with the desolation of a building or site in the present. Both of these essays are essentially acts of restoration, kept distinct from modernization partly through the diction. Evans, one of the clerks who once worked in the South-See House, reminds Elia of caricatures of "Maccaronies" seen in his youth, the word being a name for certain late eighteenth-century dandies. Evans' fear of defaulters amounted to "hypochondry": merely by changing the suffix of a word which was only slightly erudite in its modern form, Lamb gives it a Burtonian air. This means that he is not aiming only at a specific and literal evocation of the age of "Maccaronies." Rather, it is Elia's imaginative sense of Evans' pastness which is important. Evans is also "Melancholy as a gib-cat" and has a "tristful visage," phrases which are not meant to suggest Falstaff or
Hamlett so much as a grotesqueness of his appearance and manner which Elia associates with the past. The descriptions of the other clerks include fewer adjectives and nouns which are suggestive of the past, but in this context the pronouns and verbs—"thy," "quittedst," "sengest"—have a similar effect.

Elia's search for "a germ to be revivied" among the ruins of Blakesmoor is performed with the aid of poetic and old-fashioned words, but also by means of abrupt changes in the level of diction. The style at the beginning of the essay is quite modern, and there may be some intended echoes of Addison and Johnson:

I do not know a pleasure more affecting than to range at will over the deserted apartments of some fine old family mansion. The traces of extinct grandeur admit of a better passion than envy: and contemplations on the great and good, whom we fancy in succession to have been its inhabitants, weave for us illusions, incompatible with the bustle of modern occupancy, and vanities of foolish present aristocracy. (II,153)

But in the actual weaving of the illusion, the style becomes very Elian and conveys something of the antiquity which was an essential part of Blakesmoor's charm:

Or wherefore, else, O tattered and diminished 'Scutcheon that hung upon the time-worn walls of thy princely stairs, BLAKESMOOR! have I in childhood so oft stood poring upon thy mystic characters—thy emblematic supporters, with their prophetic "Resurgam"—till, every dreg of peasantry purging off, I received into myself Very Gentility? (II,156)

Even here the humble word "dreg," especially in the self-mocking, scatological metaphor, has some impact upon the
style, contrasting with the lyric elevation of its context.

But the "felt presence" of time is mainly attributable to the Romantic medievalism of "'Scutcheon" and "Very Gentility."

One curious example of the effect of such words is Lamb's use of "trenchant," to mean capable of being cut. This meaning is labeled "erroneous" by the O. E. D., and his use of it in this sense is apparently unique. In context, however, it has a quasi-archaic effect:

...what herald shall go about to strip me of an idea? Is it trenchant to their swords? can it be hacked off as a spur can? or torn away like a tarnished garter? (II,156)

One of Lamb's purposes in this essay is to make an affirmative reply to these rhetorical questions. The "idea" of Blakesmoor is realized by means of a style which could itself be called "trenchant."

The variety of Lamb's diction thus has a number of uses in the essays, and its distinctive qualities are not to be explained by archaic, pedantic, and old-fashioned words alone. Even when archaic words are used, they are sometimes less important as archaisms than as elements in the extremely rich verbal texture of Lamb's prose--its "trenchant" quality, in Elia's sense of the word. The following passage from "Blakesmoor in H--shire" may illustrate:

Mine too--whose else?--thy costly fruit garden, with its sun-baked southern wall; the simpler pleasure-garden, rising backwards from the house in triple terraces, with flower-pots now of palest lead, save that a speck here and there, saved from the elements, bespeak their pristine
The tone is certainly archaic enough, and words such as "wist" and "fragmental" obviously contribute to it. But even non-archaic phrases attract one's attention, not because the words are very unusual, but because in context they tend to draw out one another. The alliteration and assonance in "sun-baked southern wall," "gilt and glittering," and "in old formality, thy fiery wilderness" partly, but not wholly, explain their appeal to both the ear and the imagination. One recalls Lamb's protest when Wordsworth revised the line, "the stone-chat and the glancing sand-piper," in a collected edition of his poems. Lamb considered it "a line quite alive," and the same might be said of such phrases as "the day-long murmuring woodpigeon" in the preceding passage. Critics have called Lamb's prose style "poetic" for a number of reasons, but the term seems especially valid when applied to such arresting phrases. Throughout the quoted passage there are words and phrases whose purpose goes beyond both simple denotation and persuasion in the usual rhetorical sense.

"Word-centerededness" is admittedly a loose term, but it at least suggests the quality which is now to be considered. In Elia and elsewhere, despite important stylistic differences,
there is a marked tendency to thrust words into the foreground. The resulting quality is difficult to define or explain with precision, but it does include certain identifiable elements.

II

In some essays, according to Oliver Elton, Lamb is "poetic in the great sumptuous style." He quotes in illustration a sentence from "Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art," in which Elia describes part of Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne:

Precipitous, with his reeling Satyr rout about him, re-peopling and re-illumining suddenly the waste places, drunk with a new fury beyond the grape, Bacchus, born in fire, fire-like flings himself at the Cretan. (II,226)

The sentence has a power which cannot be explained simply, certainly not by citing a single element. Elton refers to its "words and rhythms as rich in their way as any in the great chorus of Endymion," and indeed the rhythms are very striking. The suspension of the main clause and the succession of modifying words and participles give a sort of jagged energy to the sentence. The individual words themselves, with the possible exception of "rout," are not especially quaint or unusual. But as in poetry the rhythms tend to make the words prominent, to place them in high relief, and to emphasize their peculiar qualities. In addition, the alliteration and other sound patterns make one conscious of
the words as things, not simply as units of discourse. The repeated "re" sounds, the rhymed "rout" and "about," and the repetition of "fire" are only a few of the devices which surely contribute to Elton's sense of the richness of the diction.

Even though the sentence is part of an attempt to explain the "individualising property" of Titian's painting, the words are not simply descriptive. The sensory qualities which are most evident are not necessarily those of the picture--Titian provides no "fire," for example--but those of the words themselves. The "fury" which Lamb presents is actually a verbal quality, one which is intended to correspond to the graphic representation of "fury," rather than to define it. It is a technique of criticism which Lamb uses on many occasions.

But it is not only the special requirements of criticism that call forth Lamb's "style of words." "I always spell plumb-pudding with a b, p-l-u-m-b--I think it reads fatter and more suetty," he says in a letter. The remark suggests a delight in words for their own sake, for their texture and peculiar flavor. His verbal imagination is shown in his use of such words as "pinguitude" and "ubiquitarian," but as the preceding example demonstrates it is not restricted to unusual words. One of his first prose pieces is an imitation of Burton, in which he freely indulges his love of words:

(Being in London I commonly dwell in the sub-
urbes, as airiest, quietest, loci musis)
Several characteristics of Burton's style are closely imitated here, most obviously his loose syntax. But the syntax must have been particularly attractive to Lamb because of its haphazard catalogues, which provide a natural setting for phrases such as "the stiletto'd and secrete Italian laughs." The imitation permitted displays of words and phrases which would have been out of place in the standard prose style of Lamb's time.

Leigh Hunt gave Lamb another opportunity for stylistic freedom when in 1810 he invited him to contribute to The Reflector. Lamb's Reflector essays are actually conventional in many ways, as Melvin Watson has demonstrated, but there are passages in which words are displayed for their own sake, much as they are in the imitation. The syntax of the following sentence contains symmetrical elements which distinguish it from the sentence quoted above, but the parade of words is in the spirit of Burton:

What work will they make with their acids and alkalines, their serums and coagulums, effer- vescences, viscous matter, bile, chyle, and acrimonious juices, to explain that cause which Nature, who willed the effect to punish me for my sins, may no less have determined to keep in the dark from them, to punish them for their presumption.
Many of these early essays are slight things, and one could perhaps argue that the words command attention in default of thematic significance or inspired humor. But in Elia there is the same evident delight in amusing combinations of words:

There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not overroasted, crackling, 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—call it not fat—but an indefinite 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.... (II, 123-124)

The banquet to which the teeth are invited is largely a verbal one, consisting of "crisp" words—"tawny," "crackling," "coy," "brittle"—and "tender" ones—"adhesive," "oleaginous," "sweetness," "innocence," "quintessence." In this passage the sounds of the words share their prominence with the metaphors, and in reflecting the texture of roast pig they have a stylistic purpose, something which is not always found in the Reflector essays; but the same impulse underlies this and the earlier examples. Although it is most easily seen in Lamb's Burtonian catalogues, it is not limited to them.

Two questions about this "style of words" seem worth answering: what are its components, and how does Lamb use it? In some cases it is perhaps, like the flavor of roast pig, "indefinable"; and it is probably wrong to expect Lamb always to have a deliberate, artistic "use" for it. But both
questions can at least be partially answered.

The most obvious quality in the preceding examples is that of sound. Louise Griswold, who has made almost the only study of Lamb's diction, cites phrases such as "a cow and rabbit couchant, and co-extensive," which as she says must have been "irresistible to Lamb's alliterative ear." Many other words seem to have been chosen for the sake of alliterative and assonant patterns. Liston's performance as Lord Grizzle in Fielding's Tom Thumb is called "an apotheosis of apathy." George Wither is given credit for discovering "that poetry was a present possession, as well as a rich reversion." Elia's reference to the site of the South-Sea House contains a characteristically intricate arrangement of sounds: "where Threadneedle-street abuts upon Bishopsgate." In the same essay is a reference to "dusty maps of Mexico, dim as dreams." The clause which concludes "Witches, and Other Night-Fears" is also very intricate: "I presently subside into my proper element of prose, remembering those eluding nereids, and that inauspicious inland landing." The succession of pr-sounds, the repeated el, and especially the in and land of the last three words suggest that Elia's relegation of himself to prose is somewhat disingenuous.

One need not insist, of course, that every repetition of a sound in Lamb's prose is a result of conscious design. In both prose and poetry, many such effects will come.
unbidden, although some writers are more hospitable to them than others. The real indication of Lamb's artistry is not that alliteration and assonance occur so frequently, but that the words so often deserve the distinction which the sounds give them. In "The Two Races of Men," for example, Elia advises born lenders to surrender their money cheerfully, and he adds this warning: "Combine not preposterously in thine own person the penalties of Lazarus and of Dives!" The alliteration gives "preposterously" a prominence which invites inspection of its accurate meaning: not simply "absurdly," but the older meaning, "in an inverted or reversed order of position." Since the lender will lose his "worldly penny" in any case, he is warned not to suffer both Lazarus' worldly poverty and Dives' ultimate punishment, upsetting the order described in Proverbs and Luke.

Lamb's use of this word suggests another characteristic of much of his diction. Despite his reputation for periphrases and whimsicalities, his words are often extremely precise and direct. Both the precision and the directness are sometimes the results of using in their literal or original meanings words which have become chiefly figurative.42 Louise Griswold gives as examples the words "inscrutable," in the phrase "inscrutable cavities of the earth"; "unctuous," in the phrase "unctuous morsels"; and "digress," in the phrase "digress into Soho."43 Another example is the phrase "reductive of juvenescent emotion," in which "reductive" has
its earlier sense of "bringing back"; the idea could hardly have been expressed so concisely without using this word. Lamb's puns often depend upon both the early and the later meanings. In the letter to Southey, Elia admits some possible indiscretions in his treatment of religious themes: "...not affronting the sanctuary, but glancing perhaps at some of the out-skirts and extreme edges." The primary meaning of "affronting" is the archaic one, "looking toward"; but the more common meaning, "insulting" or "offending," is also intended. In "The Old Margate Hoy," Elia professes an affection for the smuggler, who "robs nothing but the revenue,—an abstraction I never greatly cared about." The word "abstraction" refers to both "the revenue" and the act of robbing. Puns are of course possible only when words have precise applications, even though these applications are multiple.

In some cases the precise meaning of a word has a thematic significance, and Lamb specifically emphasizes it. In his criticism of Defoe's novels he speaks of "the extreme homeliness of their style," adding, "We use the word in its best and heartiest sense—that which comes home to the reader." Elia objects to the manner in which a Unitarian friend protests against certain requirements of conformity to the Church of England, arguing that his protest is especially hollow and formal compared to the actions of the Reformation: "These were the true Protestants. You are—Protesters."
In his analysis of Scotsmen's character traits, Elia describes their love of stating a truth "which nobody doubts," saying, "They do not so properly affirm, as annunciate it." There are actually not very many places in which Lamb refers explicitly to the precision of a single word to make a distinction; usually the precision is taken for granted. But the preceding examples are consistent with his handling of words throughout his prose. Whether words are arrayed in Burtonian catalogues, placed in alliterative and assonant patterns, used as puns, or made the basis of thematic distinctions, there is a common assumption which makes the term "word-centered" a valid one for Lamb's style: a word has an integrity and a power of its own which justifies a writer's confidence in it. "Word-centered" is the opposite of "verbose," which implies a lack of such confidence, leading to pleonastic buttressing. Even when his sentences are long, Lamb's style is essentially compact: the individual members often have the terse, striking quality of aphorisms. Hazlitt's reference to the "vivid obscurity" of Lamb's style is probably a response to this quality, and a remark made by T. G. Winnewright, a fellow contributor to the London Magazine, is comparable:

His talk [i.e., Elia's essays] without affectation was compressed, like his beloved Elizabethans, even unto obscurity;--like grains of fine gold, his sentences would beat out into whole sheets.
The persona of Elia no doubt accounts for some of this compression, but there was a tendency toward conciseness even in the early essays which contrasted sharply with the style usually found in the quarterlies.

While the mere compactness was strange enough, Lamb often deliberately increased the strangeness by his choice of words. A distinction must be made between an aphoristic style like that of Hazlitt, who avoids unfamiliar words, and that of Lamb, part of whose power derives from the unexpectedness of his diction. The following is a fair example of Hazlitt's style:

But it is in the nature of greatness to propagate an idea of itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle.

The figure is a felicitous one, and the compactness of the entire sentence is obvious. But it is the image, not the words, that one chiefly notices. Lamb could have written the sentence, but Hazlitt would have hesitated before writing the following, from "Distant Correspondents":

A pun, and its recognitory laugh, must be co-instantaneous.

This use of "recognitory" is the earliest listed by the O.E.D., and the word has the air of being made for the occasion. It not only draws attention to itself, but also imparts a calculated tautness, or even strain, to the sentence, as though a phrase or clause--"the laugh of recognition" or "the laugh which greets it"--were inadequate to express the effect of a successful pun. Thus the word does not detract
from or obscure the idea by its prominence, but emphasizes it.

However, as stated earlier, the word-centered quality of Lamb's style is not simply the result of unusual words. Elton comments upon Lamb's skill "in placing long learned words at the right spot in the sentence," and although the quality under discussion is broader than the term "learned words" implies, the emphasis upon placement is just. To consider the placement of words is of course to leave the subject of diction proper, but the interrelation of stylistic elements should be acknowledged. The following sentence from "Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty" is a good illustration of this interrelation:

Deeply corporealised, and enchained hopelessly in the grovelling fetters of externality, must be the mind, to which, in its better moments, the image of the high-souled, high-intelligence Quixote--the errant Star of Knighthood, made more tender by eclipses--has never presented itself, divested from the unhallowed accompaniment of a Sancho, or a rabblement at the heels of Rosinante. (II, 233)

Of the two participles at the beginning of the sentence, "corporealised" is perhaps unusual enough in itself to draw attention, although it is not original with Lamb. Both it and "enchained" are given an added prominence by the syntactical inversion. Neither of the adverbs which modify them is unusual, but both are placed so as to have maximum effect: "Deeply" by introducing the sentence, and "hopelessly" by the chiasmus. The most remarkable effect is that
of the word "grovelling," which is a transferred, or perhaps even a hovering, epithet. It probably modifies "mind," but its displacement, besides giving it prominence, makes it seem to refer to the whole condition--the mind's degrading subservience to the superficial--which the sentence describes. Finally, the two compound adjectives are emphasized by their parallelism, and "rabblemement," which is already striking because of its archaic tone, is made more so by the alliteration.

The same sentence may be used to illustrate one final characteristic of Lamb's word-centered style. Both the "fetters" and the "Star" metaphors are potentially visual, but in both cases Lamb inserts a word which disturbs the clarity of the image: "grovelling" and "tender" suggest sensory qualities, but are not directly descriptive of chains or of stars in eclipse. While Hazlitt presents a perfectly lucid image--"as wave impels wave, circle without circle"--Lamb subordinates his images. It is the dominant, suggestive word which carries most of the weight of his meaning. As Derocquigny says of Lamb's "style de mots":

Le mot arrete l'attention....Le mot, arrivant dans l'esprit de Lamb charge de toutes les associations qu'il comporte, se fait sentir sur toute la phrase et sur les phrases qui suivent.52

This is not to say that metaphors play an insignificant part in Lamb's style: far from it. But they are characteristically very literary metaphors, rather than sensory ones. The
well-known opening paragraph of "Poor Relations," composed entirely of a series of figures, is a good example:

...Agathocles' pot,--a Mordecai in your gate,--
a Lazarus at your door,--a lion in your path,--
a frog in your chamber,--a fly in your ointment,--a mote in your eye,--.... (II,158)

The literary allusiveness of these metaphors, with their catalogue of frustrations and plagues, is the first thing one notices. But the verbal formulations are prominent too, and the rhetorical parallelism emphasizes them.

 Obviously, the elements which contribute to the word-centeredness of Lamb's style vary considerably. Both diction in its usual sense--the choice of the words themselves, for whatever reason--and the disposition of words in the sentence are important. The latter, which would normally be considered under the heading of rhetoric or syntax, is included here because of its effect: a more constant emphasis upon words, with their connotations and texture, than is found in most prose. It is now time to consider the uses of this emphasis.

 Much of Lamb's humor is verbal, and in many cases where words are unusual or especially prominent the aim is humor of some sort. Leigh Hunt speaks of "the scholarly turn for joking which is common to a classical education," and as Barnett has noted, this remark goes far to explain the quality of Lamb's wit. The periphrases for which Lamb is known often contain pedantic words, which impart a mock grandeur to a commonplace subject: thus, a butcher is a "contunder
of the calf," drinking bouts are "agonistic exercises," and fish are "savory esculents."^4 Humor of this kind provides its own pleasure and is admirable up to a point. According to van Kranendonk, Lamb's diction or "high rhetoric...'en-nobles' a joke."^55 But it is probably in such jokes that Lamb seems most dated to modern readers. Ian Jack is surely correct when he says that the "Saloop" passage in "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers" is "close to self-parody."^56 Phrases such as "culinary fires," "o'er-charged secretions," and "casual scintillation" are finally tiresome, probably because Lamb's sympathies are not convincingly engaged with his subject. The verbal humor is merely verbal.

Much more successful are similar passages in which the purpose is, not simply to "o'er-charge" the subject with verbal "secretions," but to suggest the grandeur with which a child invests commonplace objects or people. By the end of "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," Elia has established the influence which the Benchers exerted upon his childish imagination, and the elevated diction found in the final paragraphs is justified:

So may the Winged Horse, your ancient badge and cognisance, still flourish! so may future Hookers and Seldens illustrate your church and chambers! so may the sparrows, in default of more melodious quiristers, unpoisoned hop about your walks! so may the fresh-coloured and cleanly nursery maid, who, by leave, airs her playful charge in your stately gardens, drop her prettiest blushing curtsy as ye pass, reductive of juvenescent emotion! so may the younkers of this generation eye you, pacing your stately terrace, with the same
supertitious veneration, with which the child
Elia gazed on the Old Worthies that solemnized
the parade before ye!

This passage too is of course dated, and to some tastes it is
no doubt hopelessly overwrought. However, since it is not
merely an example of what Hunt calls "the scholarly turn for
joking," but a fitting conclusion to the essay, a modern
aversion to its sentimentality and elaborateness can be over­
come. The reader is after all expected to readjust his per­
spective, to assume something resembling "superstitious ven­
eration," in reading the passage. At the same time there is
a vein of comic irony which controls the sentimentality.

Another purpose of Lamb's word-centered prose, one which
is not limited to elaborate or pedantic diction, has already
been suggested. Just as, in the sentence quoted by Elton,
the qualities of Titian's painting are expressed by the
purely verbal qualities of the sentence, so experiences from
Lamb's past are made vivid and given substance by the words
which recall them:

He [Lamb as recalled by Elia] had his tea and
hot rolls in a morning, while we were betteng
upon our quarter of a penny loaf--our crug--
moistened with attenuated small beer, in wooden
piggins, smacking of the pitched lesthern jack
it was poured from.... The Wednesday's mess of
millet, somewhat less repugnant--(we had three
banyan to four meat days in the week)--was en­
dehed to his palate with a lump of double­
refined, and a smack of ginger (to make it go
down the more glibly) or the fragrant cinnamon.

The point here is not that concrete details are abundant,
although of course they are. Such details could have been
presented in equal abundance by words with less character of their own: "eating" instead of "battening upon," "tasting" instead of "smacking," "easily" instead of "glibly." But Lamb's aim is to be more than concrete. Phrases such as "mess of millet" and "smack of ginger" convey the tangibility and, in both a figurative and literal sense, the peculiar flavor of the experience in a way that "bowl of millet" and "taste of ginger" could not.

At the same time, the reality of the scene is so dependent upon the qualities of diction that one is prevented from a total absorption in the experience itself. The schoolboy slang words, such as "crug," seem to invite the amused curiosity of the adult in a verbal oddity--one which he perhaps remembers from his own childhood, but which nevertheless is the speech of a world he cannot re-enter. It could even be argued that a less conspicuous diction, because it allows the reader to forget the verbal medium, brings him closer to the described scene. But in Lamb's prose this barrier is usually intentional. One of the most important uses of his word-centered style is the aesthetic distance it establishes, in two senses: the relation of author to subject and the relation of author to reader. "Intimacy" and "familiarity" are the terms most often used by critics of the essay who consider the matter at all, but in Lamb's case the aesthetic distance is more complex than these words imply.
Louise Griswold suggests that in some cases Lamb’s “whimsical diction” is intended to cushion a subject which would be too painful to him if treated bluntly and literally. She offers as an example the description of Boyer’s tyranny over his pupils at Christ’s Hospital, in which the playfully learned words and allusions “soften the picture of suffering under discipline.” But this is only a partial explanation. Hazlitt is much more to the point in his comments upon Lamb’s tendency to maintain a distance between himself and his subject:

Mr. Lamb rather affects and is tenacious of the obscure and remote....That touches him most nearly which is withdrawn to a certain distance, which verges on the borders of oblivion:—that quiets and provokes his fancy most, which is hid from a superficial glance. That which, though gone by, is still remembered, is in his view more genuine, and has given more “vital signs that it will live,” than a thing of yesterday, that may be forgotten to-morrow. Death has in this sense the spirit of life in it; and the shadowy has to our author something substantial in it.

In this series of paradoxes Hazlitt is not saying merely that Lamb has a preference for subjects from the past or for the recondite: he is also implying something about style. One way of giving substance to a remote subject is through a lavish use of concrete detail, of the kind Leigh Hunt often provides in his colloquial and easy way. But Lamb wishes to make his “shadowy” subject “substantial” and to retain the sense of its remoteness. As Hazlitt implies, the subject is hardly real to him without the accretions of time. The use
of archaic and old-fashioned words to express remoteness has already been noted, but the concentrated quality of his dictio-

don, so unlike the chattiness of Hunt, is a more pervasive expression of it. In phrases such as "dusty maps of Mexico, dim as dreams," "the Tarquin tread, and mill-stone dropping eyes, of Murder in Shakspeare," "a yet securer circiture of those excluding garden walls," and "those abstruser cogita-
tions of the Greville," Lamb is certainly referring to real things—the last example is an allusion to an actual copy of Greville—but the words have a density, especially in con-
text, which suggests the layers of time through which he views the things themselves. Just as time in "The South-Sea House" is represented by the image of "a superfoetation of dirt," so Lamb's diction is both a film between himself and his subject and an essential part of the subject.

However, in explaining the aesthetic distance established by Lamb's diction, it would be a mistake to concentrate ex-
clusively upon his treatment of the actual past. Hazlitt's reference is to "the obscure and remote," and in cases where the subject itself does not provide these qualities, Lamb often adds them. As Walter Pater says, "Lamb anticipates the enchantment of distance; and the characteristics of places, ranks, habits of life, are transfigured for him, even now and in advance of time, by poetic light...." Thus, in "The Illustrious Defunct," he expresses his regret at the imminent demise of the state lottery in a very Elian manner.
which makes this institution seem as old as man himself: his emphasis upon the ideal qualities of the lottery, its salutary fostering of hope and imagination, is enhanced by thus removing it from the sphere of the topical and trivial. At the same time, this remoteness allows for evocations of the actual witnessing of a lottery, just as the Old Benchers are both figures of myth and men whom Elia had actually seen: "That touches him most nearly which is withdrawn to a certain distance," as Hazlitt says. Perhaps the best way of explaining Lamb's object in establishing this distance is by noting his opposition to two contrasting attitudes: the over-literalness of the Caledonian and the Utilitarian, those to whom the lottery, for example, is merely a means, probably vicious, of raising revenue; and the over-ideal perspective of those, such as Shelley, whose visionary zeal causes them to ignore the tangible and idiosyncratic. Lamb tries to combine the tangible and the ideal.

A good, because recurrent, example of this combination is his attitude toward books. Richard D. Altick mentions the roles of Lamb and Hunt in "emotionalizing the very idea of literature," which he sees as one of the forces working against the utilitarian spirit. The book is thus "a sacred object," and in speaking of books Lamb is often concerned with what might appear merely external: the "moth-eaten covers" of books in the Bodleian and the proper bindings of various kinds of books. A reprint of Burton seems
to him a sacrilege; Burton is essentially remote, and his clothing should be a "winding sheet," or contemporary binding. This does not of course mean that the life or spirit of the book is indifferent to him; that is just what he is seeking. But this spirit is apprehended, not in isolation or in the abstract, but in its visible, tangible form. Tom Jones and The Vicar of Wakefield should be read in "old 'Circulating Library'" copies, which "speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight." Books are but one example, though an especially characteristic one, of Lamb's insistence upon the embodiment of the subject as essential to its abstract or ideal qualities. In his prose, the texture of his diction represents a corresponding embodiment, different in kind from that of his subject, but offering an approach to it.

There is finally the question of Lamb's relation to the reader. That the archaic diction is used in ways which make this relation variable has already been shown. Substantial parts of a few essays lack not only archaic words, but also the word-centered quality, which is usually more pervasive than the archaisms. In such passages and in some of the briefer reviews the relation between author and reader is also variable, depending upon the subject and tone. But examples of these are neither plentiful nor very characteristic.

Probably the most common view is that Lamb, especially when represented by Elia, is a conversable and ingratiating
fireside companion, one who reveals himself and his opinions without reserve to those who will but listen. The terms mentioned earlier, "intimacy" and "familiarity," are chiefly used to describe the accessibility of Lamb to his readers. However, a different view of Romantic prose is offered by Ian A. Gordon, who gives Lamb as one of his examples:

The writer of romantic prose has quite different aims from those of his predecessors. He is not attempting to secure the co-operation of his audience by using their normal language; nor is he trying to convince them by appealing to a shared (or ostensibly shared) intellectual background. His prose continually asserts his personal individuality, his uniqueness; and the emotionally affected audience is expected to respond not so much with comprehension as with astonished admiration.

This sounds more like the Lamb whose diction has been discussed in this chapter. His archaic and pedantic words are emphatically not the language of everyday, and in many passages the word-centered quality of his style gives it something of the air of a performance. About the uniqueness and the emotional basis of his style there can be little question.

But whatever is true of the other Romantic prose writers mentioned by Gordon, Lamb is not aiming simply at "astonished admiration." His most characteristic role has already been indicated in the discussion of his archaisms: he is the "humourist," the "fantastical" misfit, who has a perverse preference for "Milton in his prose works," for lotteries at a time when they are about to be abolished, for dubious companions whom he finds "floating on the surface of society,"
and for "sick whist." In those essays in which he maintains a thesis, however informally, it is usually one which goes against the grain of society; one does not think of Lamb as rejoicing "to concur with the common reader." But neither does he ignore this reader. Instead of inviting blank astonishment, he in effect asks the reader to share for a while his eccentric view of things, "to take an airing beyond the diocese of the strict conscience." The fact that his view is very different from that of his reader's usual fireside companions is essential to his purpose.

Lamb's archaisms, his strikingly concise aphoristic phrases, his verbal ingenuity, and the pervasive self-consciousness of his diction, all serve to emphasize the eccentricity of the author and his view of things. The reader is not required to abandon his rational judgment or common sense, but he must be prepared to readjust his outlook; above all, he must not expect the conversational idiom of an Addison or a Hazlitt. Lamb's style is, as Ian Jack says, "frankly literary," and as such it creates its own frame of reference. His diction is the most direct influence upon this frame of reference.

Notes


5. Brown, p. 84.


7. The undoubtedly archaic words are "gib-cat," "hypochondry," and "tristful." The following, at least in the sense in which Lamb uses them, may also have been old-fashioned: "annuitant," "massy," "appended," "columniations," "macaronies," "gauds," and "peradventure."


9. Works, II, 7, 3, 10. Lucas has noted these and other verbal echoes in Elia.


11. A red herring should be removed from this particular trail. Both A. G. van Kranendonk, in a reply to Thomas B. Stroup, "On Lamb's Style," English Studies, XIV (1932), 81, and George Barnett, p. 215, point out a reference by Lamb, in a letter to William Hone (May 19, 1823), to Ray's Collection of English Words Not Generally Used, 1691. Both imply that Lamb used the book in his presumed search for odd words. But John Ray's Collection is almost entirely a list of Northern and Southern dialect words which are extremely un-Elian. Lamb may have used the book to read Burns, but certainly not to write his essays.

12. One should of course consult Otto Jespersen, A Modern English Grammar, Part VI ("Morphology") (Copenhagen, 1942). Henry Cecil Wyld, A History of Modern Colloquial English, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1936), is also useful, although it is primarily concerned with the language earlier than the nineteenth century. A good general discussion is found in George H. McKnight, Modern English in the Making (New York, 1928), Chap. XX.


17. Wimsatt, p. 55.

18. The word "youth" in current usage is an example.


24. Coleridge, for example, uses the word in a comic setting in his mock ode, "Music," line 7.


34. Works, II, 9.


37. Letters, II, 41.

38. Watson, pp. 206-209.


40. Works, I, 152.

41. Works, I, 183.

42. Hazlitt comments upon the "pure and clear" quality of Lamb's style, which is partly a consequence of his archaisms. (Complete Works, XI, 179.)


44. Works, I, 228.

45. Works, I, 327.

46. Works, I, 265.

47. Works, II, 60.


50. Hazlitt, VIII, 96.

51. Elton, II, 351.

52. Derocquigny, p. 370.


57. Griswold, p. 231.


64. Jack, p. 290.
Chapter Two

Syntax

To play the role of the eccentric, offering unconventional wisdom in an unconventional idiom, is, as Lamb realized, to court misunderstanding. There were always those, typified by the Caledonians in "Imperfect Sympathies," whose literal-mindedness was impervious to Lamb's glancing wit. There was also Southey, who thought he detected unsound religious principles in the Elia essays. These misunderstandings are the results of disparities in temperament--of "imperfect sympathies," as Elia would say--and they concern style only indirectly. But the variety and apparent spontaneity of Lamb's style sometimes lead to misconceptions about it too, even among those whose sympathy with his writings is considerable. De Quincey, for example, makes the following comment upon the Elia essays: "They resemble Addison's papers also in the diction; which is natural and idiomatic, even to carelessness."¹ As the preceding chapter showed, there are rapid shifts in the level of diction which could perhaps be mistaken for carelessness, but which are actually a way of controlling the tone of the essays. The chief fault of Lamb's diction is that it sometimes becomes
overwrought or carries too slight a thematic burden to justify itself. De Quincey apparently accepted literally the "Friend's" testimony that Elia "would e'en out with what came uppermost."

Some of Lamb's readers have also considered his syntax to be spontaneous, or even careless, and with somewhat greater reason than his diction. His dash-littered sentences, with their frequent parenthetical interruptions, often seem to reflect the random or loosely associative occurrence of ideas in his mind. De Quincey makes an observation upon this quality of Lamb's style which, although somewhat overstated, is sounder than his comment upon diction:

...Lamb had no sense of the rhythmical in prose composition. Rhythmus, or pomp of cadence, or sonorous ascent of clauses, in the structure of sentences, were effects of art as much thrown away upon him as the voice of the charmer upon the deaf adder.2

There is certainly a halting, even jerky, quality in much of Lamb's prose which seems to bear out De Quincey's remark. It is no doubt true that Lamb was incapable of writing the elaborate, rhythmical sentences for which De Quincey is noted.3 But it is going too far to imply, as some critics do, that the chief quality of his syntax is lack of control. A. C. Ward explains his style as the "translation" of his stammer, saying that it was "physically impossible" for Lamb to write smooth sentences.4 In an essay on "The Decay of Syntax" R. W. Chapman refers to Lamb only in passing, but
his comment is a damning one:

...the instrument of language is a thing in its nature traditional. It is easily damaged, and painfully mended. Lamb and his contemporaries did much to impair its structure, and what they destroyed they did not rebuild.\(^5\)

J. Milton French, on the other hand, praises Lamb's "highly original sentence-structure, which throws overboard all formal rhetoric," and the metaphor of violence at least suggests destruction for a purpose; but French then echoes Ward's comment, which implies that Lamb was an infirm blunderer into the role of stylistic revolutionary.\(^6\) One may admit, with De Quincey and Saintsbury,\(^7\) that Lamb's prose lacks "pomp of cadence," without considering his sentences to be free of design.

In deciding how carefully and for what purposes Lamb's sentences are constructed, one must avoid confusing the effects of a sentence with the circumstances of its composition. If in fact they were written with little regard for their structure, it does not follow that they would appear spontaneous or careless. They might just as easily be undistinguished and neutral in their stylistic effect; they would be unlikely to reproduce Lamb's stammer. Quantitative estimates are difficult to make, but it is probable that most of his sentences, considered for their structure alone, would seem unremarkable in the prose of the Spectator tradition. In some cases a quite orthodox structure is concealed by the
eccentricity of other stylistic elements:

The rake, who wisheth to dissipate his o'er-night vapours in more grateful coffee, curses the un-genial fume [of sassafras tea], as he passeth; but the artisan stops to taste, and blesses the fragrant breakfast. (II,110)

The poetic diction and periphrases, as well as the variation in morphology, give the sentence a rather mannered appearance; but the syntax itself would appear natural in the prose of Swift or Addison. It may have been carefully designed, or Lamb might well have instinctively chosen a simple pattern from the stock which any reader and writer possesses.

In other cases there is less doubt about Lamb's conscious design. Syntactical devices appear which clearly have specific purposes. For example, Lamb occasionally uses the ethical dative with the same ironic effect which his pedantic or old-fashioned diction sometimes has: "...with great exactitude of purpose he enters me his name in the book," Elia says of George Dyer, and the oddity sustains the tone of amusement with which Dyer is always referred to in the essays.8 Miltonic object-first constructions sometimes do much the same thing: "Him shouldest thou haply encounter... regale him," Elia says, speaking of "the unpennied sweep."9 Even the dash-punctuated, halting sentences referred to earlier are sometimes anything but random or associative in structure. One of Lamb's favorite ways of developing an idea is by appositional elaboration, the most conspicuous example of which is the opening paragraph of "Poor Relations."
This paragraph is one extended sentence consisting of twenty-seven figurative definitions of a poor relation, and it is clearly a tour de force rather than an instance of loose structure. There are many briefer examples of such elaboration, usually of a single element in a sentence:

For what else has he unsealed the eyes of Sancho; and instead of that twilight state of semi-insanity—the madness at second-hand—the contagion, caught from a stronger mind infected—that war between native cunning, and hereditary deference, with which he has hitherto accompanied his master—two for a pair almost—does he substitute a downright Knave, with open eyes, for his own ends only following a confessed Madman; and offering at one time to lay, if not actually laying, hands upon him! (II,234)

Far from disturbing the structure of the sentence as a whole, the appositional series gives it its point: the contrast between the inspired conception of Sancho and the meaner one presented by the continuation of the sentence.

In a few places Lamb uses sentence fragments in a way which might at first seem to reflect a casual attitude toward syntax. Part of Elia's description of the clerks in "The South-Sea House" is in this style: "Odd fishes. A lay-monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more for show than use." But the punctuation barely conceals the resemblance between this passage and an appositional series within a sentence. The tone is a bit more colloquial in this example, but the structure is fundamentally like that of the paragraph in "Poor Relations." There are, however, a number of loosely elliptical sentences, often punctuated with dashes, which do seem to be associatively
constructed. They usually include striking and amusing phrases, and one might at first assume that the invention of such phrases was Lamb's main concern, and that he was content to record them as they occurred. But this would be a mistake. It would be an instance of the confusion mentioned above, between spontaneity of effect and spontaneity of composition. One of Lamb's soundest and most firmly held principles of criticism is that expressed in "The Sanity of True Genius": the true artist exerts control over his material even when giving the appearance of fantasy and disorder; he "dreams being awake." The purpose of this chapter is, first, to establish that considerable control exists even in Lamb's apparently artless sentences; second, to analyze a type of long sentence, here named the "accumulative sentence," which Lamb adapts or evolves for particular purposes; and third, to show that certain short sentences have in context a use which also reveals his control over syntax. In each of these discussions it will be useful to begin with his early prose writings.

I

Of Lamb's first published work of prose, the Tale of Rosamund Gray, Oliver Elton says that it "does not tempt criticism." Yet, whatever its weaknesses as a work of fiction, its style is worth some notice. Perhaps few readers at any time have shared Shelley's enthusiasm for the book,
but at least its opening pages have occasionally been praised. The mood of naive simplicity and serenity which they establish is partly a result of the delicate variation of the sentence patterns:

It was noontide. The sun was very hot. An old gentlewoman sat spinning in a little arbour at the door of her cottage. She was blind; and her granddaughter [sic] was reading the Bible to her. The old lady had just left her work, to attend to the story of Ruth. (I, 1)

The quiet scene and the simple, unhurried activities of the characters are perfectly reflected in the short sentences, with their verbs of being, and in the natural pauses of the slightly longer sentences. The mood continues for several pages, but it is set off in places by a subdued humor and by touches of irony. There is such an effect in the following brief passage, the last sentence of which contains a note of gentle self-mockery:

They had once known better days. The story of Rosamund's parents, their failure, their folly, and distresses, may be told another time. Our tale hath grief enough in it. (I, 1)

The slight elaboration of the middle sentence makes the brevity of the last sentence more effective, and the contrast reveals the firmness of Lamb's control.

Lamb's book belongs, of course, to the sentimental movement, and the naive tone is one which is calculated to satisfy a taste of the time—a taste which Lamb shared, as his early letters to Coleridge show. It is significant that when he writes for children, as in The Adventures of Ulysses and the Tales from Shakespeare, his sentences are longer and
more complex in a conventional way; simplicity is reserved for adults. At times, indeed, this quality is perhaps taken too far: Henry Crabb Robinson, who read the book aloud to approving friends, objected mildly to "an affected brevity in the periods." This remark shows that at least one of Lamb's contemporaries was aware of his control over his syntax, since affectation implies a deliberate, if mistaken stylistic aim.

This aim, especially in the early pages, is to convey the artlessness of Rosamund's character, and it is accomplished partly with the brief sentences noted by Robinson. At times, such sentences are treated in a lyric manner, but without the loss of their essentially naive quality. The following repetition, for example, has something of the effect of a ballad refrain:

She was a mild-eyed maid, and everybody loved her. Young Allan Clare, when but a boy, sighed for her.

[Three sentences are here omitted.]

Young, and artless, and innocent, meaning no harm, and thinking none; affectionate as a smiling infant—playful, yet inobtrusive, as a weaned lamb—everybody loved her. Young Allan Clare, when but a boy, sighed for her. (I,6-7)

This is obviously Coleridge's "gentle-hearted Charles," but Lamb's subsequent renouncement of that epithet is foreshadowed even in Rosamund Gray. The bubble of sensibility is very deftly deflated in the following passage, and both the dashes and the brief qualification of the absolute phrase contribute to the effect. A schoolboy friend of Clare's finds himself ignored because of the latter's absorption in
thoughts of Rosamund:

The consequence was, as might have been ex­pected, Allan's friend thought him much altered, and, after his departure, sat down to compose a doleful sonnet about a "faithless friend."—I do not find that he ever finished it—indigna­tion, or a dearth of rhymes, causing him to break off in the middle. (I,11)

This mixture of sentiment and ironic humor, like the flexible treatment of the persona discussed in the preceding chapter, suggests the influence of Sterne. The "Shandean lights and shades" which Lamb admired are perhaps not often equaled in this work, but they at least provide a model which is surely more important than that of Mackenzie, who is usually cited as the chief influence upon Lamb's book. Equally important is the example of Sterne's sentence structure. The infinitely malleable Shandean sentence, with its abrupt pauses and digressions and its flexible use of dashes, was only timidly imitated by Mackenzie,12 but Lamb is sometimes more adventurous. The following sentence describes an entire in­cident, which occurs when Rosamund approaches a dangerous pit partly hidden by an oak tree:

Rosamund ventured further and further—climbed along one of the branches—approached the for­bidden chasm—her foot slipped—she was not killed—but it was by a mercy she escaped—other branches intercepted her fall—and with a palpitating heart she made her way back to the cottage. (I,5)

An essential feature of this sentence, like so many of Sterne's, is that it does not seem prearranged. The narra­tor appears to be responding to the momentary danger, and
the cause of Rosamund's escape--"other branches intercepted her fall"--is suddenly produced, without regard for subordination or balance, as unexpectedly as the fall itself was checked. The somewhat breathy effect of the sentence is a way of expressing the nature of the experience, not a result of Lamb's stammering speech.

One need not go to Sterne to explain every use of dashes or fragmentary sentences. As Ian Watt has said, Richardson uses similar devices "to convey the impression of a literal transcript of reality,"13 and by the time of Lamb's book they were more or less customary in the sentimental novel.14 At times Lamb uses dashes almost mechanically, to mark pauses in speech, just as the characters in Rosamund Gray burst into tears with an almost monotonous regularity. But occasionally they are part of a more complex sentence structure, which attempts to reflect the mingled processes of thought and feeling. The following is the response of Rosamund's grandmother, Margaret, to an offer of hospitality by Miss Clare:

Margaret was all unused to such kindesses, and wept--Margaret had a great spirit--yet she was not above accepting an obligation from a worthy person--there was a delicacy in Miss Clare's manner--she could have no interest, but pure goodness, to induce her to make the offer--at length the old lady spake from a full heart. (I,13)

The halting movement and the discontinuous clauses are designed to reveal Margaret's mind in action, weighing both the offer and the character of the person who makes it. Perhaps as an indication of the dominance of Margaret's "great
spirit" over her purely rational judgment, which seems to point toward her acceptance of Miss Clare's offer, she refuses it.

Lamb makes several gestures of revolt against the tradition represented by Rosamund Gray, announcing to Coleridge in a letter of 1800, "My sentiment is long since vanished." And indeed the eccentric and emotive syntax found in the tale is relatively scarce in the essays and reviews of the next two decades. It does not, however, disappear altogether. For one thing, although Lamb's Reflector essays conform generally to the style of the Spectator tradition, that tradition itself had been influenced by Sterne. Whimsical characters, modeled upon Yorick and Eugenius, are to be found in some periodical essays of the late eighteenth century, and with them are traces of Sterne's punctuation and broken sentences. This is to say nothing about the quality of these essays or about the effectiveness of the sentence structure. But there clearly was some experimentation, not simply a sedulous conformity to Addison's style.

The emotive syntax of Lamb's Reflector essays is not very inspired, and there is no need to dwell upon it. But it does show a continuing attempt to express mental agitation, or a comic suggestion of it, through the style. The following passage of gallows humor, from "On the Inconveniences Resulting from Being Hanged," may be taken as representative. "Pensilis," who was rescued at the last minute,
is telling about the whole unpleasant business:

To have a fellow with his hangman’s hands fumbling about your collar, adjusting the thing as your valet would regulate your cravat, valuing himself on his menial dexterity——

I never shall forget meeting my rascal,—I mean the fellow who officiated for me,—in London last winter. I think I see him now,—in a waistcoat that had been mine,—smirking along as if he knew me——

(I,63)

The dashes are almost entirely responsible for the appearance of discontinuity in these sentences. Without them, the first would be mildly exclamatory, the last bland or matter-of-fact. With the dashes, there is a distinct shift from discourse with a reader to an almost absent-minded reflectiveness.

A similar effect is contrived more interestingly in one of Lamb’s drama reviews, contributed to Hunt’s Examiner in 1819. He gives the following account of one of the actresses in a performance of Richard Brome’s Jovial Crew:

Her gabbling lachrymose petitions; her tones, such as we have heard by the side of old woods, when an irresistible face has come peeping on one on a sudden; with her full black locks, and a voice—how shall we describe it?—a voice that was by nature meant to convey nothing but truth and goodness, but warped by circumstances into an assurance that she is telling us a lie—that catching twitch of the thievish irreprovable finger—those ballad-singers’ notes, so vulgar, yet so unvulgar—that assurance, so like impudence, and yet so many countless leagues removed from it—her jeers, which we had rather stand, than be caressed with other ladies’ compliments, a summer’s day long—her face, with a wild out-of-door’s grace upon it—

(I,187)

The sentence trails off inconclusively at this point, as though Lamb were lost in his meditations and had momentarily
forgotten the reader. It thus combines well with other techniques used in his highly subjective criticism. Something of the lyrical tone of *Rosamund Gray* is in this sentence, although there is a studied ingenuity in the phrases which is alien to the simplicity of much of the tale. Both this tone and the abstracted, meditative air of the sentence may be partly explained by the identity of the actress in question: Fanny Kelly, to whom Lamb made a proposal of marriage shortly after writing this review.

In the *Elia* essays there are enough halting or fragmentary sentences to make generalizations difficult. As mentioned earlier, Lamb's appositional elaborations appear at first to be discontinuous, partly because of the dashes, but are actually sustained and at times carefully controlled. There are also many sentences which aim at the appearance of spontaneity and include the author's interjected second thoughts or parenthetical directions to the reader. At times, the aim is probably more subjective and ambiguous: Blunden speaks of "the force of sudden silences, of the broken sentence and fine phrase lingering as though...there were no words to add just then" and gives Sterne credit for having taught this lesson to Lamb.17

One effect that does appear repeatedly in *Elia*, whether the sentences are brief and fragmentary or long and associative in structure, is the suggestion of the private meditation, like that found in the two sentences quoted above.
In "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," after declaring that "Milton almost requires a solemn service of music to be played before you enter upon him," Elia contrasts the proper way to approach, or to be approached by, Shakespeare:

Winter evenings--the world shut out--with less of ceremony the gentle Shakspeare enters. At such a season, the Tempest, or his own Winter's Tale--

(II,175)

The essentially private, meditative nature of the experience is quite effectively conveyed by the fragments. Conventional syntax implies that one is appealing to the judgment of a public, dressing one's ideas to advantage; but in this passage the contrived undress of the sentences suggests "the world shut out."

A more elaborate and perhaps more Shandean example is Elia's account of meeting Dodd, the actor whom he remembers for his comic faces:

I am ill at dates, but I think it is now better than five and twenty years ago that walking in the gardens of Gray's Inn--they were then far finer than they are now--the accursed Verulam Buildings had not encroached upon all the east side of them, cutting out delicate green crinkles, and shouldering away one of two of the stately alcoves of the terrace--the survivor stands gaping and relationless as if it remembered its brother--they are still the best gardens of any of the Inns of Court, my beloved Temple not forgotten--have the gravest character, their aspect being altogether reverend and law-breathing--Bacon has left the impress of his foot upon their gravel walks---taking my afternoon solace on a summer day upon the aforesaid terrace, a comely sad personage came towards me, whom,
from his grave air and deportment, I judged to be one of the old Benchers of the Inn. (II,136-137)

For all its shapelessness, there is unity of a sort in this sentence. The contrast between the gardens as they once existed and as they are at the time of the essay appears at first to be merely one more example of a favorite theme—the spoiled glory of things past—which is so irresistible that Lamb interrupts his sentence for the sake of it. But the contrast also parallels that which Elia observes in Dodd's face: the "comely sad personage" once wore a "vacant face of folly," which Elia associates with the past and "circumstances of gaiety." The two trains of thought are in effect superimposed. The sentence which results is difficult to follow, but it has a stylistic appropriateness: both contrasts are highly subjective, and the controlled associative structure keeps the emphasis upon Elia and his response to the meeting with Dodd, rather than upon the actor himself. As in most of the Elia essays, this is where it belongs.

It is not necessary to insist that all of Lamb's halting or fragmentary sentences have a specific stylistic purpose which can be explained precisely. But there is evidence of such a purpose in enough cases to show that he is exercising some control over his syntax, not being controlled by it. His experiments are not equally successful: the sentence just quoted, although its aim is a stylistically legitimate one, is probably too distractingly halting. Both its jerkiness and the rather stiff phrase used to recall the main
clause--"the aforesaid terrace"--are blemishes in their different ways. But the very oddity of the sentence suggests conscious experimentation. Sterne's flexible syntax has been described as the deliberate expression of "a certain reality of thought and feeling." and the same is true of Lamb's more restrained, but still highly original, syntax.

II

Lamb's view of the "reality of thought and feeling" is far from simple, and it is perhaps generally agreed that his awareness of the complexity of art and of human experience is one of the chief qualities of his mind. He shares with the major poets and prose writers of the Romantic period an opposition to formalism and to the reduction of experience to narrow rules. In Ernest Bernbaum's opinion, "formalism was to Lamb the archenemy of truth, virtue, and beauty." The discontinuity, the subjective structure, and the frequent complexity of many sentences studied in the preceding section are indications of his affinity with other Romantic writers. But Lamb resembles them also in seeking to do more than reflect the diversity of experience: part of his task is to perceive the unity underlying this diversity and to find ways of expressing it. One way is through the structure of his essays, as the next chapter will show. But many of his sentences serve the same purpose, and they will now be considered.

Although a survey of Lamb's career from the early
reviews and essays to Elia shows many important changes, and in some respects a continuous development, his avoidance of oversimplification is seen from the first. There is a sentence in a review of G. F. Cooke's performance in Richard III, written in 1802, which illustrates both Lamb's awareness of the complexity of a problem in evaluation and his desire to resolve it. He recognizes that the version of the play he is reviewing is an "improved" one and that the necessity of judging Cooke's performance is complicated by his disapproval of such versions. The sentence attempts to place the issue in perspective:

We say of Shakespeare; for though the Play, 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 or a cento of passages extracted from other of his Plays, and applied with gross violations of propriety (as we are ready at any time to point out), besides some miserable additions, which he never could have written; all together producing an inevitable inconsistency of character, sufficient to puzzle and confound the best Actor; yet, in this chaos and perplexity, we are of opinion, that it becomes an Actor to shew his taste, by adhering, as much as possible, to the spirit and intention of the original author, and to consult his safety in steering by the Light, which Shakespeare holds out to him, as by a great Leading Star.

Although the sentence appears digressive and unshapely enough at first reading, it is not composed of a random or a merely associative sequence of elements. In fact, it has a firm periodic structure: a simple antithesis which might be paraphrased, "The play is not wholly Shakespeare's, yet the actor should try to follow Shakespeare." The way in which each
half of the antithesis is developed is important. In the first half, Lamb avoids anything like parallelism or symmetry. The participles, the loose "besides," and the parenthesis all reflect the complexity of the subject, which has not yet been resolved. The absolute phrase, "all together producing," gathers up the pieces and introduces the unifying idea: the relation of this complexity to Cooke's performance. The second half, which attempts to show a way out of the confusion, is more regular, the main elements being two parallel infinitive phrases. These two phrases are essentially parallel statements of the same idea, one relatively flat and conceptual, the other vividly metaphorical. For the actor "to shew his taste" by the method prescribed is also "to consult his safety."

This sentence is representative of a type which Lamb uses repeatedly, for reasons which will be shown. For convenience it may be called the "accumulative sentence," to borrow an epithet which E. V. Lucas applies to one trait of the _Elia_ essays. Lucas appears to mean simply a tendency to catalogue particulars, but equally important in the sentences is Lamb's way of rephrasing or restating the items in a series, of arranging his catalogues into appositional clusters, and at the same time, of avoiding the appearance of precise parallelism. The single sentence is not always the form chosen for such catalogues, but when it is, its purpose is to indicate the unity underlying the series.
Such sentences are likely to show a combination of firm control, often in the form of a periodic structure (as in the sentence quoted above), and an apparent chaos in the arrangement of details within it.

The accumulative sentence is most useful when a serious subject is being treated, one whose complexity invites the kind of order which the sentence imposes upon it. Even in the comic letters to the Reflector, however, Lamb often uses it for his catalogues. The order governing the series is sometimes rather arbitrary, as in the following example.

"Moriturus" is summarizing the advertised enticements of a burial society:

The two rows all round close-drove best black japanned nails,--how feelingly do they invite and almost irresistibly persuade us to come and be fastened down! what aching head can resist the temptation to repose, which the crape shroud, the cap, and the pillow present; what sting is there in death, which the handles with wrought gripes are not calculated to pluck away? what victory in the grave, which the drops and the velvet pall do not render at least extremely disputable; but above all, the pretty emblematic plate with the Angel above and the Flower beneath, takes me mightily.(I,93)

Again the elements in the series avoid parallelism, although two are bound together by the burlesque allusion to I Corinthians. But the main point is the suggestion of a prearranged structure. Although the items in the series have hardly any intrinsic importance, the last one is made climactic, as though the sentence were all along leading up to the "pretty emblematic plate."
In the critical essay on Hogarth, Lamb uses the accumulative sentence more properly as the medium with which to express his view of Hogarth's art. He contends that there is more imagination in Hogarth's pictures than in those of many more highly regarded artists, and the point is made clearer by his definition of the imagination: "...that power which draws all things to one,—which makes things animate and inanimate, beings with their attributes, subjects and their accessories, take one colour, and serve to one effect." There are a number of sentences in the essay which reflect this idea. The points of detail, usually descriptive of the elements in one of Hogarth's pictures, are set forth in a series of clauses and phrases with their modifiers, and the sentence concludes either by stating the dominant effect of the picture or by pointing toward its statement in the next sentence. The following example, a description of the Election Entertainment, is long, but its length makes it all the better an illustration of Lamb's art of construction:

In that inimitable print, (which in my judgment as far exceeds the more known and celebrated March to Finchley, as the best comedy exceeds the best farce that ever was written,) let a person look till he be saturated, and when he has done wondering at the inventiveness of genius which could bring so many characters (more than thirty distinct classes of face) into a room, and set them down at table together, or otherwise dispose them about, in so natural a manner, engage them in so many easy sets and occupations, yet all partaking of the spirit of the occasion which brought them together, so that we feel that nothing but an election time could have assembled
them; having no central figure or principal group, (for the hero of the piece, the Candidate, is properly set aside in the levelling indistinction of the day, one must look for him to find him) nothing to detain the eye from passing from part to part, where every part is alike instinct with life,—for here are no furniture-faces, no figures brought in to fill up the scene like stage choruses, but all dramatis personae: when he shall have done wondering at all these faces so strongly characterized, yet finished with the accuracy of the finest miniature; when he shall have done admiring the numberless appendages of the scene, those gratuitous doles which rich genius flings into the heap when it has already done enough, the over-measure which it delights in giving, as if its stores were exhaustless; the dumb rhetoric of the scenery—for tables, and chairs, and joint-stools in Hogarth, are living and significant things; the witticisms that are expressed by words, (all artists but Hogarth have failed when they have endeavoured to combine two mediums of expression, and have introduced words into their pictures), and the unwritten numberless little allusive pleasantries that are scattered about; the work that is going on in the scene, and beyond it, as is made visible to the "eye of mind," by the mob which choke up the door-way, and the sword that has forced an entrance before its master: when he shall have sufficiently admired this wealth of genius, let him fairly say what is the result left on his mind. (I, 84-85)

The variations upon the formulæ, "when he shall have done wondering," serves as a skeleton of the sentence and keeps the suspended clause in the reader's mind. The details, despite the appearance of chaos, are not entirely free from arrangement. Some of them are in appositional clusters: "the numberless appendages of the scene, those gratuitous doles which rich genius flings into the heap..., the over-measure which it delights in giving...." There are also some antithetical groupings: "the dumb rhetoric of the
scenery," "the witticisms that are expressed by words." In this subordinate grouping of related details, the sentence corresponds to Hogarth's picture, in which the wealth of detail is also arranged into groups, despite the initial appearance of exuberant wildness. Lamb's sentence, with its combination of literal and figurative detail, at once describes, evokes, and reflects the qualities of the picture; and in moving toward the assertion of its own unity, it is also seeking that of the picture.

As the sentence which follows this one makes clear, the total effect of Hogarth's Election Entertainment is, in Lamb's opinion, a morally salutary one. It promotes in the viewer a "kindly [feeling] in favour of his species." This opinion is based partly upon a rather sentimental attitude toward the "substantial English honesty" which he thinks he sees in the faces; but as the scornful reference to "furniture-faces" suggests, it is also based upon the realistic variety of the faces and perhaps of the "appendages of the scene." Hogarth is an artist who did not practice a false refinement, and the very inclusiveness of Lamb's sentence corresponds to a quality of the picture which justifies his moral verdict.

The accumulative sentence is also of use in brief reviews, when it is necessary to indicate the dominant quality of a work while giving some account of its details. The review of Keats's Lamia volume (1820) is the occasion for Lamb's well-known remark, "To us an ounce of feeling is
worth a pound of fancy," but he tries to do justice to the latter, as represented by "the story of the Lamia":

Her first appearance in serpentine form--

-------a beauteous wreath with melancholy Eyes--

her dialogue with Hermes, the Star of Lethe, as he is called by one of these prodigal phrases which Mr. Keats abounds in, which are each a poem in a word, and which in this instance lays open to us at once, like a picture, all the dim regions and their inhabitants, and the sudden coming of a celestial among them; the charming of her into woman's shape again by the God; her marriage with the beautiful Lycius; her magic palace, which those who knew the street, and remembered it complete from childhood, never remembered to have seen before; the few Persian mutes, her attendants,

---------------------who that same year
Were seen about the markets; none knew
Where they could inhabit;----

the high-wrought splendours of the nuptial bower,
with the fading of the whole pageantry, Lamia,
and all, away, before the glance of Apollonius,--
are all that fairy land can do for us. (I,202-203)

The sentence is not a simple plot summary. Besides listing the chief incidents of the poem, Lamb draws attention to the power of "prodigal phrases," he describes the effect of sharp contrasts, and above all he evokes the qualities of the poem through his own turns of phrase. And yet the sentence is not a loose collection of details and interpretative comments either. It is clearly premeditated and has a definite structure, based upon the plot of the poem. The rhetorical climax of the sentence--"the fading of the whole pageantry, Lamia, and all, away,"--is the completion of an imaginative
experience which has been reproduced in miniature. The informing quality of both the poem and the sentence is hyperbolically expressed in the resumption of the suspended clause.

Although the main function of an accumulative sentence is to indicate the unity within the diversity of a work of art or of an experience in life, this is not its only function. The metaphorical elaborations of details within the sentence and the structure of the sentence itself are intended to move the reader, to stimulate his awareness of both the richness and the unity of the thing being described. French's statement, quoted earlier, that Lamb "throws overboard all formal rhetoric" is not only wrong in detail--Lamb makes abundant use of the traditional devices--but it ignores a central purpose of many of his sentences: the rhetorical function of persuasion. In the preceding two examples the extreme periodicity is itself persuasive: by the end of each sentence, especially the one from the Hogarth essay, the sheer mass of accumulated detail both calls for some unifying statement and overwhelms the reader into acquiescence. However, periodicity of this sort is not an inevitable characteristic of the accumulative sentence. It takes a number of forms, especially in the Elia essays.

One of the most effective of rhetorical devices is the rhetorical question. In the essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," Elia uses it both to identify the essential contrast between two kinds of drama and to move
the reader to an acceptance of his own viewpoint:

Oh who that remembers Parsons and Dodd—the wasp and butterfly of the School for Scandal—in those two characters; and charming natural Miss Pope, the perfect gentlewoman as distinguished from the fine lady of comedy, in this latter part—could forego the true scenic delight—the escape from life—the oblivion of consequences—the holiday barring out of the pedant Reflection—those Saturnalia of two or three brief hours, well won from the world—to sit instead at one of our modern plays—to have his coward conscience (that forsooth must not be left for a moment) stimulated with perpetual appeals—dulled rather, and blunted, as a faculty without repose must be—and his moral vanity pampered with images of notional justice, notional beneficence, lives saved without the spectators' risk, and fortunes given away that cost the author nothing? (II,146)

The fervor of Elia's conviction is reflected in the apparently spontaneous elaboration of details and in the parenthetical afterthoughts. But the structure is more controlled than at first appears. The skeleton of the sentence is the basic question: Who that remembers the old actors in the old play could forego that experience for the sake of seeing a modern play? This is fleshed out by the accretion of metaphorical appositives and other details around each part of the question. Not only is this sentence, in its apparent spontaneity and actual control, a good example of the accumulative sentence; it is also a rhetorical question in the best sense, because it contains evidence for what it assumes to be true.

Even in examples with periodic structure, there are many possible variations of effect. Surprise is often an important feature: surprise, that is, not so much at what is asserted as at the way in which it is asserted. The parentheses
and abrupt participial phrases allow for this surprise in most of the accumulative sentences, but in at least one case it is suspended along with the clause. The following, which is the last sentence of "Old China," is in some ways rather regular, with its parallel clauses introduced by variations upon "could I." The surprise is in the climax, which defies grammatical description. Elia has just told Bridget that they must make do with the increased comforts and financial security of age:

Yet could those days return—could you and I once more walk out thirty miles a-day—could Bennister and Mrs. Bland again be young, and you and I be young to see them—could the good old one shilling gallery days return—they are dreams, my cousin, now—but could you and I at this moment, instead of this quiet argument, by our well-carpeted fireside, sitting on this luxurious sofa—be once more struggling up those inconvenient stair-cases, pushed about, and squeezed, and once more hear those anxious shrieks of yours—and the delicious Thank God, we are safe, which always followed when the topmost stair, conquered, let in the first light of the whole cheerful theatre down beneath us—I know not the fathom line that ever touched a descent so deep as I would be willing to bury more wealth in than Croesus had, or the great Jew R— is supposed to have, to purchase it. (II,252)

The extravagant pledge of the main clause is appropriately expressed in a syntactical flourish, an unfolding succession of dependent clauses, each containing part of an elaborate hyperbole, which is equally extravagant. In this example the unifying idea is also that of the essay, whose content is summarized by the sentence.
The function of the accumulative sentence varies somewhat from essay to essay, but it can often be regarded as a familiar essay in miniature. Its inclusiveness, involving both concrete details and metaphorical comments upon or extensions of these details, its appearance of an uncontrived, random, digressive structure, its expression of a personal fervor--its gusto, as Lamb would say--and finally, its imaginative drawing of all these elements toward a unity: these characteristics are to some degree shared by the familiar essays themselves. The accumulative sentence is an epitome which sometimes occurs toward the end of the essay, as in the preceding example, but more often at a point within, where an amassment of detail needs to be brought into focus. Finally, as in the essays themselves, the author's presence is often crucial, since it is his vision which draws all things to one:

Situated as thou art, in the very heart of stirring and living commerce,—amid the fret and fever of speculation—with the Bank, and the 'Change, and the India-house about thee, in the hay-day of present prosperity, with their important faces, as it were, insulting thee, their poor neighbour out of business—to the idle and merely contemplative,—to such as me, old house! there is a charm in thy quiet—a cessation—a coolness from business—an indolence almost cloisteral—which is delightful!

According to Hazlitt, Lamb's "sentences are cast in the mould of old authors." This is an overstatement which is characteristic of Hazlitt (and as shall be seen, of Lamb also), but there are some indications that the seventeenth-
century prose writers, particularly the baroque or anti-Ciceronian writers such as Browne and Burton, influenced Lamb's syntax. Joseph Iseman and Huntington Brown have made such a suggestion,\textsuperscript{23} and Lamb's known admiration for these writers makes it plausible. The baroque style has been analyzed by Morris Croll, who distinguishes two types of sentence: the \textit{période coupé} and the "loose period." It is the second of these which is pertinent here, and Croll's explanation should be quoted:

> Its purpose is to express, as far as may be, the order in which an idea presents itself when it is first experienced. It begins, therefore, without premeditation, stating its idea in the first form that occurs; the second member is determined by the situation in which the mind finds itself after the first has been spoken; and so on throughout the period, each member being an emergency of the situation. The period—in theory, at least—is not made; it becomes.\textsuperscript{24}

In some ways this seems to be a description of Lamb's accumulative sentence. The elements of surprise and apparent spontaneity are traits which they share. Croll also emphasizes the importance of participial constructions and of the oppositional relations between words within the loose period; they too have been noted in the accumulative sentence. There is no doubt that Lamb understood clearly the structural principles of the baroque sentence, as is shown by his imitation of Burton in 1802.\textsuperscript{25} But the syntax there is different from that of the accumulative sentence in one very important way. As Croll says, a chain is an appropriate metaphor for the loose period: clause is linked to clause with an avoidance
of periodicity or of any prearranged emphasis upon one part of the sentence. Lamb's imitation of Burton conforms to this principle, and indeed there are some sentences throughout his prose which are similarly chain-like. But the accumulative sentence is often periodic, and it always leads to a statement of unity. It has a prearranged structural framework of some kind. Within the frame the relation of the members to one another is often loose, and perhaps baroque, but the sentence is not a mere imitation of the loose period, in Croll's sense of the term.

Neither is it essentially like the periodic sentence as used by most eighteenth-century writers and by writers in the Ciceronian tradition generally. The point may be made by quoting a sentence from Burke:

But as many of the works of imagination are not confined to the representation of sensible objects, nor to efforts upon the passions, but extend themselves to the manners, the characters, the actions, and designs of men, their relations, their virtues and vices, they come within the province of the judgment, which is improved by attention and by the habit of reasoning.

The subordinate members here are truly subordinate: their purpose is to prepare for and to justify the main clause, and such elaboration as is found in them is merely an indication of the validity of the main clause. This elaboration does not interrupt the steady movement of the sentence toward its conclusion. But each member of Lamb's accumulative sentence, in addition to pointing toward a statement of unity, is likely to draw attention to itself. The aphoristic quality of
individual phrases and clauses is one cause of the word-centeredness discussed in the preceding chapter, and it has the effect also of creating pauses and of slowing down the movement of the sentence. A clause from the sentence describing Hogarth's picture--"those gratuitous doles which rich genius flings into the heap when it has already done enough"--is not quite autonomous, since it is but a part of the total effect to which the sentence is leading. But it is much closer to autonomy than the phrase, "efforts upon the passions," or any other part of Burke's sentence.

The chief influence upon Lamb's accumulative sentence is probably neither the baroque loose period nor the Cicero-nian periodic sentence, but a concept of organic structure which he shares with Coleridge and other writers of his own time. Hazlitt's objections to what he considered the mechanical balance and parallelism of Johnson's sentences are well known, and in his letters Lamb reveals a similarly anti-mechanical view: he condemns "the damned Gibbonian fine writing, so fine and composite," and "Mr. Robertson's periods with three members." Conversely, Lamb admires Jeremy Taylor's style because of its disordered blending of images, which, he feels, imitates the order of their occurrence in the author's mind. In the Elia essay "On Some of the Old Actors," a comment upon Mrs. Jordan's delivery of a speech from Twelfth Night has some relation to his views upon
It was no set speech, that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music--yet I have heard it so spoken, or rather read, not without its grace and beauty--but, when she had declared her sister's history to be a "blank," and that she "never told her love," there was a pause, as if the story had ended--and then the image of the "worm in the bud" came up as a new suggestion--and the heightened image of "Patience" still followed after that, as by some growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears.... She used no rhetoric in her passion; or it was nature's own rhetoric, most legitimate then, when it seemed altogether without rule or law.

(II,132-133)

The effect of a spontaneous "thought springing up after thought" is one trait of the accumulative sentence, and the casual dashes and parentheses contribute to it. But at the same time, an organic growth proceeds according to some plan, and just as Mrs. Jordan's avoidance of a foreseen "set speech" is partly feigned, so Lamb's sentences require some premeditation even while they suggest spontaneity. It is significant that, instead of pouring his sentences into the "mould" of baroque syntax, he combines periodicity, or some other predetermined pattern, with the chain principle described by Croll. The result is perhaps "nature's own rhetoric" in a sense, but like so many of the poetic experiments of the Romantics, it is best seen as a compromise with nature.

III

The fundamental conciseness of Lamb's style has already
been noted, and it is a point upon which most readers would probably agree. Even the accumulative sentence aims at concentration of a sort, its apparent profusion of detail being actually a unified selection. The strikingly aphoristic quality of the members of the accumulative sentence is also characteristic of Lamb's short sentences, which will now be considered. Short sentences are of course likely to be a part of any prose style. Lamb often uses them, as any skillful writer would, to set off long sentences for the sake of a pleasingly varied prose rhythm. The term "curt sentence," however, will be used here to distinguish a syntactical conciseness, or rather a manner of using it, which is peculiar to Lamb. It is best approached through its sources.

Exactly when Lamb first read the seventeenth-century character writers, Hall, Overbury, and Earle, is not known. He tells Coleridge in a letter of 1802 that he does not know Bishop Hall's Characters of Virtues and Vices, but Hall and Overbury eventually find their way into his library. In 1811, at any rate, he is imitating the character style, just as he had imitated Burton: "On Burial Societies" contains a character of an undertaker, and "The Good Clerk" is also partly in this style. Like the imitation of Burton, both are thoroughly archaic in manner, and both are direct imitations; that is, they are not modified or assimilated into Lamb's own style. Their style may be illustrated by a
short passage from the character of an undertaker:

He takes upon himself all functions, and is a sort of ephemeral major-domo! He distributes his attentions among the company assembled according to the degree of affliction, which he calculates from the degree of kin to the deceased; and marshalls them accordingly in the procession. He himself is of a sad and tristful countenance; yet such as (if well examined) is not without some show of patience and resignation at bottom: prefiguring, as it were, to the friends of the deceased, what their grief shall be when the hand of Time shall have softened and taken down the bitterness of their first anguish; so handsomely can he fore-shape and anticipate the work of Time. (I,96)

The usual way of describing the style emphasizes the repeated antitheses and compound predicates; Northrop Frye even calls its characteristic rhythm an "antiphonal chant." But a close look at Lamb's imitation or at almost any extended passage from the seventeenth-century character writers will show that Croll's analysis is more accurate:

The frequent recurrence of the same subject-word, usually he or they, is the mannerism of this style,...It is indeed so conspicuous a mannerism that it may serve to conceal what is after all the more significant feature of the "character" style, namely, the constant variation and contrast of form in members that begin in this formulistic manner.

Croll's observation about the character style is part of his general thesis that asymmetry is a constant trait of the baroque sentence. It is certainly true of the passage from Lamb. In some of the sentences there is a final participial construction or additional clause which seems intended to throw the see-saw movement off balance. The result is a kind of shuffling movement, rather than a regular antiphonal
one—or Shaftesbury's word, "amble," might be better. The
deliberate asymmetry in the form and length of the members
no doubt appealed to Lamb's love of the irregular. But his
characteristic modification of it comes later.

It is possible that Lamb was acquainted with this style
much earlier than 1811, or perhaps he had an instinctive im-
pulse toward it. In Rosamund Gray the description of the
villain, Matravis, is in a similar style. So are some of
the notes in Specimens of the Dramatic Poets, when he is dis-
cussing a dramatist or a character in a play; these notes
are necessarily brief, and the style is in some ways a natural
one for the concise listing of a series of attributes. In
any case, the character becomes a favorite device in Lamb's
essays, and as Varley Lang observes he often seems to go out
of his way to include it.

After 1811, Lamb's earliest use of the character style
reveals one change which is perhaps significant: the more
obvious archaic touches are dropped. "Recollections of
Christ's Hospital" (1813; not the Elia essay) contains the
following passage, an account of the typical student:

His very garb, as it is antique and venerable,
feeds his self-respect; as it is a badge of
dependence, it restrains the natural petulance
of that age from breaking out into overt-acts of
insolence. This produces silence and a reserve
before strangers, yet not that cowardly shyness
which boys mewed up at home will feel; he will
speak up when spoken to, but the stranger must
begin the conversation with him. Within his
bounds he is all fire and play; but in the
streets he steals along with all the self-
In this passage there is the same pattern, including frequent variations in form, noted by Croll. It is of course brief, and it has little effect upon the style of the entire essay, but with the exception of its modern diction it is in the conventional style of the seventeenth-century character.

The earliest example of Lamb's use of the curt sentence, in this chapter's special sense of the term, is in a review written in 1819. The style generally is that of Lamb's very personal method of reviewing dramatic performances, and the following passage blends well enough with it. But the repeated subject words suggest its indebtedness to the character style:

We saw Wilkinson after it in Walk for a Wager. What a picture of Forlorn Hope! of object orphan destitution! He seems to have no friends in the world but his legs, and he plies them accordingly. He goes walking on like a perpetual motion. His continual ambulatory presence performs the part of a Greek chorus. He is the walking Gentleman of the piece; a Peripatetic that would make a Stoic laugh. He made us cry. His Muffin-cap in Amateurs and Actors is just such another piece of acting. (I, 190)

There is a trace here of the "ambling" movement of the conventional character style, but most of the sentences in the passage have a hammering effect. The exclamation points enforce this effect, but the curt sentences alone would suffice. They derive much of their force from being grouped with their kind and from the frequent repetition of the subject and possessive pronouns, which exceeds that of the conventional
style. These are the chief traits of Lamb's modification of the character style; it is based not upon asymmetrical sentences of several members, but upon the curt sentence.

In *Elia* there are some examples of the older style. The "poor antithetical manner" of the portrait of James Elia is perhaps the best example. But passages embodying Lamb's modification are much more frequent. These passages are often among the most familiar in *Elia*, a fact which is partly attributable to the quick movement and the epigrammatic wit which are characteristic of the curt sentence. The Caledonian, to borrow a phrase from another context, is one of "Great Nature's Stereotypes":

Is he orthodox--he has no doubts. Is he an infidel--he has none either. Between the affirmative and the negative there is no borderland with him. You cannot hover with him upon the confines of truth, or wander in the maze of a probable argument. He always keeps the path. You cannot make excursions with him--for he sets you right. His taste never fluctuates. His morality never abates. He cannot compromise, or understand middle actions. There can be but a right and a wrong. His conversation is a book. His affirmations have the sanctity of an oath. You must speak upon the square with him. He stops a metaphor like a suspected person in an enemy's country. (II,60)

Variation is of course still important in the new character style. The subject word is changed occasionally, and the form of the sentences varies considerably. Antitheses also occur in the new style. But the "amble" or shuffle of the seventeenth-century manner is gone, and an insistent hammering rhythm has taken its place. One might add that this
rhythm is too controlled and forceful to suggest a halting or infirm style.

As the curt sentence becomes more frequent in *Elia*, Lamb extends the application of his modified character style. It is not confined to third-person accounts of friends or of types, but is used to portray Elia himself in the first-person:

> I seem admitted ad eundem. I fetch up past opportunities. I can rise at the chapel-bell, and dream that it rings for me. In moods of humility I can be a Sizar, or a Servitor. When the peacock vein rises, I strut a Gentleman Commoner. In graver moments, I proceed Master of Arts. (II,9)

It is also occasionally used in presenting an object which is being invested with human importance: the sundial in "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," for instance. The collective response of the audience of a play or of readers of books is sometimes described in this style:

> We have not the courage to imagine a state of things for which there is neither reward nor punishment. We cling to the painful necessities of shame and blame. We would indict our very dreams. (II,144)

The repeated subject word sometimes takes on a new importance, as in the Popular Fallacy," "That Home is Home Though it is Never so Homely." Lamb insists upon the dehumanizing evils of poverty, and his character of the poor child is adapted to this thesis:

> It was never sung to--no one ever told to it a tale of the nursery. It was dragged up, to live or to die as it happened. It had no young dreams. It broke at once into the iron realities of life. (II,264)
Hazlitt's essays also include many examples of the character style, but the differences between his use of it and Lamb's is instructive. Hazlitt, true to the principles of familiar style, avoids any trace of an archaic tone. More important, he retains the antithetical structure of the old style in many of his sentences. As Marie Law observes of his use of the character, "The form lent itself admirably to the ironic portrayal of those types of persons with whom he had little sympathy or patience." For the purpose of irony, the antithetical sentence is perfect: the writer takes back with one half what he had seemed to grant with the other. Hazlitt is of course too skillful a writer to fall into a see-saw rhythm. For the most part he varies the sentences in such passages so that the rhythm is the conversational, argumentative one of his essay style generally.

Lamb's curt sentences are at times also expressive of irony. But they have a more complex function as well. For one thing, they have an effect upon the rhythm of his prose which has been obscured by the necessary isolation of passages in the preceding pages. Huntington Brown describes the movement of Lamb's prose as "nervous and quick." Compared to the ample periods of those seventeenth-century writers whom Brown has in mind, it certainly is. But this movement is not uniform. The rapidity and intensity of passages composed of curt sentences is the more effective in context because of the relatively leisurely movement of the sentences.
which surround such passages. Furthermore, the variations in rhythm are likely not to be abrupt, but gradual. The following passage from "New Year's Eve" contains such a variation:

I am naturally, beforehand, shy of novelties; new books, new faces, new years,—from some mental twist which makes it difficult in me to face the prospective. I have almost ceased to hope; and am sanguine only in the prospects of other (former) years. I plunge into foregone visions and conclusions. I encounter pell-mell with past disappointments. I am armour-proof against old discouragements. I forgive, or overcome in fancy, old adversaries. I play over again for love, as the gamblers phrase it, games, for which I once paid so dear. I would scarce now have any of those untoward accidents and events of my life reversed. I would no more alter them than the incidents of some well-contrived novel. Methinks, it is better that I should have pined away seven of my golden-est years, when I was thrall to the fair hair, and fairer eyes, of Alice W—n, than that so passionate a love-adventure should be lost. (II,27-28)

The subordinate elements of the first sentence, and especially the pause before the short catalogue, make its movement, not ponderous certainly, but at least deliberate. The acceleration begins in the next sentence, although the compound predicate applies a slight braking pressure. The precipitous movement of the curt sentences then begins, the verb "plunge" enforcing the effect. The reflective sentence beginning with "Methinks" again applies the brakes.

The rhythmic variation of the passage corresponds in an important way to the movement of Lamb's thought, and in this respect too it is typical of the use of curt sentences in Elia. The passage begins with an observation which is
relatively literal. The barrage of curt sentences leads one further into Elia's "mental twist," and they become intensely metaphorical as they probe the nature of his backward perspective. The braking sentence returns to the literal, the recollection of an early love affair. The rapid, intense movement of the curt sentences, with their pithy conceits and their combination of sentimentality and wit, expresses a corresponding fervor in Lamb's analysis of character. Imaginative sympathy with his subject, whether it is Elia (a projection of himself) or someone else, is Lamb's usual practice in portraying character. The movement of the curt sentences makes them the proper medium for this practice, as they would not be for a more detached, reflective, and objective view of a person's character.

There is insufficient documentary evidence that Lamb consciously developed the two syntactical forms upon which this chapter has concentrated, the accumulative and curt sentences, and it is indeed unnecessary to assume either that they were carefully and deliberately adapted or that every use of them has a calculated purpose. However, the premeditation and control which is essential to the accumulative sentence and the sustained use of curt sentences through fairly lengthy passages at least show that they are not merely accidental. They surely represent "true idiosyncrasy of style" in J. Middleton Murry's sense of the phrase: an author's control over the resources of language for the
purpose of making it "conform to his mode of experience." While they hardly in themselves indicate the variety of Lamb's syntax, they are of central importance in his style, and in some ways they are complementary. The accumulative sentence is an attempt to express the wholeness of a body of experience: the memory of a place, one's reaction to a book or a play, a period in one's life, or anything which is apparently so diverse and chaotic that its essential unity is likely to be hidden. On the other hand, Lamb's attraction to singularity and complexity, in people, in books, and in pictures, has a very real impact upon his style. His use of curt sentences is suited to the expression of the complexity to be found within the individual person or object. Each attribute, or each way of seeing and expressing a single attribute, is isolated and given maximum force. The intensified rhythm of passages composed of curt sentences increases the effect of concentrated attention. This dual concern of Lamb's style, the unity underlying diversity and the complexity within the individual character, is very often seen within single essays. "The South-Sea House," for instance, seeks to identify the essential spirit of the extinct house and of everything associated with the house, but it then turns to the complex identities of the individual clerks. The sensitivity of Lamb's syntax to this dual concern is one of the most important traits of his style.

2. De Quincey, V, 235.

3. It does not follow, however, that Lamb was incapable of appreciating writing of this kind: he was not deaf to the charm of Sir Thomas Browne's prose.


12. The following passage from *The Man of Feeling* is representative:

   He rushed a second time up into his chamber.
   'What a wretch I am,' said he; 'ere this time perhaps--' 'Twas a perhaps not to be born:--
   two vibrations of a pendulum would have served him to lock his bureau;--but they could not be
   spared. (Chapter XXVIII)


18. Fluchère, p. 423.
21. Works, I, 73.
25. Works, I, 31-36. A brief example may illustrate the syntax:

I counsel marriage with his mistress, according to Hippocrates his method, together with milk diet, herbs, aloes, and wild parsley, good in such cases, though Avicenna preferreth some sorts of wild fowl, teals, widgeons, beccas ficos, which men in Sussex eat.

29. Letters, I, 256.
34. Works, I, 22.
35. For example, his comments upon the Duchess of Malfy, *Works*, IV, 179n.


Lamb's achievement of "true idiosyncrasy of style" in the syntactical variety of his sentences is not wholly duplicated in the structure of his essays. "I can vehemently applaud, or perversely stickle, at parts; but I cannot grasp at a whole," he tells Godwin, speaking of his limitations as a critic;\(^1\) and while the admission is characteristically modest, there is much truth in it. This limitation has a decided effect upon the structure of his earliest compositions, in both prose and verse. Resamund Gray and John Woodvil are practically shapeless, and the poems are usually of a sort which does not require great powers of construction. The annotations to *Specimens of the Dramatic Poets* are well suited to Lamb's abilities in 1808 precisely because no such powers are required. But by the time he is writing the *Elia* essays, he has learned something about structure, and in a few cases he shows that he is ready to give lessons of his own. Elia's admission to the schoolmaster that his "little sketches... [are] any thing but methodical" is a trifle disingenuous, although they are perhaps not written according to the schoolmaster's idea of method. Their structure, like other features of their style, shows the results of a long apprenticeship as a prose writer.
The apprenticeship in the essay itself begins in 1811 with Lamb's contributions to Hunt's \textit{Refl ector}. According to Lucas this paper "gave Lamb his first encouragement to spread his wings with some of the freedom that an essayist demands."\(^2\) Lamb needed more than freedom, however, and Lucas admits that he failed to take full advantage of it: he needed conventional patterns which he could follow in compensation for his own weak powers of construction, and to a degree the essay tradition afforded such patterns. In order to understand what they were like and how they influenced Lamb's essays, it will be useful to consider part of the history of the essay.

Addison is presumably expressing the usual view of his time when, in \textit{Spectator} No. 476, he makes the following distinction:

\begin{quote}
Among my \textit{Daily-Papers}, which I bestow on the Public, there are some which are written with \textit{Regularity} and \textit{Method}, and others that run out into the \textit{Wildness} of those \textit{Compositions}, which go by the Name of \textit{Essays}. As for the first, I have the \textit{whole Scheme} of the \textit{Discourse} in my \textit{Mind}, before I set \textit{Pen} to \textit{Paper}. In the other kind of Writing, it is sufficient that I have several \textit{Thoughts} on a Subject, without troubling my self to range them in such order, that they may seem to grow out of one another, and be disposed under the proper \textit{Heads}. \textit{Seneca} and \textit{Montaigne} are Patterns for Writing in this last Kind, as \textit{Tully} and \textit{Aristotle} excel in the other.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

Whether Addison observes this distinction consistently is unclear. But it does seem clear that structure and regularity of method were not the qualities for which the \textit{Spectator} papers were most noted. It is surely significant
that the critical work which did so much to establish Addison's reputation, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), although it examines the style of several of the *Spectator* papers quite closely, has little or nothing to say about their structure. The essay, like its near relation the epistle, was essentially a loose and informal piece of writing.

In practice, however, the popularity of the *Spectator* led to the essay's development into a more distinct form than that described by Addison. Throughout the century, Addison and Steele were imitated as though they were classical writers, and as a result the conventions of some of their papers became standard. For example, there were the introduction of the "club," involving a series of characters or brief sketches of members; the letter from a reader (real or invented), offering a service or revealing a peculiar and amusing misfortune; and the allegorical dream-vision. These conventions did not completely determine the organization of individual essays. The imitations of the *Spectator* papers by later periodical essayists often show considerable originality, since even the standard forms could be varied indefinitely. But they did provide a foundation for structure which was used by essayists even into the early nineteenth century.

When such conventional forms were not used, the didactic periodical essays tended to follow a loose expository or
argumentative pattern. This too became at least partly conventional. Sir Herbert Read analyzes Goldsmith's "On the Use of Language" and contends that its structure is basic for the didactic essay:

1. A beginning on familiar ground.
2. Announcement of a paradoxical theme, which is to be the subject of the essay.
3. Development of the theme by appeal to common experience, etc.
4. Illustration of the theme by an anecdote.
5. Deductions from the illustration.

This pattern, like the more artificial conventions mentioned above, is variable. Some parts of it may be omitted entirely, and others may be rearranged or multiplied within an essay. But its applicability to many of the didactic essays of the eighteenth century, as well as to the lighter essays of Hunt and of contributors to his journals, suggests that the term no longer had the connotation of "wildness" which it had for Addison.

Lamb's essays in the Reflector show very clearly the structural legacy of the Spectator papers. Many are letters from imaginary correspondents, pleading for sympathy, presenting anecdotes illustrative of their particular misfortunes, and drawing paradoxical conclusions which are, at least in intention, amusing. The didactic tone of the eighteenth-century essay has almost disappeared, but the structure remains. "On the Danger of Confounding Moral with Personal Deformity" fits Read's outline almost exactly. "Crito" begins with casual and allusive observations upon
reading "the mind's construction in the face," or the general difficulty of judging people by their appearance. Then, pretending to have strayed from his purpose, he announces his theme: "How ugly a person looks upon whose reputation some awkward aspersion hangs, and how suddenly his countenance clears up with his character." He proceeds by telling of two instances in which he mistook the character of a person because of a forbidding appearance, and by referring generally to "advertisements offering rewards for the apprehension of absconded culprits" in which the advertiser exaggerates the culprit's deformities. The main example is an advertisement of this kind, quoted in full, with Crito's comments. With mock formality, he then lays down five rules for framing such advertisements; and finally, realizing that he is "getting unawares too serious," he concludes with a statement warning against confounding "crimes with ugliness."

The critical essays on Shakespeare's tragedies and on Hogarth, which are more serious in tone, represent variations upon Read's outline. Since Lamb's sense of form was weak this inherited pattern became all the more useful. He could concentrate upon other aspects of style without facing up to a problem which might, at this time, have been beyond his powers to solve: that of discovering a more congenial principle of structure.

Structural patterns inherited from the Spectator tradition may be seen repeatedly in Elia as well as in the early essays. They rarely appear without some modification,
but Lamb is still largely dependent upon them. "Grace before Meat" conforms in general to Read's outline, but there is no explicit concluding statement of a moral. "A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars" has a penultimate section, probably inspired by the episode of Yorick and the Franciscan monk in *A Sentimental Journey*, in which Elia broods whimsically upon having refused the plea of a beggar; but this essay concludes with a direct appeal to the reader to show charity. The beginning of "Stage Illusion" is curiously formal for Lamb, but otherwise the structure is that described by Reed. "Modern Gallantry" illustrates one of the most common of Lamb's modifications of the pattern: his frequent repetition of the first-person singular. His paradoxical theme is that the reputation of modern Englishmen for showing a "deferential respect" for women is largely unearned. In appealing to common experience, he lists typical instances by using the repeated formula, "I shall believe in it, when...": "I shall believe in it, when actresses are no longer subject to be hissed off a stage by gentlemen."

The essay next gives a fairly extended account of one practitioner of true gallantry, and concludes by applying the theme to women themselves, who are asked to act in a manner deserving of men's respect. This essay, except for the recurrent first-person singular, is more Addisonian in both tone and structure than most in *Elia*; but many others show some structural indebtedness to the tradition.
Elia also contains a few examples of the more artificial Spectator forms. "A Bachelor's Complaint" had appeared as a letter from a complainant before the Elia series began, and despite some changes the epistolary qualities are retained. There was one allegorical dream-vision, "A Vision of Horns," but Lamb disliked it so much that it was not reprinted. Charles Whitmore points out another survival of Spectator conventions: the burlesque adaptation of a scholarly or formal method to a commonplace subject. Just as the Spectator paper on the fan (No. 102) is "a mock explanation of a process," and that on the Cato Call (No. 361) "gives the various theories on the subject offered by learned friends," so some of the Elia essays at least suggest the application of a scholarly form to trivial or whimsical matter:

- The Dissertation on Roast Pig... is a mock process;
- The Two Races of Men is a mock division; Imperfect Sympathies is a thesis supported by deliberately humorous examples. We have also the mock encomium... in The Praise of Chimney-sweepers and A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars.

This convention does not of course absolutely determine the structure of the essay, and in the case of the "Decay of Beggars" it is assimilated into Read's outline. But it does provide a skeleton, and at times this is all Lamb needs.

In some cases he appears not to need, or to desire, even this. Some of the essays in Elia either are too brief to require very much organization or are frankly random and digressive. The "Popular Fallacies" are mostly of the first
sort, many of them advancing their paradox or refutation of common opinion in one paragraph. Examples of the second sort are "Some Sonnets of Sir Philip Sydney," which as Daniel Mulcahy says is more like the notes in Specimens of the Dramatic Poets than it is like an essay,\(^\text{11}\) and "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," which is almost as loosely constructed as the title suggests. Occasionally, as in "All Fools' Day," and "Rejoicings upon the New Year's Coming of Age," the structure is simply that of a series of character portraits, with a unifying scheme such as that of a feast. In the few cases in which essays have been revised extensively for their reappearance in book form, it is difficult to judge how far structural aims are the cause. The three-part essay "On Some of the Old Actors" is considerably reduced in length when it appears as three essays in the collected edition; and despite the fact that one of these, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," concludes by breaking off in the middle of the sketch of one actor, its unity is in some ways superior to that of the original.\(^\text{12}\)

But the excised portion contains one of Lamb's wittiest passages, his account of the disastrous performance of Godwin's play, \textit{Antonio}.\(^\text{13}\) It seems unlikely that he would surrender a brilliant passage merely for the sake of unity--especially when the resulting unity is very questionable. The essay was probably shortened for reasons of space.

The truth seems to be that Lamb was not really comfortable with the conventional forms of the \textit{Spectator} tradition.
They were of use to him when he began writing, and he never entirely freed himself from them; but his literary gifts and the aesthetic ideas which he shared with, and perhaps derived from, Coleridge called for a more subjective, idiosyncratic principle of structure. One of the early essays gives an indication that he was searching, perhaps unconsciously, for such a principle, but this essay cannot be considered a realization of it. As noted earlier, "On the Genius and Character of Hogarth" is constructed in at least a loose conformity to Read's pattern. Since it deals with a fairly wide range of Hogarth's prints, there are some subdivisions: the relatively serious and satiric pictures, such as the Rake's Progress and Gin Lane, are discussed separately from the more obviously comic, such as the Enraged Musician and March to Finchley. This arrangement is not rigid, but it is orderly and some of the transitions are explicitly marked.

The trouble with this plan is that it runs counter to the thesis of the essay. Lamb maintains that the true genius of Hogarth transcends both his choice of subjects and such superficial classifications as serious and comic. The truly essential qualities of his pictures may be perceived by viewers with properly active imaginations. This thesis therefore depends upon, not an objective classification into kinds, but the subjective viewpoint of an ideally imaginative observer. This is the reason for the oddly intimate
first paragraph, which goes beyond anything implied by Read's phrase, "A beginning on familiar ground":

One of the earliest and noblest enjoyments I had when a boy was in the contemplation of those capital prints by Hogarth, the Harlot's and Rake's Progresses, which, along with some others, hung upon the walls of a great hall in an old-fashioned house in --shire, and seemed the solitary tenants (with myself) of that antiquated and life-deserted apartment. (I,70)

Lamb is introducing himself as the ideal observer, whose experience in viewing Hogarth's pictures is a ripe and profound one. He is thus able to guide the reader toward a better understanding of an artist who at the time was commonly regarded as vulgar and ambitious merely "to raise a laugh."

Almost immediately after this paragraph, Lamb introduces a metaphor which is extended throughout the essay and which serves partly as a structural principle supplementing the standard expository pattern. To the perceptive viewer, Hogarth's pictures are comparable to works of literature:

His graphic representations are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of words. Other pictures we look at,--his prints we read. (I,71)

The "reading" metaphor is repeated with variations: the Rake's Progress is compared to Timon of Athens, the last plate of Rake's Progress to King Lear, Hogarth's sense of comedy to that of Smollett, Gin Lane to Shakespeare's Lucrece, and the essay concludes by comparing Hogarth's realism to that of Smollett and Fielding. It should be
emphasized that these comparisons are largely, if not wholly, metaphorical: Lamb is not referring to "reading" in a literal sense or to the allegorical explications which Hogarth's pictures in many ways invite. In fact he seems to have shared the nineteenth-century bias against allegory. Rather, they are subjective comparisons intended to express the essential qualities of the pictures, and thus are truly metaphorical. The picture of the Rake in Bedlam makes an appeal to the imagination and to the moral faculties which justifies a comparison with Lear on the heath, despite the superficial differences in subject.

The sustaining of this metaphor throughout the essay adds a binding force to that provided by the conventional structure. The two do not harmonize, and certainly the repetitions of the metaphor do not constitute the principal organizational scheme. The divisions of the conventional pattern are too well marked for it not to be dominant. But the sustained metaphor is organically related to Lamb's thesis—indeed, it is in a sense the thesis—and because it reflects his own view of the subject it leads to a method of organization which is particularly congenial to him.

It is only in Elia that a subjective principle of structure does completely govern some essays. Richard Haven deserves considerable credit for having first explained the application of this principle to Elia, and although he discusses only two essays, the implications of his idea go much
further. They do not, it should be said at once, extend to all or even most of the Elia essays. As already noted, many of them are indebted to Spectator conventions, and in fact somewhat less than a third are constructed according to the subjective principle. But its importance is greater than the proportion would suggest. It strengthens the claim of the essay to be considered a work of art comparable to the lyric poem. And Lamb's use of it shows that the difference between the new "familiar" essay and the didactic essay of the eighteenth century was not limited to matters of tone and subject.

Haven explains Lamb's new structural principle as essentially that of Romantic poetry applied to the essay. He summarizes its use in poetry as follows:

One of the distinguishing features of much "romantic" poetry as compared with the poetry of the preceding century is the replacement of an external "public" principle of structure by one that is internal and "private." The poet, that is, neither defines his private, unique experience in terms of the general, the abstract, nor does he use the particular experience merely as a point of departure for a public discourse. He rather invites the reader to share a unique experience, and it is this which determines the form of his poem. We are presented not with a rationally ordered sequence, but with a psychologically ordered movement of consciousness.

Many readers must have observed how often an essay from Elia begins with a personal experience or an objective situation. This experience or situation is often used as a foundation upon which a subjective, imaginative structure is to be built. The nature of the subject--its relation to the
author and to his friends, its setting, its position in
time—determines the movement of Elia's mind, which, often
with the assistance of an extended metaphor, in turn deter-
mines the structure of an essay. Apparent digressions,
abrupt breaks or shifts in tense, afterthoughts, all of
these are likely to have a structural relevance based upon
the movement of the author's mind. This is not to say that
a digression is not sometimes just a digression. The test
is whether all the elements are reconciled to the central
theme or subjective pattern; in other words, whether the de-
sign of the essay gives the impression of completeness and
unity. As works of the imagination, they must fit Lamb's
own definition of the imagination as "that power which draws
all things to one."

By its very nature this principle of structure is re-
sistant to generalization: each essay tends to be organized
according to a unique pattern. For this reason it will be
necessary to analyze several examples in the remainder of
this chapter, pointing out resemblances when they seem rele-
vant. Haven bases his discussion of Lamb's "Romantic art"
upon "Old China" and "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple."
He is surely correct in calling "Old China" "Lamb's most
perfectly finished essay," and since its structure is more
apparent than that of most, it might be best to begin with
it.
On the surface, the essay consists of two monologues enclosed by descriptions of and reflections upon the painted figures on china tea cups. Elia's admiration of the charming, though absurd, figures--"a young and courtly Mandarin, handing tea to a lady" and others like them--is based largely upon their changeless and ideal qualities. They are "little, lawless, azure-tinted grotesques," which exist in a "world before perspective." His satisfaction with them, however, prompts Bridget's monologue, a lament for the simpler but more deeply felt pleasures of their younger days. The relation between her speech and the figures on the cup has been noted by other readers, Derocquigny for example:

Elle est absurde sa plainte, absurde de bout en bout, absurde et dans sa forme et dans son fond. Et cependent elle est charmante comme ces "absurdes petits grotesques couleur d'azur...." 

Her speech is actually a plea for a suspension of the laws of time and change, which is impossible outside the ideal "world before perspective" represented by the cup. Elia's speech includes a recognition of this impossibility and at the same time an expression of sympathetic regret. He too would give much to return to relative poverty, but only if it could be accompanied by youth, an element of its charm which Bridget has forgotten. The essay concludes with Elia's calling attention once more to the world of the cup:

"And now do just look at that merry little Chinese waiter holding an umbrella, big enough for a bed tester, over the head of that pretty insipid half-Madona-ish chit of a lady in that very blue summerhouse." (II, 252)
The structure of the essay is thus based upon the relation between its ostensible subject, the china, and the subjective response of the two speakers. Haven explains it in the following way:

The description of the china...serves to create a tension between internal and external, between real and ideal. It also serves to control that tension. Like Coleridge's still and frosty weather [in "Frost at Midnight"], the china provides the point of stasis from which the essay begins and to which it returns.20

Haven also goes one step further than this. Citing the similarities between the essay and Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," he insists upon the essential identity of the china, "the work of art in the essay" and "the work of art, the essay, which contains it":

For the aging human beings with their changing thoughts and feelings are also fixed in words like the figures fixed in glaze. In the essay, Bridget and Elia are also quaint and changeless, "grotesques...that under the notion of men and women, float about, uncircumscribed by any element," free from the "angles of our world."21

In a sense, this is of course true. Without following up all the implications of the analogy with Keats's ode, however, one could object that this merging of form and content, this perfect resolution, destroys part of the tension that Haven admires in the essay. Elia's speech places both himself and Bridget outside the changeless world of the tea cup. They can only regard it with amusement and wistfulness as they sit at tea. The source of the tension is that the
"angles" of time and change which govern their world are inescapable. The essay contains the china, the "world before perspective," as Haven says; but it does not contain the world of Bridget and Elia in the same way. The lines of perspective point outside the frame of the essay, to the whole of their younger days and to their future. Clearly, the china is, as Haven says, "more than a simple frame, more than an occasion for the monologues." But to see Elia's and Bridget's past as something "fixed in glaze" runs counter to Lamb's characteristic treatment of time and of human life. His way is to emphasize process and change, as he does in this essay.

This emphasis upon process and change is even stronger in the other essay discussed by Haven, "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple." Again there appears to be a frame-like structure: the portraits of the old Benchers within the described details concerning the Temple and "Its church, its halls, its gardens, its fountain, its river." But the images associated with the Temple, like the china, refer to the world of Elia's mind as well as to concrete objects, and their relation to the portraits is closer than that of a mere frame. Haven explains their function as follows:

But this description does not only serve to introduce us into the physical situation. It also applies to the experience which will follow as we are led "for the first time" and "by unexpected avenues" into the garden of his childhood "where the fountain plays...." And it is here too that we are reminded of the passage of time by the "now almost effaced sun dials...seeming coevals with the Time which they measured."
In the world of childhood into which Elia leads the reader, the Benchers themselves are found: ordinary people to the adult eye, to the world "of men, and mannish," but of mythical proportions to the eye of childhood. Thomas Coventry is especially impressive, "presque apocalyptique," as Derocquigny observes, and Haven emphasizes his kinship with the grotesque statues and even the sun dial of the Temple. All the Benchers become part of the setting, which is transfigured in the light of Elia's imagination.

Like Wordsworth, Lamb sees the source of man's imagination in childhood. In this essay the image of the fountain symbolizes this source. Seen first as a concrete object in one of the gardens, it was "made to rise and fall, how many times! to the astoundment of the young urchins, my contemporaries, who, not being able to guess at its recondite machinery, were almost tempted to hail the wondrous work as magic!" In the next sentence, the sun dials are described as "holding correspondence with the fountain of light," as they enter the imaginative world of Elia's memory. Finally, at the end of the essay, the image is made yet more metaphorical:

Let the dreams of classic idolatry perish,—extinct be the fairies and fairy trumpery of legendary fabeling,—in the heart of childhood, there will, for ever, spring up a well of innocent or wholesome superstition.... (II, 90)

The structure of the essay is thus a journey from "the crowded Strand or Fleet-street" into the "classic green
recesses" of the Temple; at the same time it is a journey from the adult world of Elia's present into childhood. But the end of the essay is a look forward: to "the younkers of this generation" and to their "New Benchers of the Inner Temple," to "childhood, and...dreams, reducing [i.e., bringing back] childhood." Elia's own childhood vision, the subject matter of the essay, is not fixed under a glaze; it is vital and points toward its own regeneration in the mind of the reader.

To Lamb, as Hazlitt implies, the past is always vital and fecund. "Antiquity! thou wondrous charm, what art thou? that, being nothing, art every thing!" Elia asks in "Oxford in the Vacation," and the question applies to his own past as well. For this reason, it is usually misleading to speak of a "frame" when discussing the structure of those essays which deal with the past. The essays tend to point outside themselves, into "a remoter antiquity" than that which is the main subject, or forward to the present and the future, as in "Old Benchers." One of the best examples of an essay whose structure is based upon the vitality of the past is the first of the Elia essays, "The South-Sea House." Like the essay on Hogarth, it combines two principles of organization. The series of "characters" of the clerks is perhaps a formal legacy of the Spectator tradition, the introduction of the "club." There are of course many important differences: the clerks are not intended to reappear in Elia; they are not primarily types, but idiosyncratic individuals;
and they are seen in the perspective of memory, rather than as representatives of the present. It is useful, however, to notice the superficial resemblances, because the structure of the essay is partly conventional: the introduction of the House, followed in a rather orderly succession by the portraits of the more memorable clerks, and concluded on a brief note of mystification—perhaps, as Lucas suggests, a discretionary attempt to offset the use of the clerks' real names. But unlike the essay on Hogarth, this essay's pro-founder structure is subjective.

The main subject, the House itself, is seen through several layers of past time. The initial question, "didst thou never observe," is asked from the standpoint of the present: "Here are still to be seen stately porticos," etc. It is a present, however, which is merely the basis for repeated references to the past; the word "still" in the preceding quotation keeps the idea of the past before the attention of the reader. Very soon it is revealed that even the slight foundation of the present has been feigned:

Such is the South-Sea House. At least, such it was forty years ago, when I knew it,—a magnificent relic! (II, 2)

The House was a relic even forty years ago, in contrast to the vitality of its own past—before the "Bubble" of 1720. These layers of past time are characteristically made concrete by a series of metaphors, which introduce the
structural principle of the essay:

Time, I take for granted, has not freshened it. No wind has resuscitated the face of the sleeping waters. A thicker crust by this time stagnates upon it. The moths, that were then battering upon its obsolete ledgers and day-books, have rested from their depredations, but other light generations have succeeded, making fine fretwork among their single and double entries. Layers of dust have accumulated (a superfoetation of dirt!) upon the old layers, that seldom used to be disturbed, save by some curious finger, now and then, inquisitive to explore the mode of bookkeeping in Queen Anne's reign...(II,2)

The most conspicuous word in the passage, "superfoetation," suggests the richness and vitality which the "Layers of dust"--that is, of time and memory--carry within them.

Elia's function is to provide the "curious finger" to explore the layers of time, in order to reveal the life and complexity which are both concealed and stored by them.

The essay leads the reader to the heart of the subject as though it were following pictorial lines of perspective--rather as "Old Benchers" led to the Temple. The buildings surrounding the South-Sea House, with their "stirring and living commerce" and their "fret and fever of speculation," accentuate its "quiet and indolence." The movement is thus from the busy scene surrounding the House, inward to its "great bare rooms"; from there, since these rooms suggest the past and memory, the movement is further inward, into Elia's own mind; from this most intensely concentrated point, the movement is outward--out into the imaginative freedom and
complexity of memory. Each of the dead clerks is revivified, and each is seen in terms of his individual past. In each case too, the past is imagined as large and vital in comparison with the clerk's present; the clerk is a node into which its lines have converged. Evans, for example, though "Melancholy as a gib-cat" at work, "dilates into secret history" at tea, a history which involved "the site of old theatres, churches, streets gone to decay," as well as history in a broader sense:

...many a pleasant anecdote, derived from paternal tradition, of those grotesque figures which Hogarth has immortalized in his picture of Noon,—the worthy descendants of those heroic confessors, who, flying to this country, from the wrath of Louis the Fourteenth and his dragoons, kept alive the flame of pure religion in the sheltering obscurities of Hog-lane, and the vicinity of the Seven Dials! (II,4)

Hogarth's picture, like Lamb's essay, points outward from its frame into the past.

With the other clerks the past takes other forms, but it is similarly important. Thomas Tame endures "the night of intellect" and "obscurity of...station" because of his wife's pretensions to a descent from an aristocratic family. Plumer also is notable chiefly for "his lineal pretensions." "Mild, child-like, pastoral M--" is described in terms of the contrasting character of his father, "old surly M--, the unapproachable churchwarden of Bishopsgate." Even John Tipp, who "neither pretended to high blood, nor in good truth cared one fig about the matter," being completely absorbed in his profession of accountant, is seen partly in terms of the
past, since he occasionally signs "for a return of the old stirring days when South-Sea hopes were young"—that is, before the "Bubble."

Not only is the past a significant part of the character of each clerk, but like the past of the house, it tends to dwarf the present. Just as, to the eyes of Elia, the "great dead tomes," the account books of the South-Sea House, "with their old fantastic flourishes, and decorative rubric interlavings," are so massive that "scarce three degenerate clerks of the present day" could lift them; so to each of the dead clerks, who "partook of the genius of the place," their individual pasts were of greater dimension than their present— that is, at the time when Elia remembers them. Thus, the vitality of Elia's world of memory exceeds the apparently "stirring and living" present.

The structural principle of the essay, like those analyzed by Haven, is that of a "psychologically ordered movement of consciousness." In this case, however, it does not return to the "point of stasis" at which it begins. The "superfetation" of Lamb's subject is infinite, and the conclusion must be a rather arbitrary shutting off of the essay's growth. "Much remains to sing," says Elia at the conclusion, and his attempt to stop the succession of clerks is made to seem difficult: two new names slip out in this short paragraph. The formula which is used to halt the process—"But it is time to close"—seems uninspired, but it is at
least consistent with the expanding structure of the essay, which has no inevitable and natural stopping point.

The structure of "New Year's Eve" resembles that of the essays previously discussed in a number of ways. Like "The South-Sea House," its structure is based upon a complex view of time; like the essay on Hogarth, it includes an extended metaphor—"Every man hath two birthdays"--; and like "Old China" it begins at a point of stasis to which it returns. The metaphor involves an ambivalent view of time: like birthdays, the birth of the New Year prompts a Janus-like vision—"It is that from which all date their time, and count upon what is left." The initial movement of the essay is backward, to the previous night's celebration of the passing of the Old Year, where Elia's companions "affected...to manifest an exhilaration at the birth of the coming year."

The bells which accompanied this celebration, however, have prompted Elia to continue the retrospective movement:

I never hear it without a gathering-up of my mind to a concentration of all the images that have been diffused over the past twelvemonth; all I have done or suffered, performed or neglected--in that regretted time. I begin to know its worth, as when a person dies. (II, 27)

The backward movement of Elia's mind does not stop with the past twelvemonth; it continues until it includes "the child Elia--that 'other me,' there, in the background." This movement, and the first half of the essay, comes to a stopping point which is also marked by the ringing of bells: the "midnight chimes" of the same ceremony as it was observed
when Elia was a child.

From this point, the movement is forward. The idea of death has been implicit in the "birth-day" metaphor from the beginning, and it becomes the theme of the second half of the essay:

But now, shall I confess a truth?—I feel these audits but too powerfully. I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods, like miser's farthings. (II, 29)

The forward movement is expressed mostly in negative terms, Elia's protests against the traditional consolatory metaphors. But it is forward all the same, and Elia's insistence upon the present—"this green earth" and "the face of town and country"—is intensified by precisely this forward vision toward death. The essay concludes with the "turncoat bell, that just now mournfully chanted the obsequies of 1820 departed," and now "with changed notes lustily rings in a successor." Elia's thoughts too have reversed themselves, and fortified by the lines from Charles Cotton, he looks forward with a resolute cheerfulness. As was noted in the first chapter, this view is rather like Wordsworth's sober "eye That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality," in that it has been supported by the memory of childhood, of the "other" Elia, and has been chastened and given depth by the thoughts of death.

As Horace Smith noted in the London Magazine two months after this essay appeared, the Janus image in Cotton's poem
is meant to apply to Elia himself:

He! I exclaimed, thou art the very Janus who hast always delighted in antithetical presentments; who lovest to exhibit thy tragic face in its most doleful gloom, that thou mayst incontinently turn upon us the sunshine of thy comic smile.27

The structure of the essay is indeed an "antithetical presentment," governed by the Janus-like thoughts of Elia. Smith's idea of the "comic smile" is perhaps too bluff and unquestioning—the tone of the conclusion shares the ambiguity of Cotton's own view of the New Year. To a modern reader, this tone is likely to seem too close to the characteristic one of A. E. Housman to be summarized as simply "comic." But certainly Smith is correct in his description of the essential movement of the essay, as well as in his identification of the central metaphor.28

Of the essays in Elia which are organized by Lamb's subjective principle, only a few have completely unified designs. Besides those discussed so far, "Blakesmoor in H--shire" seems completely successful. It resembles both "The South-Sea House" and "The Old Benchers" in reanimating a place which has, in some sense, decayed. As Daniel Mulcahy observes:

 Appropriately enough for a work whose surface concern is with the architectural, "Blakesmoor in H--shire" displays a greater amount of structure than many of Lamb's essays. It opens in tranquility (the prelude), then passes into the mixed emotions which Elia experiences as he surveys present bleakness and recalls the cheerful memories of the past, and at last regains tranquility. There is progression in the statements of the motif of resurrection, first encountered
as a half-despairing question ("How shall they build it up again?")}, then as a promise ("Re-
surgam"), and finally as what is called a "hope," but is in reality fulfillment.29

This essay resembles "Old Benchers" also in its Wordsworth-
ian view of time and change. It looks backward to childhood,
to a time when the house was alive to the child's imagina-
tion—when, for example, its tapestries were seen as "not
adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots." It is here
that Elia finds the source of the future life of the des-
troyed house, which is now an ideal, and is to be rebuilt by
the mature imagination. The essay concludes:

I sometimes think that as men, when they die, do
not die all, so of their extinguished habitations
there may be a hope—a germ to be revivified. (II,157)

"Dream-children" also, although it consists of only an
extended paragraph, presents a complete imaginative experi-
ence. The structure is determined partly by the appropriate-
ly dreamlike associations: the story of the two "Children
in the Wood" with Elia's two dream-children; the imaginative
impairing of life to "the old busts of the Twelve Caesars"
with the imaginative creation of the children; and as the
final association, the actual death of John L. with the dis-
appearance, upon Elia's awakening, of the children them-
selves. The dream structure is that of the "true poet," as
Lamb conceives of it in "Sanity of True Genius," who "dreams
being awake":

...the transitions...are every whit as violent as
in the most extravagant dream, and yet the waking
judgment ratifies them. (II,189)
Some essays which begin as more or less conventional forms take more original shapes as they proceed. "The Convalescent" appears to be a traditional "character," a form which usually begins by introducing the subject and proceeds in its accumulation by paradoxes and antitheses without any very evident structural plan. But Lamb concentrates upon the convalescent's varying subjective states, the alternate contraction and expansion of his field of interest, in a way which makes the essay very unlike the conventional character. "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist" also begins as a character portrait, but Elia's own views are gradually introduced so that the essay becomes a sort of dialogue. There may even be a suggestion, in its structure, of one of Mrs. Battle's card games: an array of her "opinions," followed by Elia's mild demurrer--his objection to colorless and imageless cards--Mrs. Battle's opinions again, from a slightly different point of view, and the hand concluded by Elia's defense of "sick whist."

But even those essays which are not completely unified are often structurally interesting. Lamb's predilection for idiosyncrasies of character make it natural for him to present contrasting characters as the organizing principle in parts of some essays. Such characters, instead of being immediately recognizable types, are usually contrasted according to the subjective view of the author: Boyer and Field, the schoolmasters portrayed in "Christ's Hospital
Five and Thirty Years Ago," are presented very subjectively. Sometimes, characters are shown to be complementary. In "Mackery End," the conceit of Elia's and Bridget's living together "in a sort of double singleness" is expanded in the course of the essay. Qualities lacking in Elia—such as the ability to make himself known to "strangers and out-of-date kinsfolk," for example—are supplied by Bridget. Each also supplies memories of the old house which reawaken the memories of the other. This concept of complementary characters partially determines the structure of an essay which is often considered one of Lamb's most unmethidical: "Oxford in the Vacation."

Just as "The South-Sea House" in some ways resembles the conventional introduction of the "club," so "Oxford in the Vacation" is the introduction of the observer, the Mr. Spectator of the Elia series. Addison observes

...that a Reader seldom peruses a Book with Pleasure 'till he knows whether the Writer of it be a black or a fair Man, of a mild or choleric Disposition, Married or a Bachelor, with other Particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right Understanding of an Author. 30

Addison goes on to give a brief, but rounded summary of Mr. Spectator's life and concludes with a statement of his qualifications for the role of observer of mankind. Elia begins with a more fanciful version of Addison's preamble:

Casting a preparatory glance at the bottom of this article—as the wary connoisseur in prints, with cursory eye (which, while it reads, seems as though it read not,) never fails to consult the quis sculpsit in the corner, before he pronounces
some rare piece to be a Vivares, or a Woollet--methinks I hear you exclaim, Reader, Who is Elia? 

Instead of proceeding to a balanced account of himself, Elia proceeds digressively and associatively, revealing only evasive glimpses, and leading in this way to his subject, the vacation itself. Alfred Ainger accepts this practice as simply Lamb's way, which must be indulged by his admirers:

If an Essay is headed Oxford in the Vacation, the reader must not complain that only half the paper touched on Oxford, and that the rest is divided between the writer Elia, and a certain absent-minded old scholar, George Dyer, on whose peculiarities Lamb was never weary of dwelling.

Ainger, like so many other critics, finds the compensation for this lack of method in Lamb's charm. But the essay has more method than Ainger recognizes. Like "The South-Sea House," though less perfectly, it builds up a subjective pattern from the concrete situation which forms its ostensible subject. And the division of the bulk of the essay between Elia and Dyer is not whimsical or accidental, but a deliberate portrayal of two characters which both contrast with and complement one another.

Elia's portrayal of himself makes up the first part of the essay, and he is seen largely in terms of escape. The escape is first from the reality which has trapped him, his profession of accountant:

The enfranchised quill, that has plodded all the morning among the cart-rucks of figures and cyphers, frisks and curvets so at its ease over the flowery carpet-ground of a midnight dissertation.--It feels its promotion. (II, 8)
The essay itself is one such frisking and curving, and it is appropriate that it is composed during an actual interlude of freedom, his vacation at Oxford. This vacation is both a literal account of a momentary freedom from the desk and the basic metaphor: Elia's imaginative vacation from the limitations of matter-of-fact reality. As is usual with him, such freedom involves the past, and in this case his own past is modified in accordance with his wishes:

The walks at these times are so much one's own,—the tall trees of Christ's, the groves of Magdalen! The halls deserted, and with open doors, inviting one to slip in unperceived, and pay a devoir to some Founder, or noble or royal Benefactress (that should have been ours) whose portrait seems to smile upon their over-looked beadsman, and to adopt me for their own. Then, to take a peep in by way at the butteries, and sculleries, redolent of antique hospitality:...ovens whose first pies were baked four centuries ago; and spits which have cooked for Chaucer! Not the meanest minister among the dishes but is hallowed to me through his imagination, and the Cook goes forth a Maniple. (II,9)

For the moment the college is Elia's own, or rather he belongs to it, being "adopted" by the Benefactress who did not, in fact, materialize. In his imagination he becomes a colleague of Chaucer and is thereby "hallowed," no less than the "minister among the dishes."

From this point, Elia's reflections broaden to a speculation upon antiquity itself, and his own attitude is summarized in one question:

...what half Januses are we, that cannot look forward with the same idolatry with which we for ever revert! (II,9)
Elia's view of the past is idolatrous, and more important, it is a willed idolatry: a deliberate reverence for antiquity based upon a disillusionment with the present. This becomes clearer in the succeeding passage, the description of the library.

The library represents the past in its most concentrated form; and it is here that the transition to the portrayal of Dyer occurs. Elia's deliberate reverence for the past requires that he limit his inquiry into its true nature. This limitation is expressed in his attitude toward old books:

I do not want to handle, to profane the leaves, their winding-sheets. I could as soon dislodge a shade. I seem to inhale learning, walking amid their foliage; and the odour of their old moth-scented coverings is fragrant as the first bloom of those sciential apples which grew amid the happy orchard. (II,10)

This passage, with its Garden of Eden imagery and its pun upon "foliage," is extremely complex. In one sense, of course, it is like the description of the account books in "The South-Sea House," in that these books also contain life within their aged covers. But here the books are also the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and Elia is reluctant to touch them. Elia's Garden is an insubstantial one, existing only in the imagination, and like everything connected with the colleges, it represents what was in fact denied to him. To go further than the covers of the books, "those sciential apples" would be to break the illusion which, in his vacation from reality, he has carefully constructed. He must pretend to an innocence which he does not possess, to a past which is different from his actual one.
The transition to Dyer at this point is important. Whereas Elia does not wish to disturb the "moth-scented coverings" of the books, Dyer is "found busy as a moth over some rotten archive." In his eager pursuit of his researches, he has "grown almost into a book." Dyer's character, which is so much a subject of jest elsewhere—and to a degree, in this essay also—is here portrayed as being almost angelically innocent. He dwells "in calm and sinless peace" among the "vermin of the law" at Clifford's-inn. His studies--research into the question of the priority of foundation of the two universities, and into "all curious matter" having to do with their charters--are conducted in innocent imperviousness to the attitudes of the collegians themselves:

Your capsuts, and heads of colleges, care less than any body else about these questions.——Contented to suck the milky fountains of their Alma Maters, without inquiring into the venerable gentlewomen's years, they rather hold such curiosities to be impertinent--unreverend. They have their good glebe lands in manu, and care not to rake into the title-deeds. (II,10-11)

Dyer exists wholly in a world of abstraction—"he is on Mount Tabor—or Parnassus—or co-sphered with Plato"—a fact which makes him disconcerting to those who have a stake in the material world. His world is also different from the imaginary one of Elia. For him it is unnecessary to evade reality, to avoid the "sciential apples." Whereas Elia's imagination transforms the history of a college, making it adopt him (and perhaps Chaucer as well), Dyer merely seeks the truth about the foundation of the colleges. At the end of the essay,
Elia sees him in terms borrowed from the Pilgrim's Progress:

...when he goes about with you to show you the halls and colleges, you think you have with you the Interpreter at the House Beautiful. (II,12)

The essential structure of the essay is another expansion of a concrete subject into a subjective pattern: an actual vacation into an imaginative vacation from reality; or a vacation from the present into an imagined past. Dyer is an objectification of the ideal state: complete freedom from reality and the present, along with a constant, unsophisticated access to the past. It is in this sense that he complements Elia, who can only pretend to such a state. But of course Elia's imagination can include Dyer, and he regards him with a certain degree of irony—just as the unattainable world of the tea cup is treated ironically in "Old China." The essay does not perhaps reconcile all its elements: the protest against the abolition of holidays, for example, although it may be taken as an extension of the metaphorical plea for freedom of the imagination, tends to stand out as an isolated passage. But this is probably a matter of individual judgment. Certainly the structural principle of the essay is akin to that of the other essays discussed in the preceding pages.

Lamb's important achievement in structure is in those essays where it arises subjectively and organically from the concrete subject which he has chosen. "Pure" examples of such essays are rare, probably for two reasons: first, to begin with a private, unique experience in an attempt to
build it up into a coherent essay is to encourage a process of crystallization which will not always succeed—it succeeds perfectly in "Old China," somewhat less well in "Oxford in the Vacation"; second, the "external" methods of organization were inherent in the essay tradition, and Lamb resorts to them in parts of essays which are largely subjective in structure, such as "The South-Sea House" and "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple." The structure of these essays is one more evidence of Lamb's craftsmanship, but it is more than this: it shows that the essay was in the process of becoming a literary form which could serve not only as a vehicle for the expression of theories about the imagination; it could embody these theories as well.

Notes

4. Blair's Lectures are edited by Harold F. Harding and David Potter (Carbondale, Ill., 1965); analyses of Addison's papers are in Vol. I, Lectures 20-23. On Blair's influence upon Addison's reputation, see Bond's introduction to The Spectator, I, xcix-c.
6. Herbert Read, English Prose Style (New York, 1928), p. 77. Read does not document his contention, but it is not difficult to do so. See, for example, Johnson's Idler No. 73; Goldsmith's "Happiness, In a great Measure Dependent on Constitution" from The Bee (this essay has three
anecdotes, but otherwise it conforms to Reed's pattern); and Leigh Hunt's "On Common-Place People," Round Table, Vol. I (despite the appearance of rambling, Hunt follows the pattern).

11. Mulcahy, p. 531.
15. At least this is implied in comments, such as that upon Phineas Fletcher's The Purple Island, Letters, I, 255-256.
22. Haven, p. 139.
27. Quoted in Works, II, 329.

28. The association of the Janus image with the New Year was of course traditional; besides Cotton's poem, Lamb would certainly have known Cowley's "To the New Year," from Pindarique Odes.

29. Mulcahy, pp. 527-528.

30. The Spectator, I, 1.

Chapter Four

Figurative Language

Despite the diversity of form and purpose which is seen in Lamb's diction and syntax and in the structure of his essays, one purpose is fairly constant: all of these elements of style show a controlled effort to create a special frame of reference based upon the unique experience and character of the author. Instead of conforming to the language of ordinary civilized discourse, Lamb devises his own language and his own sequence of ideas. He is thus, as Haven contends, a very Romantic artist and has affinities with the Romantic lyric poets. The fact that Lamb is extremely subjective and idiosyncratic has of course been recognized by almost all his readers, and the "Friend of the late Elia" is made to speak of his "self-pleasing quaintness." But there has perhaps been a tendency, which Haven partially follows, to take the Friend's phrase too literally; in other words, to see Lamb as essentially a "stylist," interested in displaying his eccentric character and manner of speaking for their own sake. This view is widespread and is the basis for such unsympathetic variants as Graham Greene's charge that Lamb self-indulgently puts forward only his "personality," an evasive "social mask of character." 1 Somewhat more sympathetically,
James Sutherland assumes that Lamb's purpose is "to exploit his personality," but he (rather grudgingly) allows that this personality is at least attractive.2

But Lamb is more than simply a stylist or a personality-monger, and despite the eccentricity of his style he is not indifferent to his public. He has not entirely abandoned the tradition of the didactic moral essay. The moral purpose is very evident in an essay such as "Modern Gallantry," which retains much of the form of the eighteenth-century essay, but it is also present in such examples of Romantic art as the two essays discussed by Haven. In both "Old China" and "Old Benchers" there is much that is quite explicitly moralistic. Elia observes that it is wise to reconcile oneself to the need for security as one grows older: "Competence to age is supplementary youth; a sorry supplement indeed, but I fear the best that is to be had."3 In "Old Benchers" he pleads for the preservation of old landmarks, such as the fountain in the square of Lincoln's-inn: "The fashion, they tell me, is gone by, and these things are esteemed childish. Why not then gratify children, by letting them stand? Lawyers, I suppose, were children once."4 The main difference between the moralistic approach of the eighteenth-century didactic essay and that of Lamb is in the greater weight of meaning which, in his case, the style itself carries. The way something is said is an important part of its moral significance: thus, as Geoffrey
Tillotson notes, the "quiet brilliance of 'I suppose'" in the preceding quotation. The phrase implies an ironically skeptical view of an exclusively adult scale of values.

However, in both of these essays and in Lamb's prose generally, the moral purpose does not rest primarily in explicit statements or in incidental turns of phrase, but in the shared subjective experience of the essay as a whole. The fountains, Elia goes on to say, "are awakening images to [children] at least," and for the adult a recognition of their metaphorical significance, as "a well of innocent or wholesome superstition," is intended to be also a reawakening experience. It is good, Lamb believes, to abandon "for a dream-while or so" one's customary standards of right and wrong and one's sense of the boundaries of the real world--for example, the inescapable world of adulthood. Elia says that after accepting temporarily the lawless world of Restoration comedy, "I come back to my cage and my restraint the fresher and more healthy for it. I wear my shackles more contentedly for having respired the breath of an imaginary freedom." A similar effect is one of the aims of Lamb's essays. Elia does not ignore the claims of the world of actuality, as the statement from "Old China" makes clear. But the implication of that essay as a whole is that the metaphorical flight into youth, the "world before perspective" represented by the cups, is in some way salutary.
Even when it is used in single passages, rather than as the structural framework of an essay, metaphor is an important means of conveying Lamb's moral perspective. Almost by definition it represents "an imaginary freedom" from the literal, and even in incidental figures of speech Lamb often emphasizes this freedom. In studying his figurative language it is necessary to depart considerably from the traditional rhetorical theory of its function, which is stated as follows by Hugh Blair: "Simple Expression just makes our idea known to others; but Figurative Language, over and above, bestows a particular dress upon that idea; a dress, which both makes it be remarked, and adorns it." The assumption behind this theory is that the "idea" is essentially complete in itself, the figures of speech being added to make it more persuasive; and indeed this theory has a wide validity. An example is Johnson's distinction between wisdom and its counterfeit, cunning, in *Idler* No. 92. Johnson introduces a simile which is almost a miniature composition. It begins a new paragraph, it is extended with careful parallelism of detail, and it conforms to his concept of the simile as a "short episode":

Cunning differs from wisdom as twilight from open day. He that walks in the sunshine goes boldly forward by the nearest way; he sees that where the path is streight [sic] and even he may proceed in security, and where it is rough and crooked he easily complies with the turns and avoids the obstructions. But the traveller in the dusk fears more as he sees less; he knows there may be danger, and therefore suspects that
he is never safe, tries every step before he
fixes his foot, and shrinks at every noise
lest violence should approach him.6

The simile is an effective adornment of a distinction which
could be made in primarily abstract terms. In fact, as
though to assure himself that his meaning does not depend
upon the figure of speech, Johnson follows his simile with
such an abstract statement:

Wisdom comprehends at once the end and the means,
estimates easiness or difficulty, and is cautious
or confident in due proportion. Cunning discovers
little at a time, and has no other means of certainty
than multiplication of stratagems and super-
fluity of suspicion.9

It could be argued that without the simile the distinction
loses in clarity and that the simile is thus not entirely
ornamental. But even Johnson's moral judgment of the relative
worth of wisdom and cunning is evident in the abstract
statement, and it is obviously not a distortion to speak
of the idea and the figure separately.

The following passage from Lamb's "On the Acting of
Munden" is also highly figurative, but the difference be-
tween it and Johnson's extended simile is an essential one:

...the gusto of Munden antiques and ennobles
what it touches. His pots and ladles are as
grand and primal as the seething-pots and hooks
seen in old prophetic vision. A tub of butter,
contemplated by him, amounts to a Platonic idea.
He understands a leg of mutton in its quiddity.
He stands wondering, amid the common-place mate-
rials of life, like primæval man with the sun
and stars about him. (II, 149)

Although the series of figures is an elaboration of the
first sentence, which is itself partly figurative, it would
be very difficult to devise a paraphrase or summary which accurately expresses Lamb's thought. "Munden is, in his own way, a very fine comic actor": this is, of course, the general idea of the passage, and this summary does convey in a very crude way an evaluation of Munden; but the figures are less an ornament added to it than the substantiation of the phrase, "in his own way." This substantiation involves not only the great complexity of the subject, Munden's art, in the way that Johnson's simile conveys primarily the complexity of the two qualities as they affect human behavior; it also expresses a series of subjective, imaginative senses in which Munden's art has value. To appreciate Munden as Lamb (or Elia) does is to see, as both Lamb and Munden do, the "grand and primal" qualities in "the common-place materials of life." Without the figures of speech, these meanings are not expressed at all.

Unlike Johnson, Lamb does not consider the dependence of an idea upon the language in which it is expressed to be a stylistic defect. As noted in the first chapter, his metaphors are usually word-centered rather than highly sensory. Conversely, his words are not those of a literal-minded writer, but constantly tend toward metaphor. In the passage on Munden, for example, the phrase, "A tub of butter," is not simply the literal name of a thing which is figuratively said to be "a Platonic idea." It is also a synecdoche representing "common-place materials." Furthermore, because
of the stylistic context and the vividness of the phrase itself (not "mere butter" or "a container of butter") it has a variety of tonal or affective meanings even before it is figuratively transformed into "a Platonic idea." The use of this phrase, rather than a merely adequate, colorless one, implies an imaginative view of the powers of language which already approaches Munden's transmuting art. As Henri Fluchère says, speaking of Sterne's language:

> Words have a sort of magical value in addition to their nominating and defining function, a value in themselves, like the gleam from a spark, which can shed a new light and consequence on statement or trigger off a whole series of logical or comical effects....

It is through a recognition of the extra-literal powers of words that Lamb emphasizes the liberating effects of figurative language.

This does not mean that Lamb never uses figures of speech in the ordinary sense, or even that the ornamental theory has no application to his style. This chapter will first deal with those metaphors, similes, and other figures which are primarily conventional in that they are embellishments of ideas that could be clearly expressed without them. Their effect upon the tone of individual passages is important, and in Lamb's case the tone is often indicative of a moral attitude toward his subject, and indirectly toward the reader. Second, his interest in figurative language and in distinctions between literal and figurative meanings is sometimes explicit. Even in brief and casual allusions to
such distinctions, his concept of figurative language as an index of character and as a liberating influence is often seen. Equally important is his recognition of the limits of this influence. Finally, and most important, the essentially figurative basis of extended passages of Lamb's prose will be analyzed. These passages are plentiful, and their combination of metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and other figures into a complex figurative idiom is perhaps the most important single feature of Lamb's prose style.

I

From his early efforts as a "paragraph-monger," writing elaborate conceits upon pink stockings and other trivia at "Sixpence a joke," to the Elia essays, Lamb's figurative language is quite literally part of his stock in trade. As he reveals in "Newspapers Thirty-Five Years Ago," his employment by the Morning Post required an almost constant search for subjects which were "invitatory of shrewd conceits, and more than single meanings."

The paragraphs which resulted from these searches were purely commercial products—filler, in fact—and while their style and tone might reveal something about fashions and tastes of the times, they are hardly worth studying for their own sake.

In the Reflector essays there are many figures of speech which probably show the influence of this early employment. "On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatres" describes various
ways of condemning plays, each metaphorically expressed in rather labored variants of snake imagery. But even in these early essays, there are some uses of figurative language which are effective in establishing the tone of a passage, and thus in suggesting the author's attitude toward his subject. "Edax on Appetite," the complaint of a man whose appetite is unceasing, is for the most part a light piece of comic invention. But the metaphors in the following sentence are a bit more than that:

> What would I not give to exchange this fierce concoctive and digestive heat,—this rabid fury which vexes me, which tears and torments me,—for your quiet, mortified, hermit-like, subdued, and sanctified stomachs,—your cool, chastened inclinations, and coy desires for food! (I,123)

The figures are embellishments of a meaning that can easily be paraphrased: What would I not give to exchange this vexing, inordinate appetite for a more seemly, moderate one? What they add is a comically ironic perspective upon the supposed seemliness of a moderate appetite. Edax's misfortune is one of social rejection, and the exaggerated terms in which it is expressed—making him into a man possessed by a demon, cast out from the "sanctified" circle of his friends—is part of the comedy. The consumption of food in a greater or lesser quantity becomes an issue of damnation or salvation.

Some figures of speech which establish a similar comic tone are not greatly different in form from that in Johnson's Idler essay. The following passage, instead of arraying metaphors in a series, as in the preceding example, develops
a simile with some consistency. The example is from "A Bachelor's Complaint," and Elia (or "Innuptus" in its earlier appearance in the Reflector) is speaking of the wives of newly married friends:

Every long friendship, every old authentic intimacy, must be brought into their office to be new stamped with their currency, as a sovereign Prince calls in the good old money that was coined in some reign before he was born or thought of, to be new marked and minted with the stamp of his authority, before he will let it pass current in the world. You may guess what luck generally befalls such a rusty piece of metal as I am in these new mintings. (II,129-130)

The paraphrase which could be made from this passage would retain even more of the total meaning than that of the previous example, but it would be almost neutral in tone. The comic tone results from the surprisingly detailed correspondence of the simile to the subject of the passage—even down to the rejection of unacceptable, or "rusty" friends—and from the implication that newly-married wives are likely to assume royal prerogatives.

There is a tendency for any figure of speech to affect the tone of a passage, and at times it is difficult to control. Lamb's own control is not always firm, especially in the early essays, which for the most part are intended to have only the slightest of meanings. Occasionally a metaphor will impart a greater meaning than Lamb intends, or else a different meaning. In the essay "On the Dangers of Confounding Moral with Personal Deformity," there is a passage which, though somewhat satiric, generally shares the light
tone of the essay as a whole. "Crito" gives an account of
the deceptiveness of first impressions:

Ask the married man, who has been so but for a
short space of time, if those blue eyes where, dur­ing so many years of anxious courtship, truth,
sweetness, serenity, seemed to be written in char­
acters which could not be misunderstood—ask him
if the characters which they now convey be exactly
the same?—if for truth he does not read a dull
virtue (the mimic of constancy) which changes not,
only because it wants the judgment to make a pre­
ference?...if for serenity he does not read animal
tranquility, the dead pool of the heart, which no
breeze of passion can stir into health? (I,64)

The extended conceit upon "reading" sets the dominant tone,
but the "dead pool" metaphor has somber overtones which
would be more appropriate elsewhere. It is certainly felic­i­
tous and striking in itself, which probably explains why
Lamb retains it, but it suggests Elia in his "doleful gloom,"
as Horace Smith calls it. The ability to invent metaphors
with at least the appearance of spontaneity was one of Lamb's
most important comic resources, but his very fertility in­
creased his chances of going wrong.

Even greater skill in controlling the tone is required
when Lamb attempts, as he frequently does, a combination of
the comic and the sentimental. Here too, figures of speech
are the chief means of control, and the results are occa­
sionally open to question. The following passage from "The
Praise of Chimney-Sweepers" is an example:

I have a kindly yearning towards these dim
specks--poor blots--innocent blacknesses--
I reverence these young Africans of our own
growth--these almost clergy imps, who sport
their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind. (II,109)

The tone is precarious, because the verbal wit might easily suggest an unfeeling or mocking treatment of misery. Lamb's aim is probably clear enough: he wishes to avoid the spirit of sentimental benevolence current in his time, which, one gathers from his comments elsewhere, led all too readily to a complacent regard from one's own humanitarian virtue--one could not "relish a beggar-man, or a gipsy, for thinking of the suitable improvement." At the same time, he wishes to express real sympathy, or "a kindly yearning." The danger is that the figurative language comes close to suggesting that chimney-sweepers are merely to be "relished" for their oddity --or perhaps for the opportunity they afford of devising ingenious conceits. Blake's greater success with the same subject may be an indication that it should be treated at a greater distance, which he accomplishes by letting the chimney-sweepers speak. Lamb's verbal ingenuity establishes a certain distance, but the style retains too much of the direct voice of the moral essayist.

The tonal effect of figurative language is probably more consistently successful when Lamb is being satiric. The satiric tone appears frequently in Lamb's literary criticism, which is often sharp enough to make one wonder how the myth of the "gentle Elia" gained such a foothold. When he wishes to emphasize some pettiness of artistic aim or some bathetic
effect in a poem or play, metaphors are often useful. For instance, there is his expression of contempt for the "happy ending" version of *King Lear*:

Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily. (1,107)

The metaphor alludes to the Lord’s terrible reply to Job (41:1-2):

Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?  
or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down?  
Canst thou put an hook into his nose?

Both the magnitude of Tate’s presumption and Lamb’s estimate of the greatness of *King Lear* are effectively conveyed by the metaphor. A non-figurative paraphrase might express disapproval, but it could hardly have a similar impact.

When he is sufficiently provoked, Lamb can be critical of persons as well as of books and plays. Although he later regretted writing it, his letter to Southey is one of his best efforts in this vein, and the following passage shows his use of figures for satiric effect. Southey had written of the unsound religious tendencies of the *Elia* essays, and Elia responds by acknowledging his occasional weakness of faith and by contrasting two types of believers:

I do not accuse you of this weakness. There are some who tremblingly reach out shaking hands to the guidance of Faith—Others who stoutly venture into the dark (their Human Confidence their leader, whom they mistake for Faith); and, investing themselves beforehand with Cherubic wings, as they fancy, find their new robes as familiar, and fitting to their supposed growth and stature in
godliness, as the coat they left off yesterday--
Some whose hope totters upon crutches--Others
who stalk into futurity upon stilts. (I, 227)
The metaphors and personifications in this passage con­
tribute so heavily to its satiric import that to call them
ornamental is perhaps to stretch the term a bit. The
paraphrase would be simply a matter-of-fact comparison:
There are those whose faith is tentative and weak; and
there are those whose faith is, like their self-confidence
in worldly affairs, unwavering. Southey's presumption and
priggishness are expressed almost entirely by the figures,
some of which are especially appropriate in that their
imagery seems borrowed from Don Juan and The Vision of
Judgment.

Just as Lamb's comic tone is often mixed with sentimen­
tality, so his satire is often more qualified than it is in
the passage from the letter to Southey. Solicitude for a
friend's feelings may accompany a necessary sharpness or a
witty placing of an issue in perspective. In "Unitarian
Protests" Elia mildly reproves a Unitarian friend, who has
made a formal protest after having been married by the Church
of England; only such marriages were recognized as legal in
Lamb's time. The reproval is based upon the mere formality
of the protest, which to Elia argues a lack of sincerity,
contrasting with the more thoroughgoing protests of the
Quakers. The essay concludes with the following comment
upon the laws requiring marriage in the Church of England:

Sad worldly thorns they are indeed, and stumbling blocks, well worthy to be set out of the way by a legislature calling itself Christian; but not likely to be removed in a hurry by any shrewd legislators, who perceive that the petitioning complainants have not so much as bruised a shin in the resistance; but, prudently declining the briers and the prickles, nestle quietly down in the smooth two-sided velvet of a Protesting Occasional Conformity. (I,267)

Both the justice of the friend's complaint and the implications of his form of protest are perfectly expressed by the metaphors. A literal paraphrase is certainly possible:
Such laws are unjust and should be repealed; but they are not likely to be repealed if the complainants do not appear to suffer from them, and if in fact they accommodate themselves to these laws. But such a paraphrase makes the author seem merely earnest, and Lamb is aiming at something more complex than earnestness.

Lamb's affectionate treatment of the past has already been noted several times, and the ardent tone which often dominates such passages is also created partly by means of figurative language. The following reminiscent account of Elia's childhood at "Blekesmoor" is typical:

I was here as in a lonely temple. Snug firesides—the low-built roof—parlours ten feet by ten—frugal boards, and all the homeliness of home—these were the condition of my birth—the wholesome soil which I was planted in. (II,155)

The suggestions of worship and plant-like growth, placed here alongside a literal description of some of the details of his life in Hertfordshire, are indications of Elia's mature
appreciation of this life. Even the literal details, with their epithets and other charged words—"snug," "homeliness"—convey some part of his affection, but the figures add both an emotional and a moral dimension: Elia's reverent perception of the importance of the old house to the whole of his life.

There is one class of figurative expression which is both plentiful and characteristic enough to deserve separate consideration: Lamb's literary allusions. They are often in the form of metaphors which, by bringing the loftier tone of a serious or even heroic work into his essays, cast an ironic light upon the everyday situations being described. Thus he draws upon Coleridge's "Ode to the Departing Year" to speak of "the 'lidleless dragoon eyes,' of present fashionable tragedy," with its resolute exclusion of comic scenes. Thus also he refers to singers of oratorios as "tearers of devotion to rags and tatters," to a lottery ticket as a "promissory shower of gold" which is to obtain for its holder "his otherwise unattainable Danae," and to himself (or Elia), echoing Il Penseroso, as "Retired Leisure."16

One of the most characteristic forms of allusion in Lamb's prose is antonomasia. He has a correspondent to the Reflector speak of persistently taunting acquaintances as "rude (because faithful) Achateses"; he laments the prevalence of affectation and coquettishness among actresses,
referring to them as "the Dalilahs of the stage"; Elia calls a bullying monitor at Christ's Hospital a "petty Nero"; and he refers to a legless, but powerful beggar as "an Antaeus" and as "half a Hercules." The figure is also applied to places and to things. Elia tells of Elliston’s demotion to the proprietorship of an insignificant theatre and calls this theatre "his Elba"; to "The Convalescent," the four curtains of his bed are "his Mare Clausum"; and the sayer of a grace before an epicurean banquet is suspected of "secretly kissing his hand to some great fish—his Dagon."17

Most of these examples of antonomasia resemble Lamb’s other allusive figures of speech in being satiric or comic. Almost by definition this sort of figure is ornamental, since the plain name of the person or place could be used instead, and often the figure seems merely an incidental and insignificant comic touch. At the same time, there is at least one constant assumption behind his uses of antonomasia, an assumption which is part of Lamb’s moral perspective: there exists a division between the great world of the past, of literature and legend, of heroic actions, and the everyday world of the present or recent past, of anecdotes and triviality, of clerks and schoolmasters. The latter world is of course Lamb’s subject. But in treating it, he continually cites parallels with the great world: people such as Elliston, Ralph Bigod, Esq., Dyer, and the old Benchers are compared figuratively to Napoleon, Achilles, Alexander,
Lycidas, and the gods of the pantheon. The result is a comic irony which, nevertheless, does at times add to, rather than detract from, the dignity of Lamb's subjects. There is much that is ridiculous about Elliston and the self-important old Benchers, and the allusions to classical mythology do emphasize this fact. But one can also believe that Elliston and the Benchers possessed at least some qualities which suggested the parallels in the first place. Lamb's magnification of the ordinary is in some ways a comic version of Wordsworth's more solemn efforts to do the same. It is largely through his use of allusive figures of speech that Lamb is able to retain his perspective even while magnifying.

II

While it is true that the tone of Lamb's essays is regulated largely by the figures of speech used in treating the subject, it is arguable that this tone has to do with more than the author's attitude toward the subject itself. Just as Lamb's pedantic and archaic diction implies a reader who, by education and by temperament, is capable of responding in the proper spirit, so his figurative language implies a reader who does not demand a strict factual accounting for every statement. Lamb does not comment extensively upon the nature of figurative language, or indeed upon any aspect of style, but in the few places where he does, it is clear that he thinks of it in its relation to the reader or listener.
His remarks upon the pun, for example, are practically a
locus classicus on that subject, and the appropriately
elaborate metaphors in which they are phrased involve the
auditors very closely:

Their vigour is as the instant of their birth.
Their nutriment for their brief existence is the
intellectual atmosphere of the bystanders: or
this last, is the fine slime of Nilus—\textit{the melior
lutus},—whose maternal recipiency is as necessary
as the \textit{sol pater} to their equivocal generation. (II, 107)

Puns are like metaphors in their "equivocal" status, differing mainly in being an instantaneous revelation of the "more
than single meanings" which words may have. In both cases
the recipient is expected to adapt quickly to an essentially
oblique mode of utterance.

Much of Lamb's humor is based upon a sudden shift from
the literal to the metaphorical, or vice versa. Puns of the
usual instantaneous sort are common, but at times he dwells
upon such a shift, delaying the explanation in a way that
suggests a mock suspense:

\begin{quote}
I have no ear.—
Mistake me not, reader,—nor imagine that I
am by nature destitute of those exterior twin
appendages, hanging ornaments, and (architectu-
really speaking) handsome volutes to the human
capital....
When therefore I say that I have no ear, you
will understand me to mean—\textit{for music}. (II, 38)
\end{quote}

Geoffrey Tillotson is probably correct in saying that a joke
of this kind, "though effective in its own day, has not
enough in it to remain so."^{18} But if it is not very humor-
ous, it is at least good-humored, and its tone probably re-
fects not so much an attitude toward ears or music as the
assumption that the reader is also good-humored. In some ways, the labored quality of the joke makes that assumption all the more apparent.

Comic distinctions of this kind are fairly plentiful, especially in the early essays, and in the essay "On the Danger of Confounding Moral with Personal Deformity" it is practically the thesis: the reader is warned not to confuse literal and metaphorical meanings:

That crooked old woman, I once said, speaking of an ancient gentlewoman, whose actions did not square altogether with my notions of the rule of right. The unanimous surprise of the company before whom I uttered these words, soon convinced me that I had confounded mental with bodily obliquity, and that there was nothing tortuous about the old lady but her deeds. (I,65)

Such passages are possibly not very important in themselves, but they do point toward a way of applying the distinction between literal and figurative which does deserve some attention. Lamb begins to use differing attitudes toward figurative language as an index of character. Whereas his use of figures of speech implies something about the character of the reader, direct portrayals of people and character types sometimes makes explicit reference to their response to metaphor.

Elia himself is portrayed in this way. The account of "the Late Elia" in the Preface to Last Essays emphasizes his indirect mode of expression, referring to his use of the first-person as "his favourite figure" and admitting that he "too much affected that dangerous figure--irony." This
addiction to irony is only a part of Elia's character, but it strongly implies other traits: diffidence, shrewdness, a sense of humor, a liking for the odd and out-of-the-way, and in general all that the word "humourist" meant in Lamb's day. His reliance upon figurative language is one of Elia's qualifications for the role of Mr. Spectator, in Lamb's modification of this convention. It suggests his unorthodox, indirect view of things, in which Elia chiefly differs from the common-sense, direct view of Addison's persona. Above all, it implies a strongly "anti-Caledonian" temperament.

The Caledonian himself is also portrayed in terms of his attitude toward figurative language:

You must speak upon the square with him. He stops a metaphor like a suspected person in an enemy's country. "A healthy book!"—said one of his countrymen to me, who had ventured to give that appellation to John Bunce,—"did I catch rightly what you said? I have heard of a man in health, and of a healthy state of body, but I do not see how that epithet can be properly applied to a book." Above all, you must beware of indirect expressions before a Caledonian. Clap an extinguisher upon your irony, if you are unhappily blest with a vein of it. Remember you are upon your oath. (II,60)

There is probably something of the same idea in Elia's confession of Bridget's "blindness to the beautiful obliquities of the Religio Medici"—a mild case of Caledonianism, perhaps. The assumption behind such references to indirectness and "obliquity" of expression is that there are traits of character—a willingness to explore "mutable and shifting" meanings which escape purely literal expression, a love of
the eccentric and original, and an aversion to self-evident statements of fact—which are fairly suggested by an inclination to metaphor and irony.

But Lamb is not simply an apologist for the odd and eccentric for its own sake. Even in the Friend's portrait of Elia, there is a suggestion that he is not addicted to mere nonsense, but has a shrewder sense of truth than the "long and much talkers": "He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it."20 As Bertram Jessup and Daniel Mulcahy have recognized, there is also a strongly realistic and sceptical strain in his thought and writing.21 Lamb sees that metaphors are sometimes used to conceal, rather than to express, and he occasionally dwells upon the distinction between literal and figurative meanings in order to emphasize the deception. Probably the best example is in "New Year's Eve," where Elia, contemplating the inevitability of death, refuses to be comforted by merely rhetorical formulas:

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 re- luct at the inevitable course of destiny.(II,29)

The figures of speech are designed to console by disguising the reality, and faced with them Elia assumes something very close to Caledonianism.
The "Popular Fallacies" series also contains many examples of the skeptical side of Lamb's thought. One of the best of these, "That Enough is as Good as a Feast," regards figurative speech as deceptive:

Morally interpreted, it [the title proverb] belongs to a class of proverbs, which have a tendency to make us undervalue money. Of this cast are those notable observations, that money is not health; riches cannot purchase every thing: the metaphor which makes gold to be mere muck, with the morality which traces fine clothing to the sheep's back, and denounces pearl as the unhandsome excretion of the oyster. Hence, too, the phrase which imputes dirt to acres—a sophistry so barefaced, that even the literal sense of it is true only in a wet season... Translate any one of these sayings out of the artful metonymy which envelops it, and the trick is apparent. (II,256)

The figurative language discussed here is also an index of character, but of a different kind from that mentioned earlier. The "artful" metaphors are taken to be the creations of an artful, niggardly person. As Elia says of the originator of this proverb:

The inventor of it did not believe it himself. It was made in revenge by somebody, who was disappointed of a regale. It is a vile, cold-scrag-of-mutton sophism; a lie palmed upon the palate, which knows better things. (II,256)

There are also figures of speech which, while not absolutely deceptive, contain suggestions not intended by the speaker. When the full meaning of such figures is revealed, it sometimes casts light upon the character of both the speaker, or sponsor, and the person making the revelation.
In "A Bachelor's Complaint," Elia makes such a revelation:

"Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young children:" so says the excellent office in our Prayer-book appointed for the churching of women. "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them:" So say I; but then don't let him discharge his quiver upon us that are weaponless;--let them be arrows, but not to gall and stick us. (II,128)

Tillotson believes that in addition to being a discussion of the objectionable behavior of some married people, the essay resembles the dramatic monologue in one important way: the narrator's "edgy" tone reveals a distinct envy. The simile from the prayer book is shown to suggest more than its author intended: "arrows" are offensive weapons as well as suitable instruments for domestic security. But in insisting upon this part of the meaning, Elia reveals more of himself than he intends.

Lamb's distinctions between literal and figurative meanings to suggest traits of character or habits of mind are a natural extension of his use of figures to regulate the tone of his essays. At times this practice results merely in incidental humor and is of no particular consequence. But when it is based upon a real insight into character--the various perversities, self-delusions, and affectations which so interested Lamb, in other men and in himself--it becomes a real stylistic asset. To use one of his favorite words, "obliquity" of character is expressed by a corresponding obliquity of style.
That Lamb believed such a correspondence to be a real one seems probable. In his letters, his criticism of the writings of friends often shows a concern for style, not simply on artistic grounds, but for what it reveals of the character of the writer. "That fantastic old great man," Burton, is described as such partly because of his style, but also because his character is revealed as equally fantastic in the Anatomy of Melancholy. The Scotsman's suspicion of metaphor is not accidental, but is a true index of a national trait of character. And of course Elia constantly employs "his favourite figure," the first-person, as well as many other figures, to portray himself. As will now be seen, stylistic obliquity is an especially accurate indication of Lamb's own habit of mind.

III

"You must speak upon the square with him," says Elia of the Caledonian. Lamb, however, rarely speaks entirely "upon the square" in his prose. In some of his most characteristic passages, the metaphors and other figures are neither incidental and ornamental nor sustained in the consistent manner of Johnson's similes. Instead, they form a network or fabric of figurative expression, in which even apparently literal statements are to be understood as metaphors rather than as straightforward expressions of an idea. The term "metaphor" has been used rather loosely in parts of the preceding
discussion, sometimes to refer indiscriminately to similes, antonomasia, and other sorts of indirect expression; presumably this has not caused confusion so far. But it is now necessary to consider the nature of metaphor or figurative expression a bit more closely. Definitions vary considerably, and anyone who writes about the subject must choose or formulate his own.

A metaphor is of course a comparison, but some kinds of comparison are literal, not figurative. Probably the most usual way of distinguishing a literal from a figurative comparison is that used by Sir Herbert Read. After quoting a passage from Gulliver's Travels, in which Yahoos are said to have "climbed high trees as nimbly as a squirrel," Read comments as follows:

...a direct or simple comparison, where the objects compared are of a common nature, is not a figure at all; to climb high trees comes naturally to both Yahoos and squirrels. But if we say of a man, or a horse, that he climbed high trees as nimbly as a squirrel, then we compare the particular qualities of one object to the general qualities of another, and this constitutes a simile. If we go a step further, and in a manner identify the man and the squirrel, as in "This man, the squirrel of his clan, climbed the high trees"—then we invent a metaphor.24

This distinction no doubt works well enough in the study of a prose dealing mainly with concrete or objective situations, in which a figure of speech is a special, and in Swift's case a rare, departure.

In studying Lamb's prose, however, a more useful distinction is between the objectively and the subjectively
verifiable. For instance, if one says that Hamlet is a Senecan play, the statement is based largely upon characteristics that can be objectively shown, or which at least have an objective validity in theory: the play includes a ghost whose function is rather like that of the ghost in Seneca's plays; it is divided into five acts; the revenge motif derives from Seneca; the violence is similar to that which Seneca's nuntius describes; and so on. There is of course an element of comparison, and even of the non-literal, in the statement—Hamlet was not written by Seneca, but is like his plays—and perhaps some would consider it metaphorical, or partly so. But it is an essentially different kind of statement from the following, taken from a note in Specimens of the Dramatic Poets: "Heywood is a sort of prose Shakespeare." The scenes from Heywood's A Woman Kill'd with Kindness which are the basis of Lamb's comment are actually in verse. Lamb means that he does not perceive in Heywood's play (or plays) a quality which he does perceive in Shakespeare. The rest of the note makes this more clear:

His scenes are to the full as natural and affecting. But we miss the Poet, that which in Shakespeare always appears out and above the surface of the nature. Heywood's characters, his Country Gentlemen, etc., are exactly what we see (but of the best kind of what we see) in life. Shakespeare makes us believe, while we are among his lovely creations, that they are nothing but what we are familiar with, as in dreams new things seem old: but we awake, and sigh for the difference. (IV,95)
Lamb's "we" is more than a formal editorial gesture; he hopes to persuade or enlighten his readers, not simply to describe his own response to Heywood's plays. But it is his own perceptions, rather than an objective criterion of truth, which are the basis of his judgments. There is thus a suggestion of tentativeness in even the unqualified statements. When qualifiers do appear, as in the opening statement—"Heywood is a sort of prose Shakspere"—the phrase "a sort of" is not so much an attempt to limit the meaning to literal truth as an indication of its metaphorical status. But even without this qualification the statement would imply an "as if" condition—an essential quality of metaphor.

This is not to say that any statement expressing a subjective state or an emotion is figurative. There is a large stock of abstract words which, though perhaps incapable of conveying the precise quality of an emotion, are commonly used in a literal sense. When Elia tells of first seeing a play and confesses, "I took no proper interest in the action going on, for I understood not its import," he is making a literal statement. The remark assumes a common, objective standard by which the propriety of one's response to a play may be judged. However, his elaboration of this remark is largely figurative:

...but I heard the word Darius, and I was in the midst of Daniel. All feeling was absorbed in vision. Gorgeous vests, gardens, palaces, princesses, passed before me. I knew not players. I was in Persepolis for the time; and the burning idol of their devotion almost converted me into a worshipper. (II,99)
Elia's subject is of course real: the child's subjective response to a play and the transforming power of his imagination. Moreover, the passage includes references to characters, scenery, and costumes which were actually on stage, and to that extent it is literal. But in exploring the subject, Elia is not accountable to a strict standard of objective truth. All of the statements are to a degree hyperbolic: when he says, "All feeling was absorbed in vision," for example, he is metaphorically suggesting the nature of the child's experience, rather than attempting to describe a psychological process in exact terms. Even the literal details have the effect of synecdoche: the "vests, gardens, palaces, princesses," are representative of the aura of pageantry, and it is unimportant whether each actually appeared on stage. The final sentence is hardly a literal account of a near conversion, but a figurative comparison of the child's awe with idolatrous worship. The statements in the passage are attempts, each imperfect, to express a state of mind which is not susceptible to precise literal analysis.

Most prose writers make some use of this kind of figurative language. It is because he dwells so frequently upon subjective states, or as Elia phrases it, upon "partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions," that Lamb makes it into an idiom of his own. The notes in Specimens of the Dramatic Poets are the best place to begin an analysis of it. This idiom is probably most useful in his criticism,
and the notes provide conveniently brief examples. E. M. W. Tillyard says that the strength of Lamb's criticism is that it contains "something that by some subtle means brings [the reader] closer to certain works of art than he has been able to get unsaid,...something that creates in his mind the right receptive mood." This is especially true of the notes, which are intended to serve as a bridge between the reader and the old plays, whose style is assumed to be strange to the reader of 1808.

Some of the briefest of the notes make their point by the felicity and preciseness of the figures. The first of them, on Corhiduc, is representative:

The style of this old play is stiff and cumbersome, like the dresses of its times. There may be flesh and blood underneath, but we cannot get at it. (IV,5)

The simile and the metaphor are not particularly elaborate, but they perfectly express the solemnity and rather leaden formality of the play. Their visual content, the reference to the appearance of ruffs and doublets, must have been especially effective in an age in which, one gathers from Lamb's remarks elsewhere, a dull uniformity of costume was becoming the fashion in plays. Even in suggesting the inaccessibility of the play, he is attempting to make its essential qualities apparent to the reader.

A few of the notes attempt to create the proper receptive mood by approximating, in their own idiom, the style of the play. Thus, in speculating upon Marlowe's attraction to
the subject of temptation and evil, Lamb's figurative language becomes almost Marlovian:

To such a genius the History of Faustus must have been delectable food: to wander in fields where curiosity is forbidden to go, to approach the dark gulf near enough to look in, to be busied in speculations which are the rottenest part of the core of the fruit that fell from the Tree of Knowledge. (IV,34)

Again it is partly the imagery of Lamb's metaphors which makes the note effective. The food imagery, the suggestions of prohibited exploration and of a fall, all are prompted by the imagery of Doctor Faustus itself:

Till swoln with cunning and a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow:
For falling to a devilish exercise,
And glutted now with Learning's golden gifts,
He surfeits on the cursed necromancy.
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.

Both the play and Lamb's note use metaphor to express the nature of Faustian aspiration, a state of mind for which figurative language provides the only way of access. In both cases, too, the very energy of the language itself is analogous to the spiritual restlessness of the play's hero and, as Lamb implies, of Marlowe as well.

The two preceding examples contain figures of speech in the obvious sense. Many of the notes, however, combine outright metaphors and similes with hyperbolic statements and statements which are literal in form, but which suggest analogies of the central, unstated idea. The special idiom which results from this combination, although it does not
imitate the style of the play, does attempt to bring the
reader closer to its essential qualities. The following
note on Jonson's Poetaster is in this idiom.

This Roman Play seems written to confute those
enemies of Ben. Jonson in his own day and ours,
who have said that he made a pedantical use of his
learning. He has here revived the whole court of
Augustus, by a learned spell. We are admitted to
the society of the illustrious dead. Virgil, Hor­s­
ace, Ovid, Tibullus, converse in our own tongue
more finely and poetically than they expressed
themselves in their native Latin.--Nothing can be
imagined more elegant, refined, and court-like
than the scenes between this Lewis the Fourteenth
of Antiquity [i.e., Augustus] and his Literati.
The whole essence and secret of that kind of inter­
course is contained therein. (IV,253)

Although "seems" in the first sentence could in some contexts
indicate a literal meaning, it is here figurative. Lamb is
not speaking of the possibility that the play was written
for such a purpose, but is referring to its effect upon the
reader. A partial paraphrase would be, "The play is as dra­
matically successful as if it had been written to confute
his enemies." The next two sentences have a basis in fact--
Jonson's subject is the court of Augustus, and he portrays
dramatically its illustrious members--but they are elaborated
into metaphors expressing the effect of the play upon the
imagination. The comparison between the speeches of the
Roman poets in the play and their own works in Latin may be
literal, but there is at least a suggestion of hyperbole;
certainly Lamb is not given to making such autocratic pro­
nouncements in dead earnest. The last two sentences are
literal in appearance, except for the antonomasia ("this
Lewis the Fourteenth"), but they are actually hyperbolic; and Lamb's standards for judging courtly behavior are obviously not objective, but derive from an imaginative sense of the "essence and secret of that kind of intercourse."

Both this note and the one comparing Heywood and Shakespeare are based upon a variation of Coleridge's concept of a "willing suspension of disbelief." In both notes, the reader is assumed to have submitted to a new order of reality, in one case accepting Shakespeare's "lovely creations" as natural and familiar, and in the other regarding Jonson's Romans as contemporaries. Coleridge's concept, however, is phrased rather literally, and Lamb's preference for figurative expression makes it seem likely that he would concur with J. R. R. Tolkien's objection to it. Tolkien prefers a distinction between "Primary" and "Secondary Worlds": the latter is the imaginative world created by the story-teller, and it exists so long as the reader or listener is oblivious to the "real" or "Primary World." Tolkien's objection appears to be based upon both the literalness and the allowance for the reader's volition in Coleridge's phrase, and in suggesting an alternative concept, he uses a figurative analogy to describe the receptive state of the reader's mind: two "worlds" in which one alternately exists, not by "willing" but by submitting to the story-teller's or dramatist's spell. The implication is that this state is so mysterious that it can only be described figuratively, and in dwelling upon it Lamb must find his own figures of speech.
The concept of a spell is implicit in Lamb's comments upon a scene from The Revenger's Tragedy. This note is often taken as an indication of Lamb's passionate response to his favorite works, and in part it no doubt is. But its sustained hyperbolic sense prevents its being interpreted as merely factual testimony:

The reality and life of this Dialogue passes any scenical illusion I ever felt. I never read it but my ears tingle, and I feel a hot blush spread my cheeks, as if I were presently about to "proclaim" some such "malefactions" of myself, as the Brothers here rebuke in their unnatural parent; in words more keen and dagger-like than those which Hamlet speaks to his mother. Such power has the passion of shame truly personated, not only to "strike guilty creatures unto the soul," but to "appal" even those that are "free." (IV,160)

The "as if" clause is explicitly analogical, expressing an exaggeration of the response which a sensitive reader might be expected actually to feel. Also, it would surely be wrong to require what Elia calls "clergy-truth" or "oath-truth" of the first part of the second sentence. To continue Elia's terminology, this part of the note appears to be "a kind of secondary or laic-truth"—in other words, hyperbole. It is of course conceivable that Lamb's ears did tingle every time he read the scene, but the import of the comment is figurative, and its effect does not depend upon literal truth.

Most of Lamb's analogical figures in the preceding examples imagine the reader as passive: Shakespeare "makes us believe," Jonson places us in the court of Augustus "by a
learned spell," and the scene from *The Revenger's Tragedy* strikes us "unto the soul" with a feeling of guilt. But this is not a simple passivity. It depends upon, if not a "willing suspension," at least an impassioned neglect of disbelief. The hyperbolic tone and the succession of metaphors in Lamb's notes are intended to sustain such a state of excited receptivity. "Metaphor is a dramatic and exciting mode of expression," as Huntington Brown says, and a style such as Lamb's, relying heavily upon metaphor, is continuously exciting. Lamb's own awareness of the effect of metaphor is made clear in a comment upon a passage from Fuller:

I have seen this passage smiled at, and set down as a quaint conceit of old Fuller. But what is not a conceit to those who read it in a temper different from that in which the writer composed it? The most pathetic parts of poetry to cold tempers seem and are nonsense, as divinity was to the Greeks foolishness. When Richard II., meditating on his own utter annihilation as to royalty, cries out,

"O that I were a mockery king of snow, To melt before the sun of Bolingbroke,"

if we have been going on pace for pace with the passion before, this sudden conversion of a strong-felt metaphor into something to be actually realized in nature...is strictly and strikingly natural; but come unprepared upon it, and it is a conceit....

(1,118n)

It is helpful to remember this comment when generalizing about Lamb's own "quaintness." The word is no doubt applicable in many cases, but Lamb is also often in earnest, though the earnestness is expressed hyperbolically, and he seems quaint only to "cold tempers." At any rate, the
figures in the notes to the Specimens serve to keep the reader "going on pace for pace with the passion" of the scene.

The same is usually true of Lamb's criticism outside the notes to the Specimens. The reader is encouraged, not to judge objectively and coolly, but to share the intensity of Lamb's own feelings about a work. The writing is thus usually a compound of metaphor, simile, and hyperbole, of the kind observed in the notes. One of the best examples of Lamb's critical style is the following passage from the essay on Shakespeare's tragedies. It contains most of the figurative devices used elsewhere:

But the Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear: they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms;... (I,107)

To paraphrase the literal content of this passage is to appreciate how much weight is carried by the figurative language: A reading of King Lear reveals its essential
qualities, its true greatness, as a stage performance cannot do. The task of the passage is to convince the reader of the reality of these qualities and of this greatness, and to define or suggest the nature of them. As in the notes to the Specimens, analogies are used to suggest the "intellectual" dimensions of the play. There are explicit comparisons, indicating both the inadequacy of stage performances—"The contemptible machinery," etc.—and the surpassing greatness of the conception of Lear—Milton's Satan and "Michael Angelo's terrible figures." Like Shakespeare, Lamb attempts to suggest abstract or intellectual qualities by the imagery of his metaphors: "that sea, his mind," "This case of flesh and blood," etc. There is perhaps something of the stylistic imitation used in a few of the notes to the Specimens: the storm imagery is of course common to the play and the criticism, and Lamb certainly intends that it should bring the reader's imagination closer to the work. The use of hyperbole is also evident here: King Lear "cannot be acted"; "we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness" in stage performances; "while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear." As was true in the notes, there is an unspoken "it is as if" before such statements.

Carl Woodring comments suggestively upon the hyperbolic quality of Lamb's criticism and sees it as a characteristic of the age:

Perhaps the most famous and least understood aspect of English Romantic criticism, especially in regard to Shakespeare, is its exaggeration.
All students have heard, for example, of the exaggerated complaint of Lamb and Hazlitt that the profundity of Shakespeare's tragedies can be either hinted at or grossly travestied on the stage, but never adequately represented there. Fewer students know what this complaint conceals:...

Unfortunately, Woodring's explanation does not really illuminate this quality of exaggeration. The "complaint," according to him, conceals an "intense concern...over staging and styles of acting." While it is true that Lamb does explicitly (hardly under concealment) disapprove of certain devices and conventions in the staging of Shakespeare's plays in his time, it is also true, as Ian Jack says, that the essay on the tragedies is "an extremist document," concerned "not merely with the drama in the conditions of Lamb's own time, but with any drama at any time." Jack considers the essay's extremist tendency unfortunate, but Lamb is aiming at precisely such an extremist position—and not because of his distress over "staging and styles of acting." Like Hazlitt, Lamb seeks for the truth about a work of art in a single dominant quality, in its "genius" or "greatness," rather than in a balance of diverse qualities. He is not without a sense of critical balance, but this sense does not usually assert itself when he is hotly pursuing an argument. It appears in other contexts; he is capable, for instance, of praising the performance of an actor in a Shakespearean tragedy. But in the essay on the tragedies, he is concentrating upon their intellectual quality, which he believes to be
paramount, and he does so with such extremist zeal that, at that moment, stage performances can only be viewed as distortions. Judiciously balanced evaluation gives way to figurative overstatement, which aims at the truth even while overreaching it.

Lamb's insistent hyperbole is sometimes most effective when it is combined with other devices for intensifying the tone of a passage. His curt sentences, which have already been discussed, are such a device. In the following excerpts from "Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," the curt sentences, the rapid succession of metaphors, and the generally hyperbolic tone are characteristic of Lamb's criticism:

*We have no such middle emotions as dramatic interests left. We see a stage libertine playing his loose pranks of two hours' duration, and of no after consequences, with the severe eyes which inspect real vices with their bearings upon two worlds. We are spectators to a plot or intrigue (not reducible in life to the point of strict morality) and take it all for truth. We substitute a real for a dramatic person, and judge him accordingly. We try him in our courts, from which there is no appeal to the dramatis personae, his peers.*

... *We dare not dally with images, or names, of wrong. We bark like foolish dogs at shadows. We dread infection from the scenic representation of disorder; and fear a painted pustule. In our anxiety that our morality should not take cold, we wrap it up in a great blanket surtout of precaution against the breeze and sunshine.* (II,141,142)

Even though Lamb is protesting against an overvigilant moral judgment, his own tone resembles that of the pulpit. He is attempting to implant a conviction of guilt, rather than to weigh evidence impartially. Hence, the overstatement of the
Since this offense is seen as absurd, the tone is partially satiric. The felicity of the metaphors—"We bark like foolish dogs at shadows"—emphasizes the absurdity. Even though the criticism of the audience is intentionally excessive, Lamb is attempting to express what he believes to be essentially true.

The examples of Lamb's sustained figurative style have so far been taken from his literary and dramatic criticism. The same style is to be found in the familiar essays when his subject is an old house, himself, or another person. In dealing with such subjects, Lamb describes essential qualities and goes beyond the superficial, no less than in his literary criticism. He therefore uses metaphors and other figurative analogies in much the same way. Hyperbole is also important in the familiar essays, since it helps to convey the intensity of Lamb's, or Elia's, feelings about his subject and to invite a similar intensity of response from the reader. The following description of the "old schoolmasters" is in the same idiom as the literary criticism:

Rest to the souls of those fine old Pedagogues; the breed, long since extinct, of the Lily's, and the Linacres: who believing that all learning was contained in the languages which they taught, and despising every other acquirement as superficial and useless, came to their task as to a sport! Passing from infancy to age, they dreamed away all their days as in a grammar-school. Revolving in a perpetual cycle of declensions, conjugations, syntaxes, and prosodies; renewing constantly the occupations which had charmed their
studious childhood; rehearsing continually the part of the past; life must have slipped from them at last like one day. They were always in their first garden, reaping harvests of their golden time, among their Flori and their Spicilegia; in Arcadia still, but kings; the farule of their sway not much harsher, but of like dignity with that mild sceptre attributed to king Basileus; the Greek and Latin, their stately Pamela and their Philocles; with the occasional duncery of some untoward Tyro, serving for a refreshing interlude of a Mopsa, or a clown Damaestas!

(II,51)

The individual similes, comparing the studies of the "old Pedagogues" to a sport; the metaphors, expressing their life as a series of drills in grammar; and above all, the metaphorical variations upon the themes of Eden and Arcadia: all are ways of portraying the essential or ideal qualities of the old schoolmasters. Lamb's view of them is of course exaggerated, as he probably knows; for one thing, he is contrasting them with the new schoolmasters, who are "expected to know a little of everything," and the exaggeration heightens the contrast. But an attempt to express dominant or ideal qualities cannot easily succeed without some exaggeration, without a radical subordination of what is superficial and incidental to these qualities. The "greatness" of the old Pedagogues, like that of Lear, is in their "intellectual dimension," and to describe it Lamb resorts to a similar figurative idiom.

Elia's attitude toward the schoolmasters is of course not one of simple reverence; one can hardly miss the amused and even jocular tone of the passage. The combination of
tones which often results from Lamb's use of conventional metaphors is likely to be still more complex in passages based upon his sustained figurative idiom. Speaking of Fuller, he writes: "...his wit is not always a lumen siccum, a dry faculty of surprising; on the contrary, his conceits are oftentimes deeply steeped in human feeling and passion." In the following passage from "New Year's Eve" the figurative play of wit and the jocular tone combine with a convincing description of the fear of death:

In winter this intolerable disinclination to dying--to give it its mildest name--does more especially haunt and beset me. In a genial August noon, beneath a sweltering sky, death is almost problematic. At those times do such poor snakes as myself enjoy an immortality. Then we expand and burgeon. Then are we as strong again, as valiant again, as wise again, and a great deal taller. The blast that nips and shrinks me, puts me in thoughts of death. All things allied to the insubstantial, wait upon that master feeling; cold, numbness, dreams, perplexity; moonlight itself, with its shadowy and spectral appearances,--that cold ghost of the sun, or Phoebus' sickly sister, like that innutritious one denounced in the Canticles: --I am none of her minions--I hold with the Persian.

In Elia's letter to Southey, he says that "New Year's Eve" represents "the feelings of the merely natural man." The hyperbole of the preceding passage, in its concentration upon the one "master feeling" which the "natural man" experiences, makes everything else subordinate to the idea of death. Since Elia is dealing with "the insubstantial," he must express himself figuratively: the seasonal images are not so much literal (although the setting of the essay is in
winter) as they are figurative representations of a state of mind. Among the things which are subordinate to the "master feeling" is the play of wit: Elia's comparisons of himself to a "poor snake" and a Persian sun-worshipper. The passage conveys a suggestion of desperation which is infrequent in Lamb's prose, but which is thematically appropriate here.

The effect of Lamb's sustained figurative idiom is often to add comic dimensions to subjects which are intrinsically or conventionally serious. Huntington Brown has come closer than anyone to explaining this aspect of Lamb's style. He discusses Lamb, along with earlier authors such as the Latin Stoics and the seventeenth-century baroque writers, and later ones like Carlyle and Robert Louis Stevenson, under the heading, "The Prophetic Style." This style, especially as it appears in the writings of the Stoics, is aphoristic, paradoxical, terse, and figurative. With writers such as Bacon, the aphorisms and metaphors are usually serious in tone. But as Brown explains, this is not the only effect of the style:

The race of Montaigne, Burton, and Browne, later revived in Charles Lamb and his followers, was cannier. The primary motive in these writers is still oracular and often revolutionary, but the style is discreet, cagey, devious, often jocular. They hurl no old-fashioned challenge at us, to make us think that our fate depends on our assent to their doctrine.

... Lamb, we might say, standardized the tradition that humor is the way of independence for the latter-day prophet.
The oracular motive behind a "devious" and "jocular" style is most obvious in writers such as Carlyle, but Brown's remarks are especially helpful in showing that there is a related mixture of purpose and style in Lamb's prose. Tillotson suggests that some of the Elia essays are historically important because of the ideas which they advance, some of which are original with Lamb. That this fact justifies a comparison with Carlyle might be doubted, but it does suggest that Lamb had things to say, that he was not simply a "stylist." Some of Tillotson's examples are drawn from "Witches and Other Night-Fears," and he claims that "Lamb is one of the first writers to discover the child's psyche as a substantial matter for literature." There is no reason for disputing his historical importance in this respect, but how is one to understand a passage like the following from that essay?

Gorgons, and Hydres, and Chimaeras--dire stories of Celaeno and the Harpies--may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition--but they were there before. They are transcripts, types--the archetypes are in us, and eternal....These terrors are of older standing. They date beyond body--or, without the body, they would have been the same.... That the kind of fear here treated of is purely spiritual--that it is strong in proportion as it is objectless upon earth--that it predominates in the period of sinless infancy--are difficulties, the solution of which might afford some probable insight into our ante-mundane condition, and a peep at least into the shadow-land of pre-existence. (II, 88)

How literal are the statements in this passage? The conclusion is expressed tentatively ("might afford," "a peep at least"), but most of the ideas are quite boldly asserted,
enough so that one can see the justice of including Lamb's prose under the heading, "prophetic style." Is Lamb seriously advancing a theory of archetypes? What one knows of his disinclination to theory makes this most unlikely. The passage should be understood in the light of Lamb's comment upon Browne's love of popular superstition:

It [an account of a fabulous bird] is a fable which Sir Thomas Browne, if he had heard of it, would have exploded among his Vulgar Errors; but the delight which he would have taken in the discussing of its probabilities, would have shown that the truth of the fact, though the avowed object of his search, was not so much the motive which put him upon the investigation, as those hidden affinities and poetical analogies,—those essential verities in the application of strange fable, which made him linger with such reluctant delay among the last fading lights of popular tradition. (I,116n)

Lamb's theory of archetypes is surely similar in its application. Like the doctrine of pre-existence in the "Intimations Ode," it is expressed in a prophetic tone of voice which might suggest that it is meant completely seriously. But Lamb is no more responsible for its "truth of fact" than is Wordsworth for his doctrine. Both are attempts to deal with subjects which are resistant to literal expression by searching for "hidden affinities and poetical analogies."

Lamb is making, for his purpose as a prose writer, the best use that he can of the doctrine of archetypes.

Notes


10. See, for example, the "Popular Fallacy," "That Verbal Allusions are not Wit, because They will not Bear Translation," *Works*, II, 257.

11. Fluchère, p. 409.


13. Lamb's contributions cannot be definitely identified. Lucas prints a few such paragraphs which he thinks Lamb may have written, *Works*, II, 440-441.


21. This is in fact the meaning of Mulcahy's concept of "The Two Planes": "Lamb's usual practice is to interweave with his tapestry of illusion a thread of reality." Mulcahy, p. 517.


25. Works, IV, 95n.

26. The figurative sense in which Lamb uses the word "vision" is comparable to Wordsworth's attribution of prophetic powers to the child: both exalt the child's feelings of awe into supernatural modes of perception, but without losing sight of the distinction. In a review of 1813 Lamb had already told of first seeing a play. This earlier account is almost identical with that of Elia, but one sentence in the former makes its figurative basis more apparent: "I was, with Uriel, in the body of the sun" (Works, I, 160).

27. Works, II, 60.


29. Works, IV, 71n.


34. Compare the following passage from "The Ideal," a late essay by Hazlitt: "A thing is not more perfect by becoming something else, but by being more itself. If the face of the Venus had been soft and feminine, but the figure had not corresponded, then this would have been a defect of the ideal, which subdued the discordance of Nature in the mould of passion, and so far from destroying character, imparts the same character to all, according to a certain established idea of preconception in the mind." (Complete Works, XX, 303.)

Hazlitt's practical criticism is consistent with his theory and resembles Lamb's in its tendency to overstatement. For example: "There is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other found the way into his Wordsworth's heart: no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years." ("Mr. Wordsworth," The Spirit
35. Although he sometimes does so because of the actor's infusion of comic elements; see his remarks upon John Kemble, *Works*, II, 147.


38. Brown, pp. 79, 82.


Chapter Five
Imagery

The figurative tendency of so much of Lamb's prose is not an arbitrarily chosen manner of expressing his ideas. His interest in subjective meanings and values leads naturally to this form of discourse. One result of the close relation between his subject matter and mode of expression is that some distinctions usually observed in discussions of figurative language are blurred. I. A. Richards' terms, "tenor" and "vehicle"--the subject and the metaphorical expression of it--are examples. This distinction does not disappear altogether, as his conventionally ornamental figures of speech show, but it is so often difficult to know whether Lamb is saying "it is" or "it is as though" that Richards' terms lose much of their clarity. The confusion increases if one tries to apply the term "imagery" to his style. Imagery is usually thought of as belonging to the vehicle, but when Elia refers to "moonlight itself" as one of the "things allied to the insubstantial," which "wait upon that master feeling," the fear of death, where is the vehicle? Is "moonlight" an image in the usual sense? The fear of death is probably the tenor, but at what point does Elia become metaphorical and begin to use imagery?

189
Part of the answer is that, instead of beginning with his abstract idea, the fear of death, and alluding to moonlight and other images as a concrete embodiment or illustration, Elia begins with the concrete: "The blast that nips and shrinks me, puts me in thoughts of death." The moonlight too is real, but it has "shadowy and spectral appearances" which lead to the "master feeling." In this respect Lamb in his prose conforms to the principle described by W. K. Wimsatt as applying to the use of nature imagery in Romantic poetry. In the examples cited by Wimsatt the literal details with which the poem deals are related to subjective themes, often with a merely implied rather than an explicit statement of similitude:

A poem of this structure is a signal instance of that kind of fallacy (or strategy) by which death in poetry occurs so often in winter or at night, and sweethearts meet in the spring countryside. The tenor of such a similitude is likely to be subjective—reminiscence or sorrow or beguilement—not an object distinct from the vehicle, as lovers or their souls are distinct from twin compasses. This could easily be a description of Lamb's practice in much of his prose, and it is yet another indication of the affinity of this prose with Romantic poetry. There is no doubt a close relation between his way of using concrete, literal details metaphorically and the subjective principle of structure in the Elia essays: as Haven shows, the structure is also based upon a concrete situation or object.

Lamb's practice resembles in another way that of at least one of the poems cited by Wimsatt. Commenting upon
Coleridge's sonnet "To the River Otter," Wimsatt observes:

Both tenor and vehicle...are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material. The river landscape is both the occasion of reminiscence and the source of the metaphors by which reminiscence is described.3

In several passages Lamb provides comic versions of this practice. In "The Old Margate Hoy," Elia tells of the ignorance of the sea which he and his fellow Londoners display, implying that their being on the sea, and hence out of their element, makes them more gullible; they are especially vulnerable to one story-teller, who "did not stand shivering upon the brink, but was a hearty thorough-paced liar, and plunged at once into the depths of your credulity."4 Perhaps the most remarkable example of the merging of tenor and vehicle is the account of Lord C. and his "sentiment" in "Distant Correspondents." His lordship's sentiment is a wish to be buried near a picturesque brook in Geneva, and his will provides that his remains be carried there from England:

Conceive the sentiment boarded up, freighted, entered at the Custom House..., hoisted into a ship. Conceive it pawed about and handled between the rude jests of tarpaulin ruffians--a thing of its delicate texture--the salt bilge wetting it till it became as vapid as a damaged lustring. Suppose it in material danger (mariners have some superstitions about sentiments) of being tossed over in a fresh gale to some propitiatory shark...but it has happily evaded a fishy consummation. Trace it then to its lucky landing--at Lyons shall we say?... jostled upon four men's shoulders--baiting at this town--stopping to refresh at t'other village...; till at length it arrives at its destination, tired out and jeded, from a brisk sentiment, into a feature of silly pride or tawdry senseless affectation. How few sentiments, my dear F., I am afraid we can set down, in the sailor's phrase, as quite seaworthy.  

(II, 106)
Obviously, Richards' distinction between tenor and vehicle is of little use in this passage; or rather, it is of use only to describe the process by which it is obliterated.

Whatever effect Romantic nature poetry or Romantic aesthetics may have had upon Lamb's prose, it in some ways ran counter to the contemporary development of the essay itself. Leigh Hunt is a spokesman for what is now called the familiar essay, and one of his statements is especially relevant here:

> Writers, we think, might oftener indulge themselves in direct picture-making, that is to say, in detached sketches of men and things, which should be to manners, what those of Theophrastus are to character.5

Hunt apparently has in mind a rather literal concept of picture-making, and his essays often include a profusion of concrete visual details. Hazlitt's essays, too, often reflect the painter's interest in refinements of visual detail, as in his essay "On Beauty."6

To a degree, this is true of Lamb also; he certainly begins with concrete details often enough that for some readers he is chiefly a writer who works, in Pater's words, "ever close to the concrete, to the details, great or small, of actual things, books, persons, and with no part of them blurred to his vision by the intervention of mere abstract theories...."7 For this reason, the term "imagery" in this chapter will refer to such details, rather than to the sensory content of outright metaphors. But for Lamb, concreteness is not the end in itself, as it occasionally seems to
be in Hunt's essays. He often uses concreteness as the basis for the subjective themes, the "intellectual" dimensions, which are the true subjects of most of his prose. It is true of Lamb, as Florence Marsh finds it true of Wordsworth, that his "daffodils are daffodils and something more" and that he "constantly compels one to recognize the symbolic power of the seemingly literal."\(^8\) Lamb's images (notoriously, Wordsworth might say) are not usually of flowers, but his treatment of urban imagery shows a similar concern with the imaginative apprehension of the concrete, with the "blended might" of the mind and the external world.

Some of the characteristics of Lamb's use of imagery are apparent in his very first essay, "The Londoner." This essay is, among other things, a finished version of a theme which appears from time to time in his letters: the superiority of London or Fleet Street to pastoral scenes or Wordsworthian nature. One's first impression is perhaps that it attempts to make its point about the charm of London by reproducing the vivid sights of the city directly and forcefully. And indeed, there is at least an impression of conviction and immediacy in the Londoner's confession that he has often "rushed out into her crowded Strand..., till tears have wetted [his] cheek for unutterable sympathies" with the sights which greet him.\(^9\) On the other hand, "rural scenes" are satirically dismissed not only briefly, but in conventionally literary terms: "groves and meadows and purling
streams," and "all the flocks of silly sheep that ever whitened the plains of Arcadia or Epsom Downs." The "passion" for such pastoral scenes was a brief one in his life, the Londoner tells us, and its chief benefit was that it enabled him to understand the poets who speak of such a passion. The more abiding love for the city is a "sincerer" pleasure.

But this pleasure too is expressed in images which, if not obviously conventional in the way that the pastoral imagery is, at least are general and suggestive of the conventional. The first picture which the essay presents is that of "the conflux" of the eastern and western inhabitants of this twofold city who "meet and justle in friendly opposition at Temple-bar." Likewise, to the scenes of "silly sheep" the Londoner opposes "a mob of happy faces crowding up at the pit door of Drury-lane Theatre." In a sense, this grouping into "confluxes" and "mobs of happy faces" is inevitable, since it is in fact crowds and mobs that the Londoner finds attractive. But instead of moving into the scene and noting particular effects—the look of individual faces, the sound of individual voices, or even particular details about the appearance of the crowd—the Londoner remains at a distance. Not only that, he proceeds to describe the crowds in even more conventional and artificially pictorial terms: they become a "multitudinous moving picture, which [London] never fails to present at all hours, like the scenes of a shifting pantomime." At no point in the essay is there any
particularity worthy of the name. Wordsworth, as a stranger in London, sees "The silver-collared Negro with his timbrel,/ Equestrians, tumblers, women, girls, and boys,/ Blue-breeched, pink-vested, with high-towering plumes," before generalizing these sights into the phrase, "All moveables of wonder." But Lamb's native Londoner, even when he enumerates the "very deformities of London," continues to speak in general terms: "The endless succession of shops," "The obliging customer, and the obliged tradesmen," "the very smoke," "the dirty ring which encompasses two combatants with fists," "an execution." It is the panorama, or perhaps even the concept of a panorama, which is emphasized in the Londoner's account of his city.

The essay concludes with a figurative coda, the style of which may derive from the allegorical dream-vision:

Humour, Interest, Curiosity, suck at her [London's] measureless breasts without a possibility of being satisfied. Nursed amid her noise, her crowds, her beloved smoke, what have I been doing all my life, if I have not let out my heart with usury to such scenes!

(I,40)

The allegorical picture of London as the nurse of personified qualities has no exact stylistic counterpart elsewhere in the essay, but it is a natural extension of the conventional panorama: from "the scenes of a shifting pantomime" to the allegorical emblem-painting, is but a step. It also suggests the purpose of the generalized images throughout the essay: they too are a kind of emblem-painting, in some ways a much
more characteristic kind than the allegorical image. Because of the Londoner's long and intimate association with the city, his "entire affection for that way of life," he is able to perceive admirable qualities even in the city's apparent deformities. For example, "the dirty ring" suggests to him "grand principles of honor." It is such qualities and principles, rather than the external forms of the city, which are Lamb's main themes in this essay; he reads the sights of London, and what he presents is not the appearance of the characters but the meaning of the text. His concern with the meaning of images, his use of them as emblems, is of course conscious and may be found throughout the essay: he elaborates upon a reference to "Whittington with his Cat" by calling the pair a "just emblem of vigilance and a furred gown." Lamb is obviously not trying to draw sharply defined pictures and failing to do so.

Not only the emblematic conclusion, but the entire essay owes much to the Spectator tradition. Lamb perhaps remembered the following passage from Addison's Spectator No. 69 when he was writing the essay:

This grand Scene of Business [the Royal Exchange] gives me an infinite Variety of solid and substantial Entertainments. As I am a great Lover of Mankind, my Heart naturally overflows with Pleasure at the sight of a prosperous and happy Multitude, insomuch that at many publick Solemnities I cannot forbear expressing my Joy with Tears that have stolen down my Cheeks.  

Addison's "I cannot forbear expressing my Joy with Tears" strikes the reader immediately as chillier in tone than the
Londoner's confession of a similar weakness, but the visual imagery in the two essays is alike in its generality and representative quality. If anything, Addison is more particular. In the crowd at the Royal Exchange he distinguishes an individual person here and there:

> There is indeed a Merchant of Egypt, who just knows me by sight...; but as I am not versed in the Modern Coptick, our Conferences go no further than a Bow and a Grimace.12

But the bow and grimace are formal and general, like the Londoner's reference to the tradesmen and customers as "things which live by bowing, and things which exist but for homage." In neither case is there an attempt to make the focus sharp and clear.

Although the generalized imagery of "The Londoner" enables Lamb to concentrate upon his interpretation of it, it is not entirely successful in other respects. The quality of this imagery is better suited to an Addisonian essay than it is to the kind Lamb is trying to write. The detachment of Mr. Spectator and the fact that, as "a great Lover of Mankind," his affections are impartial make a broad, panoramic view appropriate. But the Londoner is supposed to be intimately attached to a particular city; he is not an observer of mankind in general, but one who loves what is most familiar to his vision. The imagery does not succeed in reflecting this particularity of attachment. As Lamb's style develops he finds new ways of using images both to represent the concrete and particular and to serve as emblems of
abstract qualities and subjective states.

In dealing with paintings or prints, Lamb has an obvious opportunity to dwell upon visual details. But to him a picture is more than an example of visual art; he is in fundamental agreement with Haslitt's two-part definition: "Pictures are a set of chosen images, a stream of pleasant thoughts passing through the mind." While he is certainly responsive to the images themselves, the response leads to a greater attention to what is "passing through the mind." In the essay on Hogarth one might expect a liberal use of visual detail, verbal pictures reflecting the particularity of Hogarth's art. There are a few places in the essay where detailed descriptions are used. When he wishes to demonstrate Hogarth's practice of "extending...the interest beyond the bounds of the subject," Lamb provides a fairly detailed description of an inconspicuous part of Gin Lane:

Close by the shell, in which, by direction of the parish beadle, a man is depositing his wife, is an old wall, which, partaking of the universal decay around it, is tumbling to pieces. Through a gap in this wall are seen three figures, which appear to make a part in some funeral procession which is passing by on the other side of the wall, out of the sphere of the composition. (I,74)

But on the whole, despite his admiration of Hogarth's ability to "crowd...into one small canvas so many diverse yet co-operating materials," Lamb provides few concrete details in describing these materials. His theme concerns not simply a few chosen prints by Hogarth, but the entire scope of his art, and he sometimes speaks of this art in terms which are
as general as those in "The Londoner." He finds there such qualities as the following:

...merriment and infelicity, ponderous crime and feather-light vanity, like twi-formed births, disagreeing complexions of one intermixture, [which] perpetually unite to shew forth motley spectacles to the world. (I,??)

Especially in the phrase "motley spectacles," one is reminded of the panoramic and general perspective of the Londoner. Hogarth's art too presents something like "the scenes of a shifting pantomime."

When Lamb does look at individual pictures the imagery is usually not so much like that in the description of the funeral procession in Gin Lane as it is like the following impressions of the Bedlam scene in the Rake's Progress:

It is a face [the former Rake's] which no one that has seen can easily forget. There is the stretch of human suffering to the utmost endurance, severe bodily pain brought on by strong mental agony, the frightful obstinate laugh of madness,—yet all so unforced and natural, that those who never were witness to madness in real life, think they see nothing but what is familiar to them in this face. Here are no tricks of distortion, nothing but the natural face of agony. (I,76)

What is missing here is any very clear description of the appearance of the Rake's face. It is pronounced unforgettable because of the psychological and moral qualities which one can see in it, or imagine in it, rather than because of any physical grotesqueness. The visual image is translated into abstract qualities, and in the last sentence it becomes a metaphor: "the natural face of agony." The same is true of the description of the alchemist in the next-to-last plate of
...who is paddling in the coals of his furnace, keeping alive the flames of vain hope within the very wells of the prison to which the vanity has conducted him, which have taught the darker lesson of extinguished hope to the desponding figure who is the principal person of the scene. (I, 76-77)

The visual image of the coals in the furnace immediately branches out into an interpretative metaphor, of the kind discussed by Wimsatt and included in the preceding passage; the vehicle takes its imagery from the scene itself. The flames and darkness are of course literally in Hogarth's picture, but it is the qualities of "vain hope" and "extinguished hope" that Lamb wishes to emphasize, not the mere appearance of flames and darkness.

The same interest in abstract qualities is evident in the descriptive details throughout the essay. It is often seen in the epithets, which are usually not primarily concrete, but interpretative: "the hypocrite parson and his demure partner" in the Harlot's Funeral; the "careless innocent face" of the baby and "the treason-plotting French priest" in March to Finchley; the "brutal vice-hardened child" in a plate from Industry and Idleness; the "conceited, long-backed Sign-painter" in Beer Street. Physical description may of course be found in places: the sign-painter is "long-backed," and Lamb goes on to say that "the twist of body which his conceit has thrown him into has something of the Correggiosque in it." But the main purpose of the description is not to give an exact idea of the twist of his
body, but to indicate "the enormity of the self-delusion" as the sign-painter regards the bottle he has painted, "the good humour and self-complacency of the fellow." The con­crete is seen as primarily emblematic of these qualities.

As was mentioned in the discussion of structure, Lamb's concept of Hogarth's art is that while we "look at" the pictures of other artists, "his prints we read." Lamb's way of reading is to intuit psychological and moral qualities behind the images. Hogarth's is a particularizing art, as Lamb knows very well, but in the imagery of the essay there are few direct or literal attempts to reproduce this particularity. Instead, such images as Lamb takes from the pictures are quite explicitly turned into emblems. The indi­vidual figures in the Harlot's Funeral

to a thoughtful mind present a moral emblem more affecting than if the poor friendless carcass had been depicted as thrown out to the woods, where wolves had assisted at its obsequies, itself furnishing forth its own funeral banquet. (1,72-73)

It is the power of Lamb's own imagination—so the phrase "to a thoughtful mind," suggests—as well as Hogarth's own which makes the pictures emblematic. Lamb's role is not that of a copyist, giving as exact an idea as possible of the shapes and shades of the original, but that of a moral interpreter. There is at times a stiffness in his enactment of this role, especially in the explicit calling of the reader's attention to "a moral emblem"; but in this essay Lamb is at midpoint in his development, and the Spectator influence is still strong.
It could be objected that Lamb does not elaborate upon the concrete details in Hogarth's pictures because he assumes that the reader is familiar with them, and that the mere reference is enough. The poems in the emblem books of Quarles and Wither, which Lamb admired so much, depend upon the accompanying plates for the expression of the purely visual, and it would be natural to expect that Lamb's own emblem-writing would presuppose a knowledge of the pictures. But when one turns to *Elia*, where the verbal description must be the reader's primary or only way of visualizing a scene, there is the same lack of thoroughness in the descriptions and sometimes an actual indistinctness in the visual details. Lamb is still using images as emblems, but in a much more complex manner than in the earlier essays.

Before examining the quality of the imagery in *Elia*, it might be well to mention some of the reasons for the increased complexity. Whereas "The Londoner" and the essay on Hogarth are presented as the viewpoints of individual persons in present time, many of the images in *Elia* appear as they existed in the past and through the filter of Elia's memory. This memory itself is not a simple instrument for the partial recalling of the past, but a means of combining two perspectives: that of the child or of a younger Elia, and that of the Elia who is writing the essay. The perception of the images' significance is thus not simply the act of "a thoughtful mind," as it is in the Hogarth essay; it is also a
recognition of what the images meant to the younger Elia, "that 'other me,' there, in the background," as well as of their meaning to the adult Elia. At times the quality of the imagery is influenced by psychological motives, especially that of fear. Fear is closely allied to the imagination, as Lamb conceives of it, since both thrive upon the immaterial. The indistinctness of concrete details is sometimes a consequence both of the fears of childhood and the interpretative recapturing of the child's vision by the mature Elia. Finally, although the child's imagination is a frequent theme in Elia, even the adult's imagination, "that power which draws all things to one," has an effect upon the images which a realist would call distortion. The interpretation becomes, not simply a matter of assigning abstract qualities to the image--"worldly-mindedness" or "honest mirth," for example--but of relating it to the subjective center of the described scene, or to the dominant mood of a passage. The quality of most of the concrete images in Elia may be explained by one or more of these influences.

Elia begins, Pater might say, "close to the concrete, to the details...of actual things." And indeed the first pages contain considerably more specific visual details than "The Londoner" did. The South-Sea House itself is "a brick and stone edifice," it has "magnificent portals ever gaping wide" and "a grave court, with cloisters and pillars." Inside there are "long worm-eaten tables," with "tarnished
gilt-leather coverings," "huge charts," and perhaps most vivid of all, "long passages hung with buckets, appended, in idle row, to walls, whose substance might defy any, short of the last, conflagration." But it is evident even in this profusion of concreteness that visual clarity is not Lamb's main concern. Most of the epithets do not describe appearances so much as they suggest subjective qualities, or what Elia later calls "the genius of the place." This is obviously true of "melancholy looking," "magnificent," and "grave," but some of the other descriptive words, and indeed the objects themselves, are partly subjective in meaning.

As the discussion of the structure of this essay showed, the House provides a doorway into Elia's mind: thus "tarnished," while it is primarily a literal description of the coverings, also suggests the spirit of antiquity which Elia associates with the House and with those who worked in it; thus also, "idle" is a transferred epithet referring to "buckets," but its displacement emphasizes its other function, that of evoking the spirit of "desolation." And obviously the statement that the walls are immune to any but the last "conflagration" is not a literal comment implying something about their "substance"; their endurance is in Elia's memory.

As the exploration of the House proceeds, the details become even more thoroughly a part of their evocative and allusive contexts. The reference to "vast ranges of cellargage under all, where dollars and pieces of eight once lay,
an 'unsunned heap,' for Mammon to have solaced his solitary heart withal" is representative of the concentration upon the subjective meaning of the House to the viewer, rather than upon its appearance. Later in the essay literal visual details become quite scarce. Throughout this description one is conscious of a concreteness which could have emerged with great distinctness if Lamb had so wished. But it is the "genius of the place," its essential desolation and historical richness, that he is after, and in order to express it he carefully subordinates the distinct and the concrete. A painter or draftsman would receive little guidance from Lamb if he wished to make a sketch of the building.

The fact that the South-Sea House appears only in Elia's memory, and from forty years earlier at that, is no doubt sufficient reason for some indistinctness of visual detail. But the imagery in other Elia essays is presented in a similar way even when it is not taken from the past. The account of Oxford, which was quoted in Chapter Three, is written in time present, but the images have the same evocative and subjective qualities as those in "The South-Sea House":

The walks at these times are so much one's own,—the tall trees of Christ's, the groves of Magdalen! The halls deserted, and with open doors, inviting one to slip in unperceived, and pay a devoir to some Founder, or noble or royal Benefactress (that should have been ours) whose portrait seems to smile upon their over-looked beadsmen, and to adopt me for their own. Then, to take a peep in by way at the butteries, and sculleries, redolent of antique hospitality; the immense caves of kitchens, kitchen fireplaces, cordial recesses; ovens whose first
pies were baked four centuries ago; and spits which have cooked for Chaucer! Not the meanest minister among the dishes but is hallowed to me through his imagination, and the Cook goes forth a Manciple. (II,9)

The trees and groves are distinct, though unelaborate, pictures, but this distinctness quickly yields to the influence of Elias's feelings about the scene: his association of it with the past, both his own and that of the college. "Butteries" and "sculleries" are of course visual in a very general way, but the assonance and syllabic parallelism suggest that their chief sensory appeal is to the ear. The word "redolent" is a perfect illustration of Wimsatt's concept of Romantic nature imagery: from its literal basis, implying the presence of actual odors, it is transfigured into a metaphor. Other images in the passage are more evocative than descriptive, and they occasionally resemble those in "The South-Sea House" in their emphasis upon physical emptiness and desertion: the "few or no traces of goers-in or comers-out" and "portals ever gaping wide" in that essay are matched by "halls deserted" and "open doors" in this one. This emphasis upon the insubstantial allows Elias all the more readily to pass on to his real subjects, the past which might have been his own and the past generally. It is Elias's imagination, more than Chaucer's, which "hallow s" the physical scene; which looks through kitchen servants to see Canterbury pilgrims, and through portraits of founders to see benefactors of himself. The use of emblems here is much more complex and subjective than in "The Londoner."
In the two preceding examples, the actual distance in time in one case and the illusion of time in the other justify a lack of photographic clarity. In the following passage from "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," the distance in time is actual, as the title indicates; but this time it is the curiously divided perspective of the observer which influences the quality of the imagery. The passage describes the punishment of one who had run away a third time:

The culprit, who had been a third time an offender, and whose expulsion was at this time deemed irreversible, was brought forth, as at some solemn auto da fe, arrayed in uncouth and most appalling attire—all trace of his late "watchet weeds" carefully effaced, he was exposed in a jacket, resembling those which London lamplighters formerly delighted in, with a cap of the same. The effect of this divestiture was such as the ingenious devisers of it could have anticipated. With his pale and frightened features, it was as if some of those disfigurements in Dante had seized upon him. In this disguise he was brought into the hall..., where awaited him the whole number of his school-fellows, whose joint lessons and sports he was thenceforth to share no more; the awful presence of the steward, to be seen for the last time; of the executioner beadle, clad in his state robe for the occasion; and of two faces more, of dire import, because never but in these extremities visible. These were governors; two of whom, by choice, or charter, were always accustomed to officiate at these Ultima Supplicia; not to mitigate (so at least we understood it), but to enforce the uttermost stripe. (II,17)

The most obvious influence upon the visual quality of the description is the boy's fear, which causes not only a general indistinctness, but an exaggeration of the terrors: the suggestion of infernal punishments and the imagined
purpose of the two governors. The steward, to such a viewer, becomes an "awful presence," rather than someone to be described. The beadle becomes an "executioner," and his "state robe" is left to the reader's own imagination. There are of course some concrete details: the jacket and cap, the "pale and frightened" face. But indistinctness is the rule, and Elia is explicit about one reason for it:

We were generally too faint with attending to the previous disgusting circumstances [i.e., the solemn procession], to make accurate report with our eyes of the degree of corporal suffering inflicted. Report, of course, gave out the beak knotty and livid. (II,17)

The point of view in this passage, however, is not only that of the child. A child might have been aware of some of the suggested analogies, with the Inferno and with autos da fe, but the ironically literary diction and allusiveness of the account is, for the most part, that of an adult. Quotations and allusions such as "watchet weeds" and "Ultima Supplicia," and the literary air and slight archaism of "divestiture" and "disguisements," suggest the mature Elia. The adult's ironic point of view is also expressed by the imputation of motives which Elia can now understand: "The effect...was such as the ingenious devisers of it could have anticipated"; two governors, "by choice, or charter," always attended. The perspective is in fact a double one: the partially recaptured vision of the child, which tends to magnify appearances through fear, and the retrospective view
of the adult, which instead of attempting to restore a realistic visual focus retains the vision of the child and comments ironically upon both the child's fear and the officials' motives. The images are indistinct, as in the earlier examples, but instead of serving as emblems of individual moral qualities or leading to such abstractions as "desolation" or "antiquity," they represent the changed perspective--almost the changed identity--of the viewer.

The same double perspective, this time allied to the suggestive power of the immaterial, is found in the imagery of "Witches and Other Night-Fears." Central themes of this essay are the relation of fear to the imagination and the ability of both to thrive upon that which is "objectless upon earth."17 In telling of his early acquaintance with Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Elia contrasts the harmless interest which he took in a picture of the ark, "delineated with all the fidelity of ocular admeasurement, as if the artist had been upon the spot," and another picture of "the Witch raising up Samuel, which I wish that I had never seen." Accordingly, Elia's description of the first picture is relatively clear: he tells of "the elephant, and the camel--that stare (as well they might) out of the two last windows next the steerage in that unique piece of naval architecture." The description of the horrible picture of the Witch, on the other hand, is first evaded, and when it is finally presented it is, as Daniel Mulcahy says, "awful in its indefiniteness."18
As we see from its reproduction in Lucas' edition, the picture is detailed enough; Elia, however, provides only one concrete detail—"0 that old man covered with a mantle!"

The child's fear-inspired imagination is suggested in this case, not by magnification and distortion, as the Christ's Hospital essay, but by the single detail which stands for a multitude of undescribed horrors. The adult Elia momentarily suspends his own descriptive powers, which in this essay he calls "prosaic" in their clarity and literalness—even his dreams (of cities and buildings) have "a map-like distinctness of trace—and a day-light vividness of vision"—and assumes the child's power of imagination. The child, Elia contends, does not require such "map-like distinctness" to feed his imagination or to stimulate his fears; pictures "can at most but give them a direction." To have described the picture of the witch in detail, as the adult easily could have done, would have extinguished its suggestive power. The single detail, especially in its exclamatory setting, recalls the imagination of the child.

There is a similar combination of the definite and the indistinct in "Blakesmoor in H—shire," an essay which shows even better than that on witches that Lamb's imagery can be sharply defined if he chooses to make it so. Even when the images are distinct, however, one is conscious that they are only selected ones and that they stand, not for the whole of a physical scene, but for subjective qualities. The old
house has been destroyed, and when Elia revisits the site it is described in terms of its present vagueness and its remembered concreteness:

I was astonished at the indistinction of everything. Where had stood the great gates? What bounded the court-yard? Whereabout did the out-houses commence? a few bricks only lay as representative of that which was so stately and so spacious. (II,154)

Out of these "few bricks" and by the power of his imagination Elia attempts to bring the extinct house to life, to find there "a germ to be revivified." The first sign of life is a remembered scene, an image which is clear and vivid:

I should have cried out to them [the destroyers of the house] to spare a plank at least out of the cheerful store-room, in whose hot window-seat I used to sit and read Cowley, with the grass-plat before, and the hum and flappings of that one solitary wasp that ever haunted it about me—it is in mine ears now, as oft as summer returns;...

The picture is quite distinct, and the concrete details suggest that the experience and the setting, despite the distance in time, are intensely remembered: the "hot window-seat," "the grass-plat," and most of all the wasp—"of many, one," as Wordsworth might say. But just as the single tree and the field reawaken Wordsworth's sense of "something that is gone," so this sharply particular image leads Elia into the past of the destroyed house and into his own life there.

As the "revivifying" of Blakesmoor continues, the imagery becomes more characteristically indefinite in outline. The following passage does suggest a particular room and a particular experience, but it would be difficult to envision
it with any precision:

Why, every plank and pannel of that house for me had magic in it. The tapestried bed-rooms--tapestry so much better than painting--not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots--at which childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally--all Ovid on the wall, in colours vivider than his descriptions. Actaeon in mid sprout, with the unappeasable prudery of Diana; and the still more provoking, and almost culinary coolness of Dan Phoebus, eel-fashion, deliberately divesting of Marsyas.

The "eye-encounter" here is indeed "momentary." What were the vivid colors? How did the tapestry itself express the unappeasable prudery of Diana'? There is something of the adult's ironic perspective in the turns of phrase, but the main reason for the vagueness is hinted in the phrase, "staring reciprocally." To the child, the tapestry does not simply contain figures which are to be looked at; it is "peopled" by creatures with "stern bright visages" who stare back. To the retrospective author of the essay, the interest is primarily in the child under the covers, and the imagery of the tapestry is important only as it reflects him.

It should by now be evident that Lamb has come a long way from the generalized imagery of "The Londoner," which was rather mechanically translated into its moral or subjective properties. It is equally evident that he has not simply moved toward a greater particularity of detail. There is considerable contrast between Hunt's treatment of detail and both of Lamb's methods. In his way, Hunt is as interested
in the effect of appearances upon the imagination as Lamb is;
but whereas Lamb in "The Londoner" refers to an "endless suc-
cession of shops" and passes on, Hunt devotes pages to their
description:

There is great beauty as well as agreeableness
in a well-disposed fruiterer's window. Here
are the round piled-up oranges, deepening al-
most into red, and heavy with juice; the apple
with its brown-red cheek, as if it had slept
in the sun; the pear, swelling downwards;
thronging grapes, like so many tight little
bags of wine; the pearly or ruby-like currants,
heaped in light long baskets;...20

And so on, through a description of the shapes and colors of
everything the fruiterer could possibly have sold.

It would be difficult to find a catalogue even remotely
comparable in its concreteness and visual clarity in Lamb's
prose. The merely fanciful comparisons interspersed into
Hunt's description--"like so many tight little bags of
wine"--scarcely disturb the opaque surface. Lamb's observer,
on the other hand, whether an adult or a child, usually ex-
erts such a powerful influence upon what is described that
one sees much deeper than the surface. Lamb's catalogues are
fairly represented by the following account of the drawing of
the lottery:

The two awful cabinets of iron, upon whose massy
and mysterious portals, the royal initials were
gorgeously emblazoned, as if after having de-
posited the unfulfilled prophecies within, the
King himself had turned the lock and still re-
tained the key in his pocket;--the bluecoat boy,
with his naked arm, first converting the invis-
ible wheel, and then diving into the dark recess
for a ticket;--the grave and reverend faces of
the commissioners eyeing the announced number;--
the scribes below calmly committing it to their
huge books;--the anxious countenances of the
surrounding populace, while the giant figures
of Gog and Magog, like presiding deities, looked
down with a grim silence upon the whole proceed­
ing,--constituted altogether a scene, which com­
bined with the sudden wealth supposed to be
lavished from those inscrutable wheels, was
well calculated to impress the imagination of a
boy with reverence and amazement. (I,260)

As in the description of the ceremonial punishment at Christ's
Hospital, the child's imagination includes visual details,
but the phrases into which these details are set lead one
away from the actual scene and into its subjective implica­
tions. Especially in phrases such as "awful cabinets of
iron" and "massy and mysterious portals," there are conveyed
not visual images so much as "awful" and "mysterious" ideas.
The child's imagination influences the presentation of the
scene so thoroughly that it is difficult to know how "Gog and
Magog" should be understood: as painted or sculptured em­
blems which are actually present, or merely as imaginative
elaborations of the scene.

Certainly Lamb has moved in the direction of greater
particularity of detail. Visual images such as the "naked
arm" of the "bluecoat boy" were not found in "The Londoner."
The description of the drawing of the lottery convinces, as
the generalized images in the earlier essay do not, that the
experience was an intensely felt one. But the two essays
have at least one thing in common: the imagery of each, by
virtue of the close attachment of the viewer, leads to
abstract qualities. Whereas the Londoner found "Humour, Interest, Curiosity" in his beloved city, the boy's imagination is impressed with "reverence and amazement." 21

According to Pater, Lamb's view of persons, as well as of things, is concrete and unblurred. Here again, the example of Leigh Hunt might be cited as a point of reference, since his plea for a new kind of character writing has already been quoted. Although he, like Lamb, is interested in the interpretation of his pictures, the interpretation follows from a detailed, literally descriptive image. The washerwoman, though largely a type, is pictured in this way:

In short, whenever we hear a washerwoman at her foaming work, or see her plodding towards us with her jolly warm face, her mob cap, her black stockings, clattering patterns, and tub at arm's length resting on her hip-joint, we look upon her as a living lesson to us to make the most both of time and comfort, and as a sort of allegorical compound of pain and pleasure, a little too much, perhaps, in the style of Rubens. 22

The allegorical interpretation is actually a rather weak afterthought. There is nothing in the picture itself or in the essayist's imagination to make the interpretation seem inevitable. What is most effective is the picture with its clear details, such as the "tub at arm's length resting on her hip-joint." Lamb rarely draws anything with comparable visual clarity.

Much of Lamb's character writing ignores the appearance of the person almost completely. The account of James Elia, in Elia's "poor antithetical manner," gives no attention whatever to the exterior. Instead, he is called "The
genuine child of impulse, the frigid philosopher of prudence," and similar paradoxes of temperament make up the rest of his portrayal. When Lamb does use visual imagery in his character writing, the imagination of the viewer has an effect upon it similar to that in the previous examples. The description of Thomas Coventry in "Old Benchers" is representative:

But what insolent familiar durst have mated Thomas Coventry? whose person was a quadrate, his step massy and elephantine, his face square as the lion's, his gait peremptory and path-keeping, indi­vertible from his way as a moving column, the scarecrow of his inferiors, the brow-beater of equals and superiors, who made a solitude of children wherever he came, for they fled his insufferable presence, as they would have shunned an Elisha bear....Clouds of snuff, aggravating the natural terrors of his speech, broke from each majestic nostril, darkening the air. He took it, not by pinches, but a palmful at once, diving for it under the mighty flaps of his old-fashioned waistcoat pocket; his waistcoat red and angry, his coat dark rappee, tinctured by dye original, and by adjuncts, with buttons of obsolete gold. And so he paced the terrace. (II,85)

There is much concrete detail here, in a way, and the total effect is that of a powerful and solid presence. But of course this is the point: that Coventry, to the astonished eyes of the young Elia and his contemporaries, is less a person to be scrutinized and described in literal terms than a presence to be felt, and even to be fled from. The details are thus not simply matters of buttons, and colors of coat and waistcoat. They are magnified out of all realistic proportion in such phrases as "a moving column," "Clouds of
snuff," "majestic nostril," "darkening the air," and "mighty flaps" of his pocket. Derocquigny perhaps has in mind the similarly inscrutable creatures from Daniel and Revelation when he refers to the apocalyptic aura with which Coventry is portrayed.24

In addition to the simple astonishment of the child, there is another influence upon the visual images used to portray Coventry. Lamb's concept of the imagination as "that power which draws all things to one," which causes even the houses in Hogarth's Gin Lane to appear drunk,25 is operating here. Like the other Benchers, Coventry is described partly in terms which seem more appropriate to the inanimate objects of the Temple: he is shaped like a "quadrate" and is "indivertible from his way as a moving column." Haven notes that "there is something of both the sundial and the statue" in the description of him, and that he is a "grotesque" like the statues on the fountain.26 Both the objects and the Benchers constitute "the mythology of the Temple" to Elia and the other children, and just as the inanimate objects appear to be endowed with life—the cherubic statues on the fountain "uttered" streams of water—Coventry takes on some of the characteristics of an immovable statue. The "fantastic forms" of the Temple are given unity by the child's imagination.

This unifying power does not, of course, belong only to children, and it appears at times when Elia is speaking from
the adult's point of view. The following brief account of a
minor figure in "Ellistoniana" should be compared to Hunt's
portrait of the washerwoman:

There he sat in state [Elliston as manager of
the Olympic Theatre], while before him, on com­
plaint of prompter, was brought for judgment--
how shall I describe her?--one of those little
tawdry things that flirt at the tails of cho­
ruses--a probationer for the town, in either of
its senses--the pertest little drab--a dirty
fringe and appendage of the lamps' smoke--who,
it seems, on some disapprobation expressed by
a "highly respectable" audience, had precipi­
tately quitted her station on the boards, and
withdrawn her small talents in disgust.(II,170-171)

Unlike Hunt, Lamb provides only the merest hint of the girl's
appearance: "little" and perhaps "dirty." Even these de­
tails are partly metaphorical suggestions, and they may be
entirely so. The imagery is certainly primarily metaphori­
cal, and it reveals the dominant influence upon the descrip­
tion. Earlier in the essay Elia makes the point that "wher­
ever Elliston walked, sate, or stood still, there was the
theatre." This is true of Elliston in his managerial judgment
seat. The girl is therefore seen as partaking of the spirit
of the stage and is described in its imagery. She is hardly
a character, but a "thing"--an "appendage of the lamp's
smoke"--serving merely as a necessary prop for Elliston's
performance. Lamb is here, as elsewhere, painting imagina­
tively, drawing all things to one center, which in this case
is dominated by his subjective exaltation of Elliston.

Lamb's imagery, like his elaborate diction and his fig­
urative language, is used in a way which has its dangers.
The word-centeredness of his style, when not accompanied by any great conviction or complexity of thought, easily degenerates into mannerism; and the mixed tone which results from some uses of figurative language seems misapplied in a few cases. But the pervasively subjective atmosphere in which his concrete imagery is enveloped presents even greater dangers. Pater says that his vision is unblurred by "mere abstract theories," and it is true that there is no interference from social or economic theories in Lamb's prose; people are not treated simply as data or as objects for reform. One of Elia's strongest protests is against "The all-sweeping besom of societarian reformation" which was endeavoring to rid London of "the bugbear Mendicity"27— that is, to get the beggars out of sight. It should be noted, in passing, that both the reformers and their concept of beggars are expressed as abstractions. But before attributing to Lamb, as Pater seems to do, a realistic clarity of vision, a true understanding, for example, of what beggars were like, one must take account of the quality of the imagery in "A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars." The schoolmaster who questioned Elia about "provision for the poor in past and present times" found him "rather dimly impressed with some glimmering notions from old poetic associations, than strongly fortified with any speculations reducible to calculation on the subject."28 The reader is likely to find that the same is true of Lamb himself. The view of beggars which is used to counter that of the "societarian" reformers may be represented by the following
Rags, which are the reproach of poverty, are the Beggar's robes, and graceful insignia of his profession, his tenure, his full dress, the suit in which he is expected to show himself in public. He is never out of fashion, or limpeth awkwardly behind it. He is not required to put on court mourning. He weareth all colours, fearing none. His costume hath undergone less change than the Quaker's. He is the only man in the universe who is not obliged to study appearances. The ups and downs of the world concern him no longer....He is the only free man in the universe.

(II,116)

It is one thing to protest the removal of statues from the square of Lincoln's-inn by investing them with qualities emanating from the child's imagination. The statues are in reality "awakening images" to children, and in "Old Benchers" Lamb succeeds in making their awakening power convincing. But it is something else to transform an actual beggar into "the oldest and honourablest form of pauperism" and into "the only free man in the universe." If the reformers in their "modern fastidiousness" have averted their eyes from the true conditions of Houses of Industry, Lamb has averted his in another way. It would be interesting to know George Crabbe's reaction to this essay.

But for the most part Lamb's imagery is treated in a way which, like the word-centered quality of diction, reflects his opposition to both the over-literal—that which he calls "a strait-lacing actuality" in the essay on Shakespeare's tragedies—and the over-ideal. He does at least see that the beggars wear rags, whereas, according to one of the notes
in the Specimens, "A poor man on our stage is always a gentleman; he may be known by a peculiar neatness of apparel, and by wearing black." In another note, he laments the "blank uniformity to which all professional distinctions in apparel have been long hastening," seeing this as an indication of "the Decay of Symbols among us." Pater is certainly correct in speaking of Lamb's emphasis upon "actual things." But this actuality is not presented for its own sake, as Lamb's reference to symbols makes clear. He avoids, no less than Wordsworth, "the tyranny of the eye," a tyranny which often holds Leigh Hunt captive. What Woodring says of Wordsworth's theory and practice might also be applied to Lamb's prose: "The poet is to keep his eye on the object for the purpose of revealing, not the exterior of the object, but its essence." Like Mrs. Battle, Lamb "despised superficiality, and looked deeper than the colours of things." But it is Elia who opposed Mrs. Battle's thoroughgoing austerity, her advocacy of "picture-less" cards, and speaks in favor of "the pretty antic habits, like heralds in a procession--the gay triumph-assuring scarlets--the contrasting deadly-killing sabres." Pictures have a definite place in his scheme of things, but they must be pictures which have meaning, which represent intellectual or moral qualities. His discovery of a congenial way of including such pictures in his essays is one indication of the Romantic quality of his prose style; but it also leaves him partly in the tradition of the moral essay.
Notes

7. Pater, p. 112.
11. The Spectator, I, 294.
12. The Spectator, I, 294.
14. Works, I, 72, 79, 82, 86.
15. Works, II, 1.
16. Compare another figurative use of the word, also from a description of Oxford: "On every side Oxford is redolent of age and authority" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, English Traits). Emerson's use of the word, unlike Lamb's is figurative only.
17. Works, II, 68.
18. Mulcahy, p. 520.
25. Works, I, 73.
27. Works, II, 114.
30. Works, IV, 126n.
31. Works, IV 71n.
Chapter Six
Epistolary Influence

Despite his declared intention of writing "for antiquity," and despite the customary emphasis upon his archaic style, Lamb's prose is influenced chiefly by two traditions which were very much alive in his day. The first is that of the essay as it had developed since Addison and Steele. The Spectator tradition itself was of course past its period of greatness, but both its lightness of tone and its didactic purpose were continued, in somewhat modified forms, by Hunt and Hazlitt, as well as by Lamb. Lamb begins thoroughly in this tradition, and even in Elia he retains the concept of the essay as a civilizing force. The other tradition is that of Romantic aesthetics. Not only in its emphasis upon subjective experience and uniqueness, but in the sensitivity of its style to changes of mood and purpose, Lamb's prose reveals its affinity with Romantic lyric poetry. In his essays, metaphorical expression is often the rule, rather than the departure from "normal" discourse, and at times it governs the entire movement of an essay.

However, Lamb's essays are not quite Spectator essays, nor are they quite lyric poems. There is one influence upon Lamb's style which has not yet been considered, and to some critics it is the most important of all: "His essays,"
Ian Jacks says, "are best regarded as developments from his familiar letters." There are a number of senses in which this is true, as the present chapter will attempt to show. The comment is perhaps most valuable in suggesting the true nature of Lamb's essays: in their aesthetic relation to author and to reader, they are not so much didactic or lyric as they are epistolary.

Lamb's letters have hardly been ignored, and to some readers they are more interesting than the essays themselves. The most casual study of them reveals that they contain ideas, facts, personal anecdotes, and traits of style which reappear in the essays; in some cases the parallels in both thought and expression are so close that the letter seems intended as a first draft of the essay. The letters are indeed an extremely important part of Lamb's apprenticeship as an essayist, which has been referred to earlier only as it concerns his published writings. The letters are almost certainly a greater influence than the published essays and reviews: Lamb was never prolific, and the published writings between 1802, when "The Londoner" was written, and 1811, the year of the Hogarth and Shakespeare essays, are not plentiful enough to account for the very high quality of these two pieces of criticism. Nor are his writings between 1811 and 1820 so abundant that Elia can be accounted for by them alone. The true apprenticeship took place in his correspondence.

The word "apprenticeship" is more appropriately applied to Lamb's correspondence than is often thought. The letters
are not simply a reservoir of stylistic devices and ideas which Lamb taps in order to fill his essays; nor do they only provide a testing ground for specific essays: they themselves sometimes display finished qualities of style and thought which justify considering them works of literary art. It is doubtful that this finish is accidental or that Lamb was unconscious of their wrought quality. If, as Virginia Woolf says, "The art of letter-writing is often the art of essay-writing in disguise," in Lamb's case the disguise is sometimes rather thin. They are of course usually informal and spontaneous in appearance, but so are many of the essays.

The letters are an influence upon the essays in the most direct sense: among the essential qualities of Lamb's essays are some which are most easily thought of as epistolary. They are not those derived from the Spectator tradition, the conventional letters from invented correspondents. Instead, it is the very relationship between Lamb, or Elia, and his readers—the eccentric, whimsical, irresponsible persona which he assumes—which is the richest legacy of his correspondence. The development of this persona may be observed in the letters, and indeed it is a part of Lamb's process of maturing. Ian Jack, of all commentators upon Lamb, has probably described this process most convincingly, and the present study is heavily indebted to his discussion of it.

The letters to Coleridge, dating from 1796 to 1709 reveal a Lamb who is, as Jack says, "as much a Man of Feeling
as Mackenzie himself had been in his youth. 5 Although there are some examples of a verbal playfulness in even the earliest of these letters, Lamb's dominant tone is a sincere and confessional one: "I hate concealment, and love to give a faithful journal of what passes within me," as he writes in October of 1796, 6 and the theme is repeated with variations in letters to Coleridge during the next two years. Even after his sister's first illness, during which she killed their mother, Lamb does not change immediately, although he does burn many of his poems and a journal which he was keeping. In the letters to Coleridge which tells of the destruction of these writings, he continues in a tone much like that of the earliest letters. 7 A phrase which appears in a later letter, "the naked honesty of prose," 8 is an apt description of the tone of these letters.

It is of course Lamb's confidence in Coleridge's friendship which permits the "naked honesty" in which he indulges. The same confidence also allows humorous mannerisms of language which foreshadow, however faintly, the future Elia. "Thy Watchman's, thy bellman's verses, I do retort upon thee, thou libellous varlet," Lamb writes, and although the reference is not entirely clear, the tone is obviously one that suggests friendship. 9 Oddities of diction such as "floccnaucl-what-do-you-call-em-ists," and archaic or poetic words such as "ycleped" also are indicative of a friendship shared by two bookish men. 10 In addition, Lamb uses metaphors with
a frequency which suggests the future essayist, although they are generally less original and effective than those of Elia. "Thus am I pouring balsam into the wounds I may have been inflicting on my poor friend's vanity," he writes, after mixing adverse criticism and praise in his comments upon one of Coleridge's poems.11 "I hate made-dishes at the muses' banquet," he writes,12 and while the sentiment is one which Elia might share, the expression of it would probably have been more striking in one of the essays.

The same letter, however, contains a passage which does clearly give promise of Lamb's mature style, and it is worth quoting at length. The letter is to Coleridge in 1797, and Lamb assumed that Charles Lloyd would read it also. The subject is Lamb's recent visit to a Quaker's meeting, at which he witnessed "a man under all the agitations and workings of a fanatic";

In the midst of his inspiration—and the effects of it were most noisy—was handed into the midst of the meeting a most terrible blackguard Wapping sailor; the poor man, I believe, had rather have been in the hottest part of an engagement, for the congregation of broad-brims, together with the ravings of the prophet, were too much for his gravity, though I saw even he had delicacy enough not to laugh out. And the inspired gentleman, though his manner was so supernatural, yet neither talked nor professed to talk anything more than good sober sense, common morality, with now and then a declaration of not speaking from himself. Among other things, looking back to his childhood and early youth, he told the meeting what a graceless young dog he had been, that in his youth he had a good share of wit: reader, if thou hadst seen the gentleman, thou wouldst have sworn that it must indeed have been
many years ago, for his rueful physiognomy would have scared away the playful goddess from the meeting, where he presided, for ever. A wit! a wit! what could he mean? Lloyd, it reminded me of Falkland in the 'Rivals,' 'Am I full of wit and humour? No, indeed you are not. Am I the life and soul of every company I come into? No, it cannot be said you are.' That hard-faced gentleman, a wit! Why, Nature wrote on his fanatic forehead fifty years ago, 'Wit never comes, that comes to all.' I should be as scandalised at a bon mot issuing from his oracle-looking mouth, as to see Cato go down a country-dance.

(I,101-102)

The reader immediately recognizes the source of part of the essay entitled "A Quaker's Meeting": both the sailor and the Quaker gentleman are resurrected from Lamb's memory twenty-four years later. The passage in the letter shows much witty exuberance and artistry in the telling of the anecdote, and in fact this account is in many ways more amusing than that in the essay. Phrases such as "blackguard Wapping sailor" and "his fanatic forehead" suggest Elia's picturesqueness of expression. The allusions, to Sheridan, Milton, and Shakespeare, are applied in a comic manner similar to that of the future essayist. And most important, both the sustained passage from The Rivals and the address to a "reader" indicate that Lamb is consciously performing for an audience which he regards as a friendly one. For the moment, "naked honesty" and Rousseau-like confessions are forgotten; one can easily imagine that some points of the story are exaggerated or modified for comic effect. The conclusion of the letter makes clear that this comic outburst
is based upon the friendship which he assumes to exist:

God love you all. You are very good to submit to be pleased with reading my nothings. 'Tis the privilege of friendship to talk nonsense, and to have her nonsense respected. --Yours ever, C. Lamb. (I,102)

The "privilege of friendship" was interrupted sharply in 1798, when, partly owing to Lloyd's influence, Lamb and Coleridge had a falling out. In some ways, this disagreement marks the true departure of Lamb's character and his manner of writing from the "disclosure of all the most hidden and delicate affections of the mind" at which he had previously aimed. The letter from Lamb to Coleridge which marks the bitterest point of their quarrel is written in a mock-academic style which shows that a common body of literary knowledge can lead to something very different from good-humored, allusive pleasantry:

THESES QUAEDAM THEOLOGICAЕ

1. Whether God loves a lying Angel better than a true Man?
2. Whether the Archangel Uriel could affirm an untruth? and if he could whether he would?
3. Whether Honesty be an angelic virtue? or not rather to be reckoned among those qualities which the Schoolmen term 'Virtutes minus splendide et terrae et hominis participes'?
4. Whether the higher order of Seraphim Illuminati ever sneer? (I,123)

And so on, through eight "theses" and a mocking conclusion, which show a considerable, if unfortunately directed, stylistic virtuosity. One of the most interesting results of this quarrel is that Lamb turns to Southey as a correspondent--Southey himself was to receive an epistolary blast from
Elia twenty-five years later—and after doing so, Lamb is pleased enough with the eight "theses" that he repeats them verbatim for Southey's benefit. Whatever it shows of Lamb's "self-pleasing quaintness," it does indicate that he is not displeased to gratify others with his wit. This act, even more than the address to a "reader" in the letter to Coleridge and Lloyd, suggests the essayist in search of a public.

From this time on, one can see many distinct traces of Elia's verbal humor peering out from Lamb's letters. The following passages from letters to Southey are representative: (of a copy of Wither's Emblems) "Some child, the curse of antiquaries and bane of bibliographical rarities, hath a little sullied the author's own portraiture"; "I have had a letter from Lloyd; the young metaphysician of Caius is well, and is busy recanting the new heresy, metaphysics, for the old dogma, Greek"; "I wish you could affix a different name to the volume; there is a contemptible book, a wretched assortment of vapid feelings, entitled 'Pratt's Gleanings,' which hath damned and impropriated the title for ever"; "George [Dyer] writes odes where the rhymes, like fashionable man and wife, keep a comfortable distance of six or eight lines apart...." Finally, the following comments upon one of Southey's poems contain phrases which could be applied to the style which Lamb is developing: "...those kind of home-strokes, where more is felt than strikes the ear; a terseness, a jocular pathos,
which makes one feel in laughter....The fifth [stanza] falls off. It has no felicity of phrase, no old-fashioned phrase or feeling."19 In the preceding excerpts, the alliterative and otherwise striking arrangement of phrases, the archaic or poetic verbs, the outright archaic words such as "impropriated," and the felicity of the metaphors are significant. There is a new note of sharpness which the man of feeling usually did not impart to his letters, but which the writer newly freed from Coleridge's domination now offers repeatedly.

There was soon a reconciliation between Lamb and Coleridge, and Lamb's letters to him show the results of his new independence, and at times his impudence. But the addition of Thomas Manning to Lamb's stock of correspondents has a greater influence upon the developing Elian manner. Manning was one with whom Lamb did not have to be on guard, as he did with Wordsworth, Southey, and at times even Coleridge. In writing to him, his new combination of affection and sharpness (toward others) recur frequently:

Godwin I am a good deal pleased with. He is a very well-behaved, decent man, nothing very brilliant about him, or imposing, as you may suppose; quite another guess sort of gentleman from what your Anti-Jacobin Christians imagine him. I was well pleased to find he has neither horns nor claws; quite a tame creature, I assure you. A middle-sized man, both in stature and in understanding; whereas, from his noisy fame, you would expect to find a Briareus Centimanus, or a Tityus tall enough to pull Jupiter from his heavens. (I,174)

In the same letter Lamb in effect bids a farewell to the tone of his early letters to Coleridge. "Truth," he writes, is to
be distinguished from "Sincerity, that amphibious gentleman, who is so ready to perk up his obnoxious sentiments unasked into your notice, as Midas would his ears into your face un-called for." This letter is written of February of 1800.

By this time Rosamund Gray is out of Lamb's system, and the essayist is ready to begin his apprenticeship in earnest.

Lamb's interest in Burton begins at about this time, and the influence of Burton is seen in the letters, as well as in the imitations which he published. As was noted earlier, Burton, like other authors who influenced Lamb's style is not only imitated but is assimilated into the "conglomerate" idiom which he is now developing. The letters, unlike the published imitation, provide an opportunity to practice this assimilation. The following reference to Charles and Sophia Lloyd's new child, in a letter to Manning, is probably inspired by Burton, but it is clearly not a mere imitation:

Heaven keep the new-born infant from star-blasting and moon-blasting, from epilepsy, marasmus, and the devil! May he live to see many day, and they good ones; some friends, and they pretty regular correspondents, with as much wit as [?and] wisdom as will eat their bread and cheese together under a poor roof without quarrelling; as much goodness as will earn heaven if there be such a place and deserve it if there be not, but, rather than go to bed solitary, would truckle with the meanest succubus on her bed of brimstone. (I, 200)

In this example, Burton's influence may be by way of Sterne; but the "outbursts of gustatory ecstasy" which Lucas notes throughout the letters, and which of course lead eventually
to "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig," are surely adaptations of Burtonian catalogues. The following sentence from another letter to Manning sounds both Elian and Burtonian:

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 gold-foils to rare jewels) your partridge, pheasant, woodcock, snipe, teal, widgeon, and the other lesser daughters of the ark. 

Lucas remarks that "Lamb was just now [i.e., 1800] steeped in the Anatomy." Burton's influence is seen in the tone of various passages, in direct references to him, in suggested remedies for various ills ("Read Albertus Magnus de Chartis Amissis five times over after phlebotomising"), and most important for the developing essayist, in the syntax of the letters.

In both the letters and the essays, the majority of Lamb's sentences are loosely constructed, but not very remarkably so. They follow what Hazlitt considers "the genius of the English language," which is "elliptical and idiomatic." "Conversational" is a term which would fit them very well. After Lamb's acquaintance with Burton, however, one begins to find the eccentrically abrupt successions of phrases and clauses and the appositional clusters which fill the Anatomy. Some of these characteristics are found in the Reflector essays, as was seen in the discussion of syntax, but they appear much earlier in the letters. The following account of John Rickman, in a letter to Manning, is
He is a most pleasant hand: a fine rattling fellow, has gone through life laughing at solemn apes; himself hugely literate, oppressively full of information in all stuff of conversation, from matter of fact to Zenophon and Plato--can talk Greek with Porson, politics with Thelwall, conjecture with George Dyer, nonsense with me, and anything with anybody: a great farmer, somewhat concerned in an agricultural magazine--reads no poetry but Shakspeare, very intimate with Southey, but never reads his poetry... up to anything, down to everything--whatever sapit hominem. A perfect man.

It would surely be wrong to call this passage simply informal or casual. The parallel structures suggest, if not careful design, at least a concern with stylistic effect. "Elliptical" it certainly is, but the idiom is not that of casual conversation or of Lamb's earlier letters; there is a definitely baroque quality, which reappears in some passages of Elia. As the account of Rickman proceeds, one can even see stylistic anticipations of specific passages in Elia:

You must see Rickman to know him, for he is a species in one. A new class. An exotic, any slip of which I am proud to put in my garden-pot. The clearest-headed fellow. Fullest of matter with least verbosity. (I,221)

The following passage from "The South-Sea House" has the same syntactical qualities and almost the same rhythm:

Hence they formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay-monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more for show than use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat--and not a few among them had arrived at considerable proficiency on the German flute. (Works, II,3)

Despite the discontinuous phrases, which ordinarily might suggest a relaxed informality, there is a tautness, a constant
pressure of wit, an attempt in each phrase to outdo the preceding one or to come closer than it to the truth, which makes the style in some ways a demanding, even a disciplined one. This is true both of the letter and the essay, and in both there is a metaphorical concentration of meaning which is more characteristic of Lamb's mature style than even the archaisms and allusions are.

From this point on the history of his correspondence, Lamb's playful style is likely to reveal pronounced stylistic influences, and while this does not mean that the playfulness is not genuine, it does show that his spontaneity can coexist with much artifice. George Barnett's distinction between those stylistic devices that are copied and those whose appearance in Lamb's letters shows them to be "natural" is not a very sound one. The "Friend of the Late Elia" says that his "affected array of antique modes and phrases" was natural to him, and the same is often true of Lamb himself. Sterne may be the inspirer of the following passage from a letter to Coleridge, but even if he is not, there is a distinct air of the performance about it:

> My head is playing all the tunes in the world, ringing such peals. It has just finished the 'Merry Christ Church Bells,' and absolutely is beginning 'Turn again, Whittington.' Buz, buz, buz: bum, bum, bum: wheeze, wheeze, wheeze: feu, feu, feu: tinky, tinky, tinky: crunch. I shall certainly come to be damned at last. I have been getting drunk for two days running. (I, 203)

In the same letter Lamb calls attention to this quality of
artifice. After erasing a few lines, he asks:

Is it not a pity so much fine writing should be erased? But, to tell the truth, I began to scent that I was getting into that sort of style which Longinus and Dionysius Halicarnassus aptly call 'the affected.'

(I,205-206)

The next step in the apprenticeship is the letter which has a thematic, metaphorical, or tonal unity of the kind found in several of the Elia essays. Without having any apparent purpose beyond that of communicating news, sentiment, or puns to a friend, Lamb occasionally molds the letter into an artistic whole. Something of the kind is seen in a short letter to Manning, which has already been quoted in part. After acknowledging the birth of Charles Lloyd's child in the Burtonian style noted above, Lamb modulates to a different subject, but retains the imagery of childbirth and fertility:

Coleridge is settled with his wife (with a child in her guts) and the young philosopher [Hartley Coleridge] at Keswick with the Wordsworths. They have contrived to spawn a new volume of lyrical ballads, which is to see the light in about a month, and causes no little excitement in the literary world. George Dyer too, that good-natured heathen, is more than nine months gone with his twin volumes of ode, pastoral, sonnet, elegy, Spenserian, Horatian, Akensidish, and Masonic verse--Clio prosper the birth!... Well, God put it into the hearts of the English gentry to come in shoals and subscribe to his poems....

(I,200-201)

The metaphors and the tone of the letter--a tone which combines the literary and the colloquial, perhaps also in imitation of Burton--give it the sort of unity which is characteristic of some of the essays. The concluding sentence of the letter is also in its dominant tone and reflects a certain
stylistic self-consciousness, as though a performance had just ended:

   Now farewell: for dinner is at hand, and yearning guts do chide.  (I,201)

   A much better example of the artistic finish and unity attained by some of the letters is one to Coleridge, in which Lamb presents an anecdote full of characteristically Elian sentiment and satiric insight. The letter is too long to be quoted, but its most interesting details may be discussed here. Lamb, in company with George Dyer, has visited Joseph Cottle shortly after the death of Cottle's brother. Cottle is inconsolable until Lamb comments tactfully upon the improvement he perceives in a revision of his epic poem, Alfred:

   Joseph, who till now had sat with his knees cowering in by the fire-place, wheeled about, and with great difficulty of body shifted the same round to the corner of a table where I was sitting, and first stationing one thigh over the other, which is his sedentary mood, and placidly fixing his benevolent face right against mine, waited my observations. (I,216)

This careful description of movement and posture reminds one of Lamb's debt to Sterne. The technique is used only occasionally in the essays--in "Barbara S--," for example--but it is extremely effective as a way of portraying eccentricity of character. The description of Corporal Trim's stance in Book Two, Chapter Seventeen, of Tristram Shandy may very well lie behind it. And indeed, the indebtedness to Sterne is suggested in the very next sentence of the letter:

   At that moment it came strongly into my mind,
that I had got Uncle Toby before me, he looked so kind and so good. (I,216)

The sentimental tone of the passage is not allowed to go unchecked in the letter, any more than it is in Elia. After Lamb has perceived "that Cottle had forgot his brother was so lately become a blessed spirit," he responds appropriately:

I felt my cue, and strong pity working at the root, I went to work, and beslabber'd Alfred with most unqualified praise, or only qualifying my praise by the occasional politic interposition of an exception taken against trivial faults, slips, and human imperfections, which, by removing the appearance of insincerity, did but in truth heighten the relish. Perhaps I might have spared that refinement, for Joseph was in a humour to hope and believe all things.... So what with my actual memory, of which I made the most, and Cottle's own helping me out, for I really had forgotten a good deal of Alfred, I made shift to discuss the most essential parts entirely to the satisfaction of its author, who repeatedly declared that he loved nothing better than candid criticism. (I,217)

Immediately after this ironic passage Lamb reflects sentimentally upon the effect of his "candour," which he says was "lusious to my conscience," and the mixture of tones continues to the end of the letter. The irony in particular reaches its culmination after Dyer's saying that the deceased brother had been "estimable both for his head and heart, and would have made a fine poet if he had lived": Cottle remarks peevishly "that he always thought that the qualities of his brother's heart exceeded those of his head." Lamb makes the appropriate summary, which effectively places the anecdote at a distance suitable to the conclusion:

I believe his brother, when living, had formed
precisely the same idea of him; and I apprehend the world will assent to both judgments. I rather guess that the Brothers were poetical rivals. I judged so when I saw them together. Poor Cottle, I must leave him, after his short dream, to muse again upon his poor brother, for whom I am sure in secret he will yet shed many a tear. (1,217)

E. V. Lucas is quite right in referring to this letter as an example of Lamb's "richest mood of comedy."

It is also in several ways an anticipation of the essays: in its allusiveness and literary air, its metaphorical revolving of a subject--"In the language of mathematicians the author was as 9, the brother as 1"--above all in the apparently casual, but actually firm structure. The concluding sentence--"Now send me in return some Greta news"--actually rounds off the letter with an appropriate flourish, the counterpart of which is the "In my next" formula of "My Relations" and other essays.

These are some of the ways in which the letters in effect serve as an apprenticeship for the essayist. They are a medium wherein Lamb begins to discover his identity and the style which is properly part of such an identity. In the letters he enjoys an even greater freedom to experiment than Hunt's Reflector gave, and he takes advantage of it in a way that he did not do in the essays. In addition, they afford an opportunity for him to mould his experiences into an artistic form which is congenial to him, and they are thus interesting not only as revelations of Lamb the man, or even as sources of his essays, but as works of literary art in their own right. It is thus natural that the published essays should retain
some of the characteristics of the letter as a form. In one sense, this form was already part of the essay tradition, and Lamb's essays which are actually epistolary, such as "Edax on Appetite," "Distant Correspondents," and "Letter of Elia to Robert Southey," are continuations of it. But the mark which his correspondence leaves upon his essays is more important.

In the first place, the essays deal with real people, instead of character types such as Will Honeycomb, Sir Andrew Freeport, and Dick Minim. Very often the actual names of persons are used, and even when they are not, a real person usually is the basis of the character: Coleridge appears as "Comberbatch" and as "S. T. C.," John Fenwick as "Ralph Bigod, Esq.,” and Sarah Burney as "Mrs. Battle." The same is true in the "Lepus" papers, where "Mrs. Pry" is almost certainly based upon the second Mrs. Godwin, the name being a reflection of Lamb's estimate of her character. One could say that Lamb, instead of portraying a type based upon the characteristics found in many individual persons, portrays a person whom he knows in such a way that he takes on the qualities of a type. It is in this way that Thomas Coventry becomes "presque apocalyptique." One could also say that this method is essentially Romantic. But in Lamb's case, it derives most directly from his portrayal of acquaintances in his letters: Godwin, in the letter to Manning quoted earlier; Rickman, also in a letter to Manning; and above all, George
Dyer, in letters to Coleridge, Manning, and Rickman.

Dyer appears so often and in such a variety of amusing contexts that he begins to take on the qualities of a mythic, or at least a fictional, character. His absent-mindedness, his wild way with logic, his impractical dedication to an impossible level of scholarly accuracy, and his assumption that "all men are fine geniuses" are only a few of his qualities, which are emphasized in Lamb's letters for the delectation of his friends. Lamb appears to be institutionalizing him, to be inventing sobriquets: "George Dyer, of burlesque memory"; "George Dyer, that common Lyer of Benevolence"; and so on. As Ian Jack says, "when he writes about Dyer Lamb is always Elia," and of course Elia writes about "G. D." on several occasions. Lamb's assumption that his correspondent will share his amusement and satirical insight into Dyer's character and will make the proper generous allowances is duplicated in the essays. "D. started like an unbrok heifer, when I interrupted him," is a sentence which could have been taken from one of Lamb's letters; actually, it is from "Oxford in the Vacation." The portrayal of Dyer there is so much like that in a letter that the publication of it seems almost an indiscretion; and in fact, Dyer was quite disturbed by the figure he thought he was cutting in Elia. The same kind of familiar treatment prevails when other acquaintances are discussed, and often it would be difficult to tell whether an isolated sentence comes from a letter or an essay.
Another quality of the essays which shows the influence of the letters is their casual, even haphazard, transitions from topic to topic. Addison's idea of the wildness of essays was that one did not organize the ideas carefully under separate headings; but one did have a general subject which gave the essay some unity. Even in Lamb's essays which have unified subjective designs, the transitions seem spontaneous, as they would be in a casual letter. In a letter to Manning, written in 1809, his reference to its necessary brevity leads to the revelation that he is moving, which in turn leads to general reflections upon the discomforts of moving.29 In "Oxford in the Vacation," Elia glides from subject to subject in a similar way. Speaking of manuscripts in the Bodleian, he says:

I leave these curiosities to Porson, or to G. D.--whom, by the way, I found busy as a moth over some rotten archive....(Works.II,10)

Similarly, parts of some essays appear as afterthoughts, no attempt being made to rearrange the essay to accommodate them. A long paragraph is added to "Old Benchers," and its prefix--"P.S."--suggests how thoroughly Lamb's correspondence has influenced the very terms in which he thinks of his essays.30 Digressive paragraphs appear frequently in the essays, such as "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers," in which Elia dilates upon Mr. Read's "Salopian House" without referring at all to chimney-sweepers.31 The liberty is one which one comes to expect as part of the Elian style, but the fact
that such rambling is essentially epistolary is seldom noted.

There is, finally, one quality derived from the letters which is of the very essence of Lamb's prose style. George Williamson speaks of the self-revelation which, somewhat paradoxically, the essays allow and which must be limited in the letters by the character and the biases of Lamb's correspondents. The relation between Lamb and his correspondent in the letters, says Williamson, is a "personal equation"; that in the essay is an "impersonal equation," permitting "the terrible intimacy of art." This contrast between the two forms is, in his view, an essential one, and he stresses it so forcefully partly because it is often neglected. There is surely some truth in what Williamson says. Especially worth noting is his comment that in the letters Lamb can rely upon the correspondent's knowledge of his character, his mannerisms, his bias, without filling them in too explicitly; while in the essays, "Lamb puts his face and hands, even his body, into his writing, and so more completely reveals himself to all men." There are, after all, despite the similarities that have so far been emphasized, a number of differences between the two forms: the essays are generally longer and more fully developed, for one thing.

But the connotations of the term "impersonal equation" are likely to be misleading. As was noted in the case of Lamb's early letters to Coleridge, he assumes a friendly
relationship with the correspondent, which permits the free play of whimsy and idiosyncrasy: "'Tis the privilege of friendship to talk nonsense, and to have her nonsense respected." But Elia's relationship to his "Reader" is not quite accurately described as an "impersonal equation."

Here too, Lamb is relying upon intimacy, or the illusion of intimacy, in his appeal to the reader. The Londoner is writing to other Londoners, and his preference of the "very deformities" of the city to "rural scenes," though unconventional in one sense, is supposed to be not altogether foreign to his readers. The Londoner is an "enthusiast," and he has some of the oddity of character later associated with Elia--"I am naturally inclined to hypochondria"--but the reader is taken into his confidence so thoroughly that their relationship is anything but "impersonal." In fact, the terms upon which they correspond are those which become standard in the Elia essays.

As noted in the first chapter, the illusion or pretense of intimacy is established at the very beginning of Elia:

Reader, in thy passage from the Bank--where thou hast been receiving thy half-yearly dividends (supposing thou art a lean annuitant like myself)....

Similarly, Elia acknowledges the expectations and standards of the reader, or at least what he takes to be their standards, at other places in the essays: "...(dare I tell thee, how foolish I am?)," he asks, before making his confession that he would be content to play "sick whist" forever;34
"If these speculations seem fantastical to thee, reader—(a busy man, perchance), if I tread out of the way of thy sympathy, and am singularly-conceited only, I retire, impenetrable to ridicule, under the phantom cloud of Elia."**35**

Elia is thus aware of the reader's possible response to the oddity of his character and tastes, but this oddity is not an insurmountable barrier; it is indeed often a basis of communication. In the last of the above quotations, there seems to be a suggestion that, however the reader protests, the "speculations" of Elia are probably familiar to him.

This relationship between Elia and his readers has already been discussed as the aesthetic distance which is established in part by the archaic and word-centered qualities of diction. If these qualities, along with the sustained figurative idiom of much of Lamb's prose, may be called the primary internal characteristics of his style, then the special relation between the author and reader is surely the chief external characteristic. This relation is best understood as one which occupies a middle point between certain established positions. Lamb does not write as an objective, detached observer or moral arbiter; he is neither an Addison nor a Johnson. But neither does he indulge in self-revelation for its own sake or because of some inner drive to confess. One is usually conscious of a moral purpose in his writings, and sometimes this purpose is quite explicit. Lamb does not write as though to a "public," to readers who are expected
to think of themselves collectively and of the application of Lamb's themes to society; but neither does he create autonomous, imaginative "worlds" which he considers to have value apart from a public and its expectations. As this study has attempted to show, he is influenced by Romantic aesthetics, but he retains, in a modified form, the moral purpose of the traditional essay.

This modification is best represented by the letter. Even in the great majority of his essays which are not explicitly epistolary in form and which are not obviously derived from a particular letter from Lamb to a friend, there are qualities which make "epistolary" the best description of their form. Their subject matter is either assumed to be already familiar, in which case the author tells how it appears, or appeared, to him; or it is described or evoked, as though for the benefit of a particular reader. There is a difference between the way Mr. Spectator aims at enlisting public sympathy in his description of the Royal Exchange, and Elia's way of calling the individual reader's attention to something in its very nature out of the public eye: the South-Sea House, for instance. Despite the affinities of Lamb's essays with lyric poetry, which have been observed repeatedly in this study, their truer affinity is with the personal letter. The reader does not "overhear" Elia, as he might overhear the speaker in a lyric poem. He is being addressed, and the address is to him as an individual. There
is often an air of the performance, and even a bit of affectation, but the author assumes that the reader is kindly disposed, that he will hear his nonsense and respect it.

In fact, the epistolary element in the Elia essays, at least, is not entirely feigned. From the beginning, these essays drew responses from readers of the London Magazine, both in letters to that journal and in comments in others, such as Blackwood's. At times, Elia replied, as he did when one "W. K." protested against the portrayal of George Dyer in the original, and longer, version of "Oxford in the Vacation." Also, Lamb's correspondence shows that the essays provoked personal letters which are, in a way, an extension of the correspondence begun by the essays themselves. He received gifts of suckling pig and letters guessing at Elia's identity, the latter a practice Lamb may be said to have started in both "The South-Sea House" and "Oxford in the Vacation." Lamb begins his career with one correspondent only: Coleridge. In a few years he has acquired several, many of them particularly congenial: Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Manning, Southey, Rickman. At the height of his career, at the time of Elia and through the medium of the Elia essays, he is corresponding with much of the English-speaking world.

Notes

2. Some of these resemblances are discussed by Marie Law, pp. 109-118.

3. Melvin Watson notes the striking superiority of the two critical essays to the other Reflector essays; "The Spectator Tradition," pp. 207-208.


6. Letters, I, 43-44. It should be noted here that Lucas' edition of the Letters is being used with some caution. It is known to be unreliable on matters of detail, including spelling and punctuation: see George Barnett, "A Critical Analysis of the Lucas Edition of Lamb's Letters," MLQ, IX (Sept. 1948), 303-314. It is, however, the best available (Barnett, p. 314). The letters quoted in this chapter have been collated with the versions given by the Boston Bibliophile Society edition, Letters of Charles Lamb, ed. Henry H. Harper (Boston, 1905), 5 volumes. There are a number of discrepancies, but none that affect the points made in this chapter; Lucas' text is therefore unchanged here.


12. Letters, I, 100.


17. Letters, I, 140.

18. Letters, I, 141.

33. Williamson, p. 75.
36. Some of these were of course not particularly friendly; see Lucas, *Life*, II, 155; *Works*, II, 323-324. Horace Smith's friendlier communication has already been quoted in part; *Works*, II, 329.
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