

## ***On Charles Lamb's Romantic Essays***

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### Abstract

In the Romantic literary period, the works of many of the well-known authors and poets are usually classified by genre based on not only the time in which they were produced, but their essential form and the subject matters. Charles Lamb chronologically falls within the same category as these authors and poets, but his works differ from the other well-known works both thematically and in form. While his works in some cases have similarities to the works of the Victorians who followed, his use of different literary tools helped him to create an individual Romantic style, but still similar enough to situate him into the genre. After understanding the qualities of both the Romantic and Victorian periods, it is easy to see that his works fall into the category of Romantic, and after looking into the essay form's history, Lamb's choice in this form be better understood.

### On Charles Lamb's Romantic Essays

Charles Lamb's most popular and successful works took the form of the essay. As an essayist whose works were being produced during the period of British Romanticism, Charles Lamb's works differed in form from the works of other Romantic writers of that time who often chose poetry as their mode of expression, but in subject and artistic ability, his body of work was similar to his many well-known contemporaries. Some aspects of his writings, such as certain subjects and his stylistic choices, make his work difficult to categorize as Romantic or Victorian era. Although Lamb was writing in a form that many of the Victorians who followed him chose to use as well, his work has many characteristics that situate his work as an essayist and poet among the English Romantics. Ultimately although it is stylistically and sometimes seemingly subjectively different, Charles Lamb's works should be categorized and the British Romantic period based on the content and themes. While his extensive use of the essay seems to make his work fall outside of the typical works from the romantic period, Lamb's use of the essay was strategic and purposeful to help him achieve a Romantic effect; Lamb's ability to create works that are situated in with the Romantics while using a form and subjects that are unusual to what is generally thought of when discussing the Romantic period shows his impressive and artistic abilities as an essays and as a writer during this time period.

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*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* lists the major characteristics of this period, including “Glorification of the Ordinary” and “Individualism and Alienation.” Greenblatt describes one of the works of William Wordsworth, a well-known British Romantic, in the anthology. Wordsworth’s “Preface of 1802” is described by Greenblatt as “poetic practice with theory that inverted the traditional hierarchy of poetic genres, subjects, and styles. It elevated humble life and the plain style, which in earlier theory were appropriate only for the pastoral, the genre at the bottom of the traditional hierarchy, into the principal subject and medium for poetry in general” (17). William Wordsworth serves as a standard example of the styles and forms of the British Romantic poets. This elevation of ordinary life as a part of respected literary works is a characteristic that became popular from the works of the Romantics.

G. H. Mair’s *English Literature 1450-1900* discusses the literary movements over the 450 year span covered in the book. In the chapter “The Romantic Revival,” Mair discusses the major forms of writing in the period, and he claims that “it was poetry that the best minds of the time found their means of expression” (121). He continued however, “But it produced prose of rare quality too” (121). While the poets of the Romantic period were the ones who made the majority of the major contributions to the era, the prose writers and essayists also had a place of their own within the period. Mair believed that the prose writers of this time were different than those prose writers of other literary periods in the fact that they “brought back egotism and they brought back enthusiasm. They had the confidence that their own tastes and experiences were enough to interest their readers” (121). Mair’s interpretation of the Romantics who chose to use prose writing was that they focused on their own personal experiences, but they were able to apply enough interesting elements to the ordinary situations that occurred in their lives to attract and maintain the attention of their readers without having to use a form such as poetry to hold their attention.

Another element of the British Romanticism was individualism. Many British romanticists focused their writings on the individual and the mind and conscious thoughts of the individual. Samuel Coleridge was another contemporary of many British Romantics such as Wordsworth and Lamb. In one of his canonized poems, “Dejection: An Ode,” Coleridge writes, “I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and life, whose fountains are within” (Greenblatt, 480). Coleridge’s poem, in this quote specifically, discusses how a person cannot look out unto the world for happiness and other emotions when those passions are ones that are found within oneself. This idea

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of looking within oneself shows just one perspective of how English Romantic authors and poets viewed the importance of the individual.

“Old China” also has another romantic notion: the adoration of art. Many English romantic authors and poets used art as a subject of their works to act as a vessel to discuss bigger and more complex topics. John Keats, another well-known British romanticist, incorporates this idea in “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” and Robert Browning does this as well in “Fra Lippo Lippi.” In Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” the designs engraved onto the urn which are being described throughout the poem are commenting on other topics related to the effects of deterioration over time. E.C. Pettet in “On the Poetry of Keats” says about this work, “But though, since he is feigning to write about a work of art, he may very well be implying that art has the power of making the fugitive permanent, there is no reason from thinking . . . that he is chiefly trying to express some visionary or mystical apprehension of timelessness” (Pettet 333). In saying this, Pettet addresses the fact that although Keats uses the timelessness and beauty of art as a tool to tell his story, art is not the main theme of the work. The adoration of art allows romantic authors and poets to tell talk about more complex subjects through a simple mean. This construct is one that both Keats uses in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and Lamb uses in “Old China” as well.

Another scholar, Fred V. Randel, analyzes Lamb’s work as a Romantic in *The World of Elia: Charles Lamb’s Essayistic Romanticism*. In this, he discusses the many overarching themes of the works. One of Randel’s claims is directed at “Old China.” Randel acknowledges that this work is made of “a contrast between the reminiscent speeches of Bridget and Elia and the pieces of blue china which open and close the essay” (Randel 106). Randel says that “critics have noted this pattern, and have emphasized the advantage which the timeless world of china has over the temporal world of Elia and Bridget” (Randel 106). The idea that art is a timeless entity while human life is mundane and finite can also be found in the work of Percy Byshee Shelley, a canonized English Romantic poet. Shelley wrote many well-known and studied poems including “Mutability,” “Ozymandias,” and “Adonais.” In one of his works “Ozymandias,” the theme of the timeless nature of art in comparison to the finite aspect of human life is the largest focal point of the story at first read. On the pedestal found in the desert, a quote is seen stating, “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair! / Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away” (Greenblatt 776). The fallen empire observed by

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the narrator in the poem serves as an example of how human life and humanity's societal constructs comes to an end eventually while the art and physical creations will last. The china pieces in Lamb's essay serve to represent this idea as well. The pieces of china discussed are like the ruins of the empire in Shelley's work; they remain although the lives that created them eventually cease. This theme of the everlasting nature of art and elevating the ordinary are both romantic themes which can be found in Lamb's works, further justifying his categorization in the English Romantic period.

In "Ozymandias," time can also be viewed in terms of destruction. The ruins of an empire show that while the physical creations of the world may remain, the people and societies that create these structure will not last forever. In another one of Lamb's works "New Year's Eve," Lamb's underlying point of the paper is to discuss the ever-nearing end of time in terms of life. In this piece, the mark of the New Year sends the narrator into a deeper thought about the celebration of the New Year. In this essay, Lamb writes, "I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods" (302). The mortal duration that is being discussed in Lamb's essay is the same idea that can be drawn from Shelley's "Ozymandias." Both of these works bring the reader to think about the end of time and the mortality of human life.

In another of Shelley's works, "Mutability," the underlying subject is the focus of the ever-changing and temporary nature of human life and creations. The opening stanza of this poem states, "We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon; / How restless they speed, and gleam, and quiver, / Streaking the darkness radiantly! – yet soon / Night closes round, and they are lost forever" (751). The narrator in comparing the cloud to 'we' (human life) acknowledges the temporary state of human life. In "Old China," the conversation occurring in the essay between Elia and Bridget shows the same theme as well from Elia's ending perspective. Elia rebuttals against Bridget's claim that wealth has changed them by reminding her that the changing nature of human life has caused Bridget to notice the changes that have occurred over time. It was, Elia claims, not materialistic wealth that caused the two people to act differently, but it was their maturing that caused this.

In "Old China," Charles Lamb uses a similar tactic to address his topic. The china pieces that Elia adores leads the characters into a deeper conversation about more complex things. The characters spring into a debate that comments on the effects of wealth and the changes in perspective that comes with maturity. Another one of the elements of the English Romantic period as categorized by Greenblatt involves glorifying the ordinary or mundane elements of the world around us. In "Old

China,” Lamb does this to achieve an effect. In glorifying the pieces of old china, he is able to manipulate the focus on the subject matter of china pieces to make a comment about life, social structures, and economic importance that he encountered during his life. By using a Romantic subject, Lamb is able to achieve something greater than simply glorifying ordinary objects.

Although Lamb has many characteristics that situate him into the category with the English Romantic authors and poets, he has some qualities that can be argued should position him with the English Victorians who followed shortly after the Romantics. David Russel writes in *Tact* that, “The *Essays of Elia* are a response to the ever more urgent questions of social status and behavior in an increasingly dense and diverse urban society” (15). Many of the English Victorians dealt with subjects that covered social structures and behaviors as well; one example is John Stuart Mill’s “Subjugation of Women.” Although Lamb’s essays often cover these types of subjects that the Victorians who followed after him wrote about, his work still remains situated with the Romantics.

David Amigoni’s *Victorian Literature* explains the historical contexts of the English Victorian Era and the literary works that make up that time period. One chapter discusses the poetry of the time, specifically looking at dramatic monologues and critical dialogues. In this chapter, Amigoni states, “[Victorian poetry] was composed during an age of rapid social change, material accumulation and mass participation in the production and consumption of literature that was bluntly at odds with high lyrical discourse” (109). This period which experienced rapid changes both socially and economically affected the Victorian writers whose lives were subject to these changes. While Charles Lamb chronologically falls into the latter part of the English Romantic era, this time that he wrote during was the beginning of the bridge into the English Victorian era as well. When thinking of Lamb as an essayist who bridges into the Victorian period, the rapid changes that shaped the literature can be seen within Lamb’s works.

The Victorian age was historically a time of great change and growth in British history. Greenblatt in the introduction to his chapter on the Victorian Age in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* writes, “In 1897, Mark Twain was visiting London during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations honoring the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victorian’s coming to the throne. ‘British history is two thousand years old,’ Twain observed, ‘and yet in a good many ways the world had moved farther ahead since the Queen was born than it moved in all the rest of the two thousand put together’” (1017). What Twain recognized as great changes that were beginning to occur at the

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beginning of the Victorian period were the social and economic changes that Victorian literary works were influenced by as well. Greenblatt continued stating, “The experience that Victorian novelists most frequently depict is the set of social relationships in the middle-class society developing around them. In a society where the material conditions of life indicate social position, where money defines opportunity, where social class enforces a powerful sense of stratification, yet where chances for class mobility exist” (1036). Victorian writers lived during a time period where society was experiencing great changes, and their personal societal changes they and their contemporaries were facing can be seen depicted in their works.

Another characteristic of Victorian literature that Greenblatt discusses is the common poetic elements shared by many of the works of the Victorian Age; while he recognizes the diversity of the poetry created during this era, Greenblatt acknowledges the characteristics that make the poems similar as well. He stated that “the formal experimentation of Victorian poetry, both in long narrative and in the dramatic monologue, may make it seem eclectic, but Victorian poetry shares a number of characteristics. It tends to be pictorial, using detail to construct visual images that represent the emotion or situation the poem concerns” (1039). According to his interpretation of the poems of the time, many of the poems created during the Victorian era contained great details that helped to evoke the ideas that the poem wanted to emphasize by creating a picture for the reader to imagine.

The Victorian Age has many characteristics individual to that that establish a literary period, but Greenblatt also acknowledges that “Undeniably innovative, Victorian poetry was nevertheless deeply affected by the shadow of Romanticism. By 1837, when Victoria ascended the throne, all the major Romantic poets, save William Wordsworth, were dead, but they had died young, and many readers consequently still regarded them as their contemporaries” (Greenblatt, 1038). This overlapping of culture and time clearly had impacts on the way literature was perceived at that time, but it also causes periods to have unclear boundaries of works and authors who are (and should be) categorized in each period.

Charles Lamb wrote in many different genres beyond the essay. He also wrote a novel and poetry. His most popular and well-known essays were published under the title *Essays of Elia*. In this collection of essay, Lamb writes under the pseudonym, Elia. He refers to many different topics that relate to everyday life, and throughout the essays, he talks directly to Bridget, a cousin of Elia’s, and then he also speaks to himself and the implied audience or reader of the essays. In these essays, he

uses many varying tactics that make his works different from other works of the time, but he also makes them difficult to categorize as being either Romantic or Victorian due to the unique combinations of stylistic and structural choices that Lamb makes.

In “Old China,” one of Lamb’s essays out of the *Essays of Elia* collection, Lamb writes in two perspectives evoked through the thoughts of the narrator or implied author and through dialogue between Elia and Bridget. In the beginning of the essay, Elia describes the beauty and perfection of old china pieces: “I had no repugnance then – why should I now have? – to those little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques, that under the notion of men and women float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspective – a china cup” (291).

One could argue that the concept of mortality and art in “Old China” make it similar to the works of Victorian authors and poets such as Robert Browning. In “Old China,” Elia and Bridget discuss the worth of riches and all that comes with it versus the happiness from their childhood that Bridget reminisces upon versus mortal worth. Robert Browning in his dramatic monologue “My Last Duchess” creates a question for the readers involving the same idea of art versus life. In “My Last Duchess,” Browning creates this question by having conflicting elements between the perfect piece of art and the flawed life of the woman in the piece of art. The argument can be made that Lamb creates a similar question in “Old China.” The question that arises in this work is the worth of mortal riches compared to happiness, but this question is not the main subject matter of “Old China.” While Lamb’s work does propose this question, the main thought that this helps to emphasize is the idea of the nature of maturity and life going on although art will remain forever—an idea that other romantic poets such as Shelley used in their works as well.

As a literary form, the essay is one whose history is not clearly defined. In “Understanding that Essay,” Jeff Porter writes an introduction titled “A History and Poetics of the Essay.” In this, Porter states, “The essay occupies an odd place in the history of literature . . . No other genre is as infinitely adaptable as the essay.” (Porter, ix) French essayist and philosopher Michel de Montaigne is credited as one of the essayists who helped shape and start the essay as the literary genre. In “After Montaigne: Contemporary Essayists Cover the Essays,” David Lazar discusses the history of Montaigne’s life and of the essay; he states that Montaigne was responsible for “the creation of a form that he called the *essai*, coining the term from the verb *essayer*, to try or attempt, which started and sustained an innovative, playful, experimental edge to prose” (2). Jeff Porter defined *essayer* as “to attempt, to

experiment, to try out” (x). Montaigne wrote and established the essay as a literary form, naming the essay based on a word meaning to attempt. This, in many ways, can prove true in many aspect as essays can attempt to persuade, explain, or do other things as an example. Montaigne was the start of the essays literary life as a genre, but it was not until later that the essay became popularized as a literary form.

Charles Lamb followed in the form of the essay that Montaigne created. Jeff Porter went stated, “A French writer may have invented the essay under the influence of the ancients, but English writers succeeded in canonizing the genre in a variety of guises.” (xv) Charles Lamb was one of these English writers that Porter was referring to; Lamb’s guise for the essay was one that can be compared to his contemporaries of the English Romantic period. Porter continued:

While the periodical essayists of the eighteenth century (Joseph Addison and Richard Steele) found Montaigne too digressive for their tastes, nineteenth-century writers such as Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb were intrigued by his expression of subjectivity. The great merit of Montaigne, according to Hazlitt, was that he was the first modern writer ‘to say as an author what he felt as a man.’ Por (“On the Periodical Essayists”) That Montaigne could write whatever passed through his mind seemed immensely important, and his commitment to self-portraiture (“C’est moy que je peins” – *It is myself that I paint*) was taken to heart by nineteenth-century writers, in whose work the performative nature of the essay reaches its peak. (xvi)

Hazlitt, who was an essayist of the nineteenth century along with Lamb, was captivated by Montaigne writing the emotions of life as an author which is what Lamb, years later, did as well. Lamb wrote in his essays such as “Old China” and “New Year’s Eve” about emotions connected to life situations. His narrator discusses these topics through conversation to another character in the essay or to the imagined audience, but no matter which way he gets his topic across, he uses prose writing to evoke an emotion that is common to everyday life.

In *Don’t Call Me Gentle Charles!*, Robert Frank closely analyzes Charles Lamb’s body of work as an essayist during the romantic period dominated with poetry. Frank’s intent was “to show that [the essays] will bear the kind of critical attention that has been given the poetry of the romantic period” (Frank, 12). Lamb’s work as a part of the romantic period stands out compared to other works from that time in format and medium choices. His use of the essay to discuss his generally romantic



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topics makes his work distinct in that sense. While this choice in medium may not seem to be a drastic one, Robert Frank recognizes the challenges that Lamb was setting himself up to face by choosing this writing style. Frank states, “Lamb was well aware of the difficulties posed for a serious writer of literature by a public that failed to distinguish between an aesthetic experience and other modes of consciousness – ethical, practical, or critical. He faced the problem of educating a public so that it would respond sympathetically and imaginatively to his *Essays of Elia*: he wanted the essays to be treated as art objects, not as the scribblings of a journalist” (13).

Lamb’s “New Year’s Eve” is an example of the emotional elements that essays of Lamb’s have. David Lazar writes a chapter on “Reading “New Year’s Eve”” in “Understanding the Essay.” In this chapter, he discusses the overall context and subject of the essay saying, “Lamb’s ostensible subject, New Year’s Eve and the way it causes us to turn inward, to reflect, the way it is a metaphorical birthday of the year, and thus for us all, is his entry to the actual or deeper subject of the essay, which is his meditation about the ever-nearing prospect of death, his terror of it, and the emotional/psychological conditions around which this fear reverberates.” (206). Lazar points out that, just as in “Old China,” Lamb uses another “ostensible subject” to guide his reader to his actual point or subject of his essay. In “Old China,” the pieces of china serve this purpose; in “New Year’s Eve,” the birth of the New Year performs this role in the essay.

Many other English romantic writers wrote about subjects that discussed life and the emotions connected to everyday living, but most of these writers were poets. Lamb’s choice in form is one that makes him stand out among all of the other writers that he was writing with chronologically. When thinking of the definition of the essay as being ‘to attempt,’ Lamb could very well have been using this form of writing to attempt many things. By writing in a form that, while not completely foreign, was very scarcely used at that point in English literary history, he experimented with style and was able to evoke his emotions to the reader in a different manner than many poets and other writers were able to do. As David Lazar states, “the essay itself is a queer genre. It breaks and violates genre norms, destabilizes identity.” (211) The style that he chose as a form made Lamb lie outside of the social and literary norms, but his subject matter still remained similar with those subjects of the English romantics with whom he wrote alongside chronologically.

Lamb produced many literary works in forms beyond the essay including three poems, but his essays are what have an increasing amount of interest when situating him literarily. Lamb himself

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commented on the essay's potentials and capabilities as a form of writing; In *Tact*, David Russel states, "We gain a rare glimpse of Lamb's explicit reflections on the capacities of essay form in an 1821 review of Hazlitt's *Table Talk*. . . Lamb insists that collections of essays, if they are successful at all, must derive a 'unity' from 'some pervading character.'" (21). Lamb's *Essays of Elia* were published over a period of time, but they were all published under the same collection and under the same pseudonym. Lamb felt that in order to be successful as an essayist, he would have to publish his essays with a character that was able to connect to the reader of the essay. Through his narrator that

In *Understanding the Essay*, Jeff Porter states, "In its directness and intimacy, the essay is the ideal literary form for the twenty-first century. Overwhelmed by an endless flux of information, we inwardly crave the momentary stay against confusion promised by the essay. We relish, as Scott Russell Sanders wrote, "the spectacle of a single consciousness" confronting the chaos of cultural overload to which we awake each day" (Russell ix). Although Lamb wrote during the nineteenth century rather than the twenty-first as Porter was referencing, the reasoning for the essay being the ideal literary genre may not be too different between these two centuries. The single consciousness perspective that Porter referenced is the same perspective that Lamb used through his Elia narrator in all of his essays in the collection of the *Essays of Elia*. Through this single consciousness, he addresses many different issues that were a part of the nineteenth century 'cultural overload.'

In a continued evaluation of Lamb's use of the essay, a reading of "Charles Lamb's Insight into the Nature of the Novel" by Charles L. Patterson can serve as an understanding as to why Lamb chose this form. Patterson argues, "Lamb envisioned for prose fiction considerable range in subject matter; it could reflect the normal stream of ordinary experience or could present the striking, individual, and unfamiliar" (377). Patterson believed that Lamb viewed prose fiction as a literary form that could be used to discuss a variety of subjects from every day, ordinary occurrences to new, remarkable situations. With this interpretation of Lamb's views on prose fiction, Charles Lamb's decision to use this form as one he could manipulate into a poetic piece of Romantic literature can be better understood.

Lamb also critiqued other literary styles whose focus was on the form as well as the subject and language. Charles Lamb specifically expressed his opinions of Shakespeare's plays where he elevated the worth and craftsmanship of the play above simply a visual art. Lamb finds "the value [of the play] comes from our process of understanding the meaning of the play's expression of mind" (Arac 281).

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The importance of watching a play has less of a value to Lamb than fully understanding what the thoughts and emotions behind the language of the lines written by the playwright.

Lamb himself comments on the value of spoken monologues rather than reading novels written in ‘epistolary form.’ In his essay titled “On the Tragedies of Shakspeare” Lamb makes his case: But in all the best dramas, and in Shakespeare above all, how obvious it is, that the form of *speaking*, whether it be in soliloquy or dialogue, is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one, for putting the reader or spectator in possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of mind in character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at *in that form of composition* by any gift short of intuition. We do here as we do with novels written in *epistolary form*. How many improprieties, perfect solecisms in letter-writing, do we put up with in *Clarissa* and other books, for the sake of the delight which that form upon the whole gives. (563)

As he clearly states in this essay, the speaking form of delivering all inner thoughts to the audience, in Lamb’s opinion, is ‘highly artificial’ which can serve as an indication as to why Lamb saw worth in the direct expression of inner thoughts that he was able to convey by using the essay form and writing under a pseudonym. As a writer himself, Lamb chose a style fundamentally opposite of the style of Shakespeare that he was referring to, but within the essay form that Lamb chose, he still was able to get across the thoughts of his narrator, but he was able to achieve this in a prose form of writing containing both the narrator’s direct thoughts and dialogue rather than through dialogue alone.

While the essay form of writing as we know it currently is used for many purposes, specifically academically and persuasively, the essay as Lamb used it served a completely different purpose. Lamb’s essays did on one hand discuss topics of significance and also made statements on important life topics and situations, but they commented on these subjects in an indirect manner often or in an almost poetic and unique manner. In an encyclopedia entry on Lamb, William Zeiger states that “in Lamb’s essays, the personality of the writer nudges the thesis off stage” (458). He continues, “Lamb reminisces, describes a scene or character, proposes one opinion only to replace it with another – often all these in a single essay- never seriously advancing a thesis” Zeiger recognizes that while the essay is usually a thesis driven form, Lamb’s Elia narrator does not respond to a thesis as the driving force of his essay. As in “Old China,” from the opening paragraph, the implied thesis would seem to be involving the narrator’s infatuation with old china pieces, but as the paper progresses, the narrator

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breaks off into a story that involves dialogue that discusses the main point of the essay and reveals the narrator's thoughts.

English Romantic writers Coleridge and Wordsworth stand as prime examples of the period, but Lamb, who is also a canonized author of this time period, questioned and criticized the works and artistic choices of these authors in many letters that he wrote to other contemporaries. His critiques of their literary choices show evidence as to why he may have made certain choices in form, style, and subject himself. In *The World of Elia*, Fred V. Randel states, "Lamb employs some common Romantic patterns partly to subvert them but partly too to show his commitment to them" (Randel, 8). One Romantic pattern Lamb uses is adoration to art, one he uses in "Old China." In this essay, Lamb's adoration of art could be seen as an attempt to subvert a common Romantic pattern, but it could be argued that Lamb was not attempting to subvert at all. In the defense of the idea that it was Lamb's intention to use a common Romantic idea to undermine or show his own literary expertise, the point that Lamb discusses this adoration of art in an essay form serves as an indicator that he did not want to employ only Romantic tools. Also, in this essay specifically, Elia's narration leads the reader to the main point by telling a story that makes the reader think philosophically about the intended meaning of the story.

In *Critical Approaches for Literature*, David Daiches discusses what poetry is as a genre and what the term 'poem' as a form entails. He describes the difference by stating that, "for Coleridge 'poetry' is a wider category than 'poem' and is to be explained in terms of the way the imagination functions" (103). By Daiches's interpretation of Coleridge's opinion, Coleridge deems that Poetry is a more complex genre than simply being works of poems, and while poems are a part of Poetry, not all works of Poetry are poems. Daiches quotes Coleridge stating, "Poetry . . . brings the 'whole soul of man' into activity, with each faculty playing its proper part according to its 'relative worth and dignity'" (105). Charles Lamb's essays do many of the things that signify that a work falls into the category of poetry both in Coleridge's and in literary culture's opinions. By using a narrator in his essays who connects with the reader, Coleridge is able to achieve a poetic effect that helps his works fall into the literary genre of Poetry that many of his English Romantic contemporaries chose to write using as well.

In *Essays of Elia*, the Elia as the narrator draws in the reader as if he is telling a story to a specific audience. Elia, in "Old China," starts off the essay with the opening line, "I have an almost

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feminine partiality for old china” (291). This focus on the narrator’s love for old china continues to be the portion of the essay which leads the reader to also feel as if the point of the essay, or intended thesis, is focusing on the infatuation with old china pieces; however, this love for china pieces is not the true purpose of the essay. What seems to be the intended essay of the story helps to distract the reader from the direct opinions that the author attempts to portray in an indirect manner.

The use of the pseudonym Elia is also another element of the essays that Charles Lamb wrote that could help indicate why he chose to use this form to write his works that were intended to be considered Romantic. The use of the pseudonym helps to further the author from the narrator. In *Understanding the Essay*, David Lazar states, “The need for pseudonym, the inability to broach certain subjects . . . , the changing of names . . . , Lamb’s subconscious resentment and need to memorialize – all these point to a writer without the liberties we take for granted in our confessional essays today” (210).

Lamb’s essays have many different ideas involving why he chose certain aspects to take advantage of, but in the end, the use of the essay was very thought out for Lamb. In using a pseudonym, Lamb was able to discuss topics that he otherwise would not have been able to discuss, but in doing this, the English Romantic idea of egotism that Mair discussed is also able to be used. Lamb discusses his life and things that directly affected him and others around him, but by using a pseudonym, he is able to discuss the subjects and maintain the attention of the reader who, instead of interpreting the essays as a confessional, are able to look at the essays as a piece of literature that is artistically commenting on a larger topic.

Although the essay is not as frequently used in English Romantic literature, it was the form that Lamb chose for his most well-known works, and his essays contain many qualities that help situate his works among those other works produced during his time. Fred B. Millett notes that while he is writing a form that was used before him that may not fit in with the normal attributes of the literary period he is situated into, “[his work’s] range is wider, and their treatment of human life is marked by the more searching pathos, the more sensitive and flashing humor, which belonged to Lamb as a partaker in the romantic renaissance of feeling” (287). The use narrative voice within the essay form and the subject matters of Lamb’s that Millett notes above encompasses why Lamb’s works are and should be situated with the works of the other English Romantics.

While Charles Lamb's essays have many examples of the qualities that help to distinguish his work as coming from an English Romantic rather than an early Victorian writer, his opening lines from "New Year's Eve" serve as an epitome of the Romantic qualities that Lamb writes about in his essays. Elia, the narrator, says, "Every man hath two birthdays: two days, at least, in every year, which set him upon revolving the lapse of time, as it affects his mortal duration" (Lamb, 298). With this line, the narrator quickly grabs the reader's attention and forces the reader to think about mortality, a Romantic focal point. As the narrator continues, his charm and language choices keeps the reader engaged as they feel they are talking with an old friend. Lamb's ability to achieve with the essay the same qualities that his contemporaries achieved with poems shows not only his worth as a canonized writer of the Romantic period but also his creative abilities that serve as an example of stepping outside of the usual or accepted literary practices to create works of literature (in Lamb's case, essays) that embrace individuality as a writer. While Lamb's works are unlike the works of the other English Romantics in form, his use of the form and the subjects and ways he used language throughout his essays help to situate him in amongst the other Romantics.

#### Works Cited

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