

■ Pathological Performance in Charles Lamb's Prose Writing

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Abstract

The English familiar essayist Charles Lamb's attachment to memories, triviality, and metropolitan London has long been regarded as a settled matter, but not until recently have the discussions about his disabilities received proper scholarly attention. In an effort to address Lamb's disabilities more holistically, this essay contributes to the Lamb scholarship through close analyses of his physical and psychological discomfort as presented in his literary works. Reading Lamb's writings about disabilities in the broader socio-medical context at the turn of the nineteenth century, however, suggests that Lamb's pathological performance of his non-normative embodiment under the persona of Elia allows him to better connect with the changing metropolis. This article persistently attends to Lamb's own paradox to approach and recognise his various disabilities. Lamb's pathological performance can be better understood and appreciated, as this article will elucidate and conclude, when his disabilities are better contained through prose writing.

Keywords: Charles Lamb, disability aesthetics, non-normative embodiment, prose, *Elia* essays, pathological performance

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Scholarship has difficulty in positioning Charles Lamb, the loveable English familiar essay writer. Lamb belongs neither to the first generation nor the second generation of Romantic writers, but he befriended both. He produced works in literary criticism, novel, poetry, prose, and play, but he is mostly remembered for the two volumes of *Elia*¹ essays (1823, 1833) and *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) he co-authored with his sister Mary Lamb. He received high praise from his contemporaries through to the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, but some critics in the 1920s and 1930s denounced his sensibility and hypocritical bourgeois laissez-faire.² And it was not until Fred V. Randel's mid-1970s work, *The World of Elia*, that the full identity of Elia is reconstructed with many useful perspectives. These perspectives find their successors in recent scholarship as renewed interest in Lamb has sprouted, ranging from his metropolitan aesthetics to his friendships and literary coterie.³ Granted, to many, Lamb may seem like a prose writer who only dwells in memories, trifles, and everyday life in the London cityscape. With these recent findings, Lamb is depicted as a singular figure who shaped the style of familiar essay in an era which prized the faculty of imagination and poetic sublime, and as an individual against the backdrop of a changing metropolis and social mobility at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Over the decades, the Lamb scholarship has witnessed expansion with more avenues opening up. Nonetheless, Randel may demonstrate certain precience when he argues that “modern criticism, in short, has generally set Lamb before us as an essayist of body or an essayist of mind, but not as an essayist of both at once” (165). This argument somehow still holds true today. Dr. Robert

¹ The very complicated relationship between Lamb the writer and Elia the persona has been well debated, but it is generally established that the Elia essays, albeit at times too close for Lamb's comfort, are highly autobiographical. See David Duff's “The Art of Intimation” and Gerald Monsman's “Charles Lamb's Art of Autobiography” for further discussion.

² Denys Thompson's influential essay, for example, “Our Debt to Lamb” in *Determinations: Critical Essays* (1934) edited by F. R. Leavis, assaults Lamb for being a comfortable bourgeois who turns his back on the lower classes. Thompson's attacks encompass Lamb's readers, too. See Joseph E. Riehl's *That Dangerous Figure: Charles Lamb and the Critics* (1998), especially Chapter 7 “Lamb's Ill-Starred Centenary,” for an insightful analysis of Thompson's critique.

³ In the 1980s and 1990s, it was Gerald Monsman's continuous efforts that presented Lamb as a critically interesting figure who combines confessional elements with autobiography in prose-writing. More recently, Felicity James re-examines the friendship between William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Lamb, while Simon P. Hull focuses on the readership of *the London Magazine* and the persona of Elia. David Higgins argues Lamb's intense local attachments to London prioritise his Englishness over the rest of the world. Gregory Dart commends Lamb as the alchemist of the streets and highlights his metropolitan aesthetics. Tim Fulford establishes how Lamb and his Cockney School friends use sociable walk to portray the city. Emily B. Stanback expounds that Lamb, as a part of the Wordsworth-Coleridge circle, acknowledges and appreciates non-normative embodiments.

L. Pitfield, for instance, explores and attests Charles and Mary Lamb's mental afflictions in the late 1920s without paying sufficient attention to Lamb's physical discomforts. Monsman sheds light on how Lamb rejects Wordsworthian claims for the power of mind in order to prioritise a compromised balance between his primal innocence and the destructive potential of the world ("Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer" 159). Stanback, on the other hand, offers a fresh take on reading Lamb's non-normative embodiment in the emerging metropolitan context, with an emphasis on Lamb's physical discomforts. These brilliant discussions take one step further toward understanding Lamb and his works from a holistic viewpoint. This article is concerned with re-examining how Lamb, through his literary production, established his "disability aesthetics"—both physically and psychologically—while considering its relation to the evolving socio-medical context.⁴ It is this article's intention to demonstrate the pathological performance demonstrated in Lamb's works from a more holistic view.

A Body to Be Remembered

Seven years before his unexpected death in 1834, Lamb published in 1827 a brief epitaph-like piece "An Autobiographical Sketch," in which Lamb lists all the works he has accomplished to date, as well as his epithets. In this literary self-portrait, Lamb describes himself as "a Gentleman at large" who "stammers abominably" while he is also "a small eater but not drinker" and "a fierce smoker" (1: 320-21). Portraying himself as "a dull fellow," Lamb is, for his circle of Cockney friends, a very much singular and amiable figure whom William Hazlitt jokingly and dearly calls "a Titian head full of dumb eloquence" (403). Stammering, or stuttering, appears to be the language disorder and the "nervous distemper"⁵ most associated with Lamb not only by his friends but also by

⁴ The term in use here is inspired by Emily B. Stanback. In her exemplary work, Stanback uses the term "disability" to the interpretation of the non-normative body and mind as decided by medicine, science, and culture. The "non-normative bodies" are marked as the antithesis of the standard, biologically given and fully functioning body while disabilities generally refer to an individual's health condition. Although these two terms "disability" and "non-normative embodiment" may differ in meaning in different contexts, in this essay, "disability" and "non-normative embodiment" are used interchangeably because Lamb's depictions of his disabilities offer an opportunity to think more critically through values and ethics that congregate around the particular body of his.

⁵ In *The English Malady* (1733), the famous physician George Cheyne believes that people who stutter and stammer are "full of weak Nerves" and "are of most lively Imagination" (104-05). Cheyne compares the nervous constitution of a person who stammers to that of a child. In Lamb's diagnosis, stammering is a "nervous distemper" that stems from "a relax'd State of Solids or Fibres" and the cure and remedies are to "corroborate and strengthen them" (106-07).

himself.

Since a young age, Lamb had suffered from stuttering, a speech impediment that not only denied his path to enter a university, but also disqualified him for a potential clerical career.⁶ Although Lamb often alludes to his stammer passingly in his writings, this “inveterate impediment of speech” (2: 152) would be a lifelong battle for him. In “Confessions of a Drunkard,” first published in *The Philanthropist* in 1813,⁷ the self-professed “anonymous” writer describes drinking and smoking problems as a result of social anxiety. The essay opens with a direct challenge posed to “sturdy moralist, thou person of stout nerves and a strong head, whose liver is happily untouched” (1: 133). Contrary to moralists, the writer claims to provide a voice for “the weak, the nervous” and “those who feel the want of some artificial aid to raise their spirits in society to what is no more than the ordinary pitch of all around them without it,” not because he is superior but because he is one of them. Before long, the writer reckons to have “a natural nervous impediment” in his speech as a consequence of being “gifted with nerves.” In the company of “men of boisterous spirits,” the writer finds the great difficulty in “finding words to express [his] meaning” (1: 134), but the speech impairment can be temporarily conquered with the assistance of alcohol. Calming his nerves, the alcohol transforms him into a witty and eloquent man more sociably at ease, and finds “a preternatural flow of ideas” setting upon him “at the sight of a bottle and fresh glasses” (1: 135). The habits of drinking persist, however, when these drunken disputants are later replaced by another group of friends who are not drinkers but tobacco smokers. The habit of smoking becomes “a new failing against an old infirmity” (1: 135) to the writer,⁸ as he begins

⁶ Lamb’s biographer E. V. Lucas notes that because of his speech impediment, Lamb lost his Grecian status at Christ’s Hospital. While other scholarly schoolmates such as Coleridge could go on to study at Cambridge or Oxford, young Lamb would have to leave school at the age of fourteen and started working. He ended up working as a bookkeeper in the East India Company for twenty-five long years until his retirement in 1825.

⁷ The essay first appeared anonymously in a short-lived magazine *The Philanthropist* in 1813, and the editor James Mill deleted several lines to make the essay more consistent with the Utilitarian doctrines without Lamb’s consent. In 1814, when Basil Montagu sought to publish a collection of temperance essays under the title *Some Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*, it was a great opportunity for Lamb to restore the uncorrupted version of the essay. Lamb’s essay was included under the section “Do Fermented Liquors Contribute to Moral Excellence?” Several years later, the essay would make its way to the *Elia* series in *London Magazine* in 1822 as a “reprint” of *Elia* as a result of Charles and Mary Lamb’s travel to France and thus an interruption to the regular course of the *Elia* essays. When Lamb’s *Last Essays of Elia* was published not long before his death in 1834, this essay was not included in the series; however, in the posthumous reprint in 1835, “Confessions of a Drunkard” was once again incorporated (1: 430-34).

⁸ In 1805, Lamb also wrote a poem “A Farewell to Tobacco” (5: 32-35), in which he facetiously

[. . .] from smoking at first with malt liquor, I took my degrees through thin wines, through stronger wine and water, through small punch, to those juggling compositions, which, under the name of mixed liquors, slur a great deal of brandy or other position under less and less water continually, until they come next to none, and so to none at all. (1: 136)

To rid himself of the influence of liquor, the writer opts for tobacco as a substitute, but soon enough he submits himself to the mutual influences of both, with even heavier addiction to stronger alcohol. Aware of falling victim to his own vice, the writer resolves to quit smoking, but he is engulfed in “a feeling as of ingratitude” as if “it has put on personal claims and made the demands of a friend of mine” (1: 136). Intriguingly, what underlines the writer’s vices is his anxiety to be accepted on social occasions, but the root of this nervousness is purely pathologically physical. This social anxiety stems from his stammer, but ironically the stammer amplifies his social anxiety. The dependences on alcohol and tobacco show the writer’s need to fit in rather than to stand out. Akin to camouflage, these addictions take him in with immediate intimacy. This explains why the writer senses “ingratitude” as he tries to get rid of the vices, but then again, he surrenders.

The withdrawal symptoms are noticeable yet complex. The writer details his reactions to the substance dependences as he reckons to be “chain[ed] down [. . .] to his pipe and pot” even though he seeks merely “a quick solace” in them (1: 136). With the growing dependences, the situation deteriorates: it soon turns to “a restlessness and dissatisfaction, thence to a positive misery” and extracts “the sense of pain” (1: 136). Intellectual capacities too are under the influence, and soon “reason shall only visit him through intoxication” (1: 138). The writer then admits

for it is a fearful truth, that the intellectual faculties by repeated acts of intemperance may be driven from their orderly sphere of action, their clear day-light ministeries, until they shall be brought at last to depend, for the faint manifestation of their departing energies, upon the returning periods of the fatal madness to which they owe their devastation. (1: 138)

As alcohol becomes his ruin, the writer is reduced to “imbecility and decay” (1:138) as intemperance leads to disorder and madness. The psychological and intellectual sufferings add another dimension of physical discomfort as the writer feels “the uneasy sensations in head and stomach, which are so much

bids farewell to the use of tobacco. The poem can be read as a companion piece to this essay, particularly in the first few lines of the poem, where Lamb explains the use of tobacco is to soothe his “stammering verse” (5: 32), a way to conquer his language impediment.

worse to bear than any definite pains or aches” (1: 138). The joint effects render the writer incapable, weary, and frightened. The writer finds himself in tears “for any cause, or none,” and claims “[i]t is inexpressible how much this infirmity adds a sense of shame, and a general feeling of “deterioration” (1: 139).

The loss of capabilities in general only highlights the overwhelming power of puff and booze, and pushes the writer further into the chasm of mental infirmities. However hard the writer tries to justify his own over-indulgences,⁹ the failed attempt is only underlined by the physiological infirmity, emotional vulnerability, and intellectual imbecility. Deterioration of both his physical and mental health turns this essay into an alarming moral tale despite its hint of comical tone.¹⁰ Uneasiness, nervousness, and social anxiety surround and indicate the hypersensitivity that underscores the somatic sufferings, and in turn, these bodily discomforts only strengthen the dependences on the substances. This unbreakable circularity begins with the writer’s belief that his speech impediment may be conquered—if not cured. The addictions, however, only endow the writer with “a harassing conceit of incapacity” (1: 139). The writer is left with a suffering body and mind with a shameful soul.

Through the writer’s continuous interrogation of his own physiological conditions and psychological transitions under the influence of substances, “Confessions of a Drunkard” borrows the form of confession and knits the autobiographical element of essays into the narrative nearly seamlessly, a “perceptual and stylistic shift” from the mannered prose style of the eighteenth century to a more “natural” prose style with “a deepening of the autobiographical, confessional impulse” (Duff 130). As the act of confession always involves a sense of guilt and invites the engagement of an audience, the writer’s account of his somatic and mental infirmities embodies the corruption of morality, and the loss of capabilities is treated as a punishment for the writer’s degrading morality. It is, therefore, only through the act of confession that Lamb is granted, as Monsman suggests, “a therapeutic exorcism or catharsis derived from the act of writing itself” (“Charles Lamb’s Art” 547). The much-needed exorcism is more

⁹ Randel in his 1970 article “Eating and Drinking in Lamb’s Elia Essays” discusses extensively Lamb’s obsession with writing about eating and drinking and sees his gastronomic preferences as a way of oral satisfaction, a displacement for a motherly figure and nutriment.

¹⁰ In 1822, a reviewer of John Reid’s *Hypochondriasis and other Nervous Affections* referred to Lamb’s “Confessions” and asserted that this is a “fearful picture of the consequence of intemperance, and which we have reason to know is a true tale” (*Quarterly Review*, April 1822: 120-21). In a letter (dated 21 November 1823) complaining to Robert Southey about the *Quarterly Review* incident, Lamb calls his decision to write the “Confessions” a “folly” and says its publication was done without Mary’s knowledge, which made her “uneasy ever since.” Lamb states in jest that “my guardian angel was absent at that time.” Evidently, he did not wish the piece to see the light of day (7: 627-29).

complex, more profound, and darker than the addiction because it has a root: a hereditary insanity that runs in the family.

Madness and Melancholy

On Saturday 24 September 1796, *The Times* of London reported a matricide in the neighbourhood of Holborn. The familial tragedy occurred when an anonymous young lady stabbed her mother to death and wounded her senile father in a fit of insanity. This was Mary Lamb, an elder sister to Charles Lamb by ten years. To avoid Mary's potential life-long confinement in Bethlem Royal Hospital, an asylum notoriously known as "Bedlam," the younger brother, then twenty-one years old, promised to become her legal guardian and to take her under his care indefinitely. Despite relapses of madness, Mary would be lucid, serene, and a dear companion to Charles. The pair of siblings shared common interests in literature, art, and theatre, but they also shared the familial mental illness that Lamb himself was no stranger to. Some months prior to the fatal episode of family tragedy, Lamb admitted himself to an asylum in Hoxton in 1795 as a result of a failed marriage proposal to Ann Simmons, whose parents opposed it for fear of the potential taint of insanity in Lamb's family. This particular experience is almost deliberately erased by Lamb in his writings—except in his personal correspondence. In Lucas's edition of Lamb's letters, the first letter is dated May 27, 1796, and addressed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an old schoolmate in Christ's Hospital. In the letter, Lamb makes the following confession:

The 6 weeks that finished last year and began your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a mad house at Hoxton—I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite any one. But mad I was—and many a vagary my imagination played with me, enough to make a volume if all told. (6: 2)

This would be the earliest allusion that Lamb makes to his madness, and he finds madness highly similar to creative urge, which soon turns into literary expression, as Lamb transcribes a sonnet written between his lucid intervals during his stay in the psychiatric institution and dedicates the poem directly to Mary. The sonnet, "To My Sister," shows Lamb's deep melancholy and helplessness in the face of his nervous breakdown:

If from my lips some angry accents fell,
Peevish complaint, or harsh reproof unkind,

‘Twas but the error of a sickly mind
 And troubled thoughts, clouding the purer well
 And waters clear, of Reason [. . .]. (6: 3)

The irrationality and the “error of a sickly mind,” luckily, did not occur repeatedly for Lamb, unlike for the less fortunate Mary. In the remainder of Lamb’s life, he would only suffer occasional minor mental breakdowns. And Mary Lamb would spend her life under the care of her nurses until 1847, with several severe psychotic episodes after Lamb’s death in 1834. For Lamb, the six weeks in the hospital only marked the commencement of his lifelong battle with mental illnesses.

In a personal letter to Coleridge dated May 12, 1800, Lamb writes in a grievous tone, in which he describes the death of an aged housemaid named Hetty and the subsequent relapse of his sister Mary’s madness as a result of “fatigue and anxiety” (6: 166). All alone in the stillness of the household and with the dead body of Hetty in the adjacent room, Lamb tells Coleridge that “Mary will get better again; but her constantly being liable to such relapses is dreadful; nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us.¹¹ We are in a manner *marked*” (6: 166; emphasis original). At the end of the letter, the gentle Lamb makes a desperate claim: “I almost wish that Mary were dead” (6: 167). The letter sketches a troubled young man who has been suffering the consequences of Mary’s matricide as well as the relapses of Mary’s lunacy. In this letter, in particular, it becomes explicit that Lamb is very self-conscious of the “mark” that mental illness brings to his family—he uses the same expression (“marked people”) in another letter to Thomas Manning on the same day (6: 167). The word “marked,” however, bears a paradox here: “mark” is, as Monsman suggests, “an almost visible sign [. . .] for an inward state of guilt” (“Charles Lamb’s Art” 544), while it cannot be seen at all. The invisible yet indelible mark is not noted as a punishment *per se*, but as an evil and murderous sign, something to be noticed, recognised, and stared at for the Lambs. This self-consciousness of the family lunacy is enlarged and further complicated by the inner guilt: he too is ruled by the tainted blood that he shares with Mary, but the selfish thought of cutting his sister off frightens him, which in turn deepens the guilt. The unresolved complex overwhelms him, and before long, it turns into raging and haunting melancholia.

In October 1800, Lamb composed “Hypochondriacus,” a dark, obscure,

¹¹ Two days after the tragic event, *The Morning Chronicle* carried a report and identified the matricide killer to be Mary Lamb, a mantua maker. See Lisa Appignanesi’s *Mad, Bad and Sad: Women and the Mind Doctors*.

and mystical poem, delineating the terrors of hypochondriasis.¹² From the beginning of the poem, the poet speaks of his melancholy not being fully comprehended in the state of solitude: "By myself walking, / To myself talking, / When as I ruminat / On my untoward fate, / Scarcely seem I / Alone sufficiently" (5: 27). In the pensive state of violent melancholy, the poet finds himself visited by misfortune in this desolation: "Black thoughts continually / Crowding my privacy; / They come unbidden, / Like foes at a wedding, / Thrusting their faces / In better guests' places, / Peevish and malecontent, / Clownish, impertinent, / Dashing the merriment" (5: 27-28). The first stanza of the poem describes the struggle of a solitary and distraught man haunted by melancholia, as his privacy is violated and joy evicted. What is fascinating here is how Lamb translates this melancholia from a psychological perspective to a sense of physicality and space, and in melancholia, they are all correlated. Alienated, the poet is pushed off the abyss of sheer solitude as he hears voices whispering in his ears: "Thy friends are treacherous, / Thy foes are dangerous, / Thy dreams ominous." The auditory hallucinations soon give rise to visual ones, as "All dire illusions / Causing confusions" (5: 28). These nightmarish visions direct the poet to venture further into the obscure unknown where the mysterious and mythological creatures emerge, once again baffling and challenging the poet's mental faculty. The last line in Latin seems akin to an exorcism when the poet cries in desperation: "*Jesu! Maria! liberate nos ab his diris tentationibus Inimici*" (deliver us from these temptations of the enemies) (5: 28). The hypochondriacus experienced by the poet comes in plurality in contrast to the poet's solitariness and the singularity of his sufferings. This short poem can be read as an extension of the letter dated May 12, 1800 to Coleridge: when Lamb feels no longer able to carry the weight of attending Mary and "almost" wishes for her death, he explicitly demonstrates a perplexing self-contradiction: he rejects the shared mental illness that runs in his family while he exercises his profound guilt over avoiding such responsibilities. It is understandable that Lamb wishes to escape the ill-fated doom of this hereditary lunacy, yet he is also under siege of mounting anxiety of not being able to break the spell. The interaction effects of selfish thoughts and guilt thus constitute Lamb's hypochondriasis.

To better understand "hypochondriasis," one has to consult the socio-

¹² In the year of 1800, Lamb was obsessed with the topic of hypochondriasis and melancholy. In spring that year, Coleridge advised Lamb that he contribute to a newspaper an imitation of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. In the following months, Lamb constantly referred to Burton's work—sometimes he called it "recipe." It is perhaps not surprising that Lamb would be under the influence of Burton's work when Mary's relapse occurred again in May. Coleridge's suggestion bore fruit in the three "Curious Fragments" printed with *John Woodvil* in 1802.

medical context of the term. The definition of “hypochondriasis” in the long eighteenth century was rather different from its modern-day one. Already in the seventeenth century, “hypochondriac” was identified by Robert Burton in “Subsect II.—Symptoms of windy Hypochondriacal Melancholy” as he associated “windy, hypochondriacal melancholy” with “sharp belchings, fulsome crudities, wind and rumbling in the guts,” the patient feeling “fearful, sad, anxious [and] discontent” (2637). Burton also saw the origin of hypochondriasis in the blood and humours. The eighteenth-century medicine world would see hypochondria shifting its emphasis from the body’s fluids and humours to its solids and fibres. Robert James, a physician and a friend of Dr Samuel Johnson, commented in his *Medicinal Dictionary* (1743-45) that the “hypochondriac Disorders” throw “the whole nervous System into irregular Motions, and disturbing the whole Oeconomy of the Function” (“Hypochondriacus Morbis”). Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755) defines “hypochondriacal / hypochondriack” as “1. Melancholy; disordered in the imagination [. . .] 2. Producing melancholy” (“Hypochondriac”). Just a decade later, Robert Whytt’s *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which have been commonly called Nervous Hypochondriac, or Hysteria* (1765), suggests hypochondria derives from “too great delicacy of the nervous system together with some morbid matter in the blood” (111). John Hill’s *Hypochondriasis: A Practical Treatise on the Nature and Cure of that Disorder* (1766) identifies the origin of the disease as coming from “an obstruction of the spleen by thickened and distempered blood; extending itself often to the liver, and other parts” (3). Often associated with overactive imagination, hypochondriasis was treated in the eighteenth century as a disorder that originated from the imbalance of body humours as well as an obstruction to the nervous system, a prescription similar to the “nervous distemper” that Cheyne writes about in *The English Malady* (1733). Hill details the signs and symptoms of such a disorder: “a lowness of spirits, and inaptitude to motion; a disrelish of amusements, a love of solitude and a habit of thinking, even on trifling subjects, with too much steadiness” (12). Hill’s diagnosis corresponds to what Charles Lamb describes in the poem “Hypochondriacus” and his letters, and some aesthetic idiosyncrasies that the Romantic essayist later incorporates into his essay writing.¹³

¹³ In his introduction to Hill’s work, G. S. Rousseau sees the prevalence of this disease “toward the middle of the eighteenth century” (ii), traces its connection with “the seventeenth century and [Robert] Burton’s Anatomy [of Melancholy]” (iii) and George Cheyne’s *The English Malady* and *The Natural Method of Cureing the Diseases of the Body, and the Disorders of the Mind Depending on the Body* in 1742 (v), and extends its influence well into the nineteenth century. Therefore, although the modern-day definition of “hypochondriasis” emphasises chronic anxiety about imagined ill health, “hypochondriacus”

These contemporary medical texts shed light on how Lamb experiences this mental illness. Hypochondriasis, although first regarded with suspicion, is seen as an obstruction to the nervous system and the imbalance of body fluids and shows real symptoms such as visual and auditory hallucinations. But perhaps more importantly, Lamb's poem registers a desperate sense of belonging hidden beneath the exclusion revealed. To be liberated from the temptations of dark thoughts, Lamb does not turn to pastoral scenes for consolation like Wordsworth does in his poetry; instead, as a proud Londoner, Lamb claims to his readers that he was "born . . . in a crowd" in "The Londoner" (1: 39). In this essay, he pronounces his "almost insurmountable aversion from solitude and rural scenes," because it is the metropolis that gives him endless sensual pleasures as well as familial companionship and comfort:

This passion for crowds is no where feasted so full as in London. The man must have a rare recipe for melancholy, who can be dull in Fleet-Street. I am naturally inclined to hypochondria, but in London it vanished, like all other ills. Often, when I have felt a weariness or distaste at home, have I rushed out into her crowded Strand, and fed my humour, till tears wetted my cheek for unutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture, which she never fails to present at all hours, like the scenes of a shifting pantomime. (1: 39-40)

Lamb not only connects melancholy with hypochondria, but the word choice of "humour" is unusual and precise. A great punster as Lamb is, "humour," on the surface level, indicates his mental status; but on a deeper level, it also refers to "body fluid" that affects the temperaments—with melancholy in particular, the excess or unnatural black bile secreted by the spleen. The interconnectedness of spleen and humour again emerges more explicitly when the writer makes an intimate analogy about London:

Where has spleen her food in London? Humour, Interest, Curiosity suck at her measureless breasts without a possibility of being satiated. Nursed amid her noise, her crowds, her beloved smoke, what have I been doing all my life, if I have not lent out my heart with usury to such scenes! (1: 40)

The familial intimacy that London has to offer is, to Lamb, a proper extension of his home and selfhood. The psychological comforts that the busy streets and noises in the metropolis provide calm his nerves like a pacifier and release him from the guilt and melancholy. The writer even argues that "[t]he very deformities of London, which give distaste to others from habit do not displease me" (1: 40). The disfigured motherly image that London projects—words such as

that Lamb wrote about still retains its strong association with melancholia that arises from the liver and the spleen.

“begot,” “born,” “breast,” and “nursed”—shields him from being alienated and marked. In other words, it is the anonymity of the city that provides Lamb a secured hiding place as an individual with mental infirmities.

In the aforementioned letter to Manning, Lamb states that he has given up his house in search of new lodging in town: “It is a great object to me to live in town, where we shall be much more *private*, and to quit a house and neighbourhood where poor Mary’s disorder, so frequently recurring, has made us a sort of *marked* people” (6: 167; emphases original). Mary’s renewed lunacy activates Lamb’s melancholy, but the anonymity of the city offers a sense of privacy that could liberate them from being marked. The combined mental illnesses, both descended from nervousness, may not be visible, but the shame of being identified and recognised by the illness becomes the indelible mark that they find themselves perpetually bearing. In the same year of 1800, Coleridge published “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison” with the subtitle “[a]ddressed to Charles Lamb, of the India House, London” in the *Annual Anthology*. Although the poem was composed earlier in 1797, Coleridge affectionately expresses in his verse: “My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined / And hunger’d after Nature, many a year, / In the great City pent, winning thy way / With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain / And strange calamity!” (136). The “strange calamity” is an allusion to Mary Lamb’s madness and matricide in 1796. But Coleridge’s sympathy would, in many ways, offend Lamb’s wish to remain private with Coleridge’s public references to the tragic event of the Lambs also revealing Charles’s true identity and workplace. Lamb’s repeated protests against the phrase “my gentle-hearted Charles” would thus come as no surprise. In late July 1800, Lamb objects to Coleridge, “[f]or God’s sake (I never was more serious), don’t make me ridiculous any more by terming me gentle-hearted in print, or do it in better verses” (6: 172). Lamb rejects such a notion because “the meaning of gentle is equivocal at best, and almost always means poor-spirited,” and thus “the very quality of gentleness is abhorrent to such vile trumpeting” (6: 172). There are two dimensions to Lamb’s objection: for one, gentleness is equivalent to poor-spirited, a symptom commonly associated with hypochondria, with which Lamb acknowledges his constant struggles. For the other, calling Coleridge’s comparison “vile trumpeting” is Lamb’s strong rejection of being sympathised by Coleridge and his perfect health. In less than a month, Lamb urges Coleridge to “please to blot out gentle-hearted, and substitute drunken: dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-eyed, stuttering, or any other epithet which truly and properly belongs to the gentleman in question” in letter dated August 14, 1800 (6: 177). This time, Lamb emerges not as a gentle man, but as an individual who is vocal about

his non-normative characteristics that are both somatic and behavioural in lieu of psychological ones. According to Stanback, Coleridge's deliberate and specific references to Lamb might "unduly distract the reader, especially as the murder was publicized by London periodicals" (190). Although Mary's matricide is not mentioned in Coleridge's poem, the shadow it casts fills the margins of the pages as well as the public imagination. But Coleridge's poetic attempt to distract from or revise the event might have endangered Lamb's identity, particularly his core identity as a person with disabilities. Felicity James also notes that Coleridge has this "persistent tendency to overwrite the experiences of others" (85). Lamb's direct challenge to Coleridge's poetic revision of the non-normative episode and embodiments is in itself contradictory: on the one hand, as a writer Lamb wishes to pronounce his own individuality with his physical and behavioural non-normative characteristics; on the other hand, he wants to be able to conceal his mental derangement in the crowd. While he rejects being tamed and incorporated into Coleridge's poetic revision, Lamb also rejects the notion that disabilities should be stigmatised. This incongruous perplexity shows how he establishes tactics for survival as well as his unique aesthetics. It is therefore precisely accurate when the nineteenth-century literary critic Augustine Birrell comments in his introduction to the 1888 edition of *Elia* essays that "[m]y belief is that Lamb, feeling his own mental infirmity, and aware of the fearful life-long strain to which he was to be subjected, took refuge in trifles seriously, and played the fool in order to remain sane" (xxi).

If remaining sane is a tactic for survival, it is a practice that Lamb had been devoted to since his childhood. Overactive imagination—sometimes hallucinations too—might have a root more profound than he is aware of. In "Witches, and Other Night-Fears," Lamb, through the character of Elia, traces the source of his creativity and finds how this essay shares the similar nightmarish visions he lays bare in "Hypochondriacus." In this essay, Elia appears to guide his readers through the childhood sufferings of his night terrors as well as the development of Lamb's own writing aesthetics. Elia reveals that from four to seven or eight years old, he was overwhelmed by an obsession with witch-stories, by which his night terrors were also triggered. Elia recalls how the visionary figures were formed in childhood, and one particular image—a "detestable" picture of Samuel with a Witch of Endor from Stackhouse's *New History of the Bible*—further fuelled his night terrors as it "tr[ie]d] my childish nerves rather more seriously." Elia continues:

I was dreadfully alive to nervous terrors. The night-time solitude, and the dark, were my hell. The sufferings I endured in this nature would justify the expression. [. . .] All day long, while the book was permitted me, I dreamed walking over his

delineation, and at night (if I may use so bold an expression) awoke into sleep, and found the vision true. I durst not, even in the day-light, once enter the chamber where I slept, without my face turned to the window, aversely from the bed where my witch-ridden pillow was. (2: 67)

As Elia acknowledges, with these night terrors expanding, the emotions are stirred. These “nervous terrors,” similar to what one reads in “Hypochondriacus,” are haunting and troubling. While Elia is deeply frightened by these “spiritual” beings, he continues to depict these creatures as “tearing,” “mangling,” “choking,” “stifling,” and “scorching” demons that may even “inflict upon us bodily injury” even though “they date beyond body” (2: 68). By using these action verbs, Elia compares his mental torment to violence imposed on the body, but it goes beyond the somatic sufferings too. For Elia, the dread not only gives rise to his nightmarish visions but also mobilizes his creativity, akin to Lamb’s madhouse experience. Now as an adult man, Elia admits that these “night-fancies” had long ceased to afflict him, with recurrence of “occasional nightmare” (2: 68). As these night terrors fades, it seems that Elia eventually finds a way to resolutely contain his emotional disturbance. Yet intriguingly, Elia, now as a grown-up man, feels “almost ashamed” to acknowledge how “tame and prosaic” (2: 69) his dreams have become. To him, his dreams are “never romantic, seldom even rural,” and mostly they are “of architecture and of buildings—cities abroad, which I have never seen, and hardly have hope to see” (2: 69). Elia then turns to admire the grandeur of Coleridge’s dreamscapes, and claims that his stagnant dreams are somewhat mobilised by Coleridge’s visions.

In the last paragraph of this “Witches” essay, Elia builds the connection between the nightmares and imagination where he concludes “[t]he degree of the soul’s creativeness in sleep might furnish no whimsical criterion of the quantum of poetical faculty resident in the same soul waking” (2: 69). In other words, the nightmares are the hand that rocks the cradle of imagination and creativity. While admitting the power of imagination, Elia makes his concession: “I presently subside into my proper element of prose” (2: 70). The night terrors derived from poetry are too overwhelming, and, as “Hypochondriacus” hints, hold the power of destruction and melancholy. Although Elia’s argument here seems to suggest that dream visions of poetry are far more prominent and sublime than those of prose, it is also noteworthy that by so claiming, Lamb’s choice of prose to develop his aesthetics relies on the fact that it is a much safer mode of imagination for the essay writer, as it can be better managed. Monsman is perhaps accurate to observe that “Lamb therefore rejects the visionary and demonic poetry of the egotistical sublime and replaces it with a prose model of a safe and nourishing social reality” (“Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer”

159).

The “safe and nourishing social reality” is the reason why Lamb indulges in the business of London. This too also confirms how Lamb formed his aesthetics as a writer: being tame and prosaic in the genre of familiar essay. The persona of Elia is a borrowed name that promises a new identity in the ocean of metropolitan anonymity. The social reality that might “displease” or “disgust” (1: 39) others rather gives him “an inexpressible sense of delight” (2: 69) only because these deformities are a part of him; or, to be more exact, he is a part of these deformities. Turning away from the poetic grandeur of Coleridge’s vision and revisions to his own “alone, safe and inglorious” (2: 69) choice of literary expression, Lamb again rejects the transcendental power in Coleridge’s poetry and finds himself landing from the billows of the raging sea in poetry onto the tranquillity of his prosaic aesthetics. To be able to contain the terrorising power of mental activities is, at the end of the day, how Lamb can make his creative voice heard.

Lame Walker in the City

From the “nervous terrors” in childhood to the habitual unsettledness of melancholy and madness in adulthood, Lamb’s aesthetics is never far removed from the disabled self, although they are better developed in the genre of prose. In other words, it is through familiar essays that Lamb finds a way to better connect the disabled self to the expanding metropolis. Appreciating and celebrating a busy city, Lamb saunters, digresses, pilgrimages, and perambulates in the city—with slight lameness. In “Dream Children: A Reverie” and “The Child Angel: A Dream,” Lamb translates his lameness in dreamscape. With its unusual narrative structure, “Dream Children” unfolds many twists within. A reverie, this brief essay adheres dream vision to past memories of Elia in order to mourn for the losses in life, opening up to “might-have-been”: opportunities and an alternative reality that Lamb could not have had in his reality. In the crevice between fact and fiction is where Lamb finds the compensation for his guilt. Lamb juxtaposes a very tangible physical space and corporeal depictions of characters with the abstract and illusory dreamscape. When Elia talks to his children about Mrs. Field, their great-grandmother, Elia says:

Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice’s little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted—the

best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. (2: 101)

Two corporeal depictions here are particularly intriguing. First, cancer is, instead of being commonly regarded as a punitive notion for moral flaws, used to contrast the very fine qualities and nature of Mrs. Field. Her resistance to cancer is both physical and psychological, and her resilience becomes something worth celebrating. Second, the movement of little Alice's right foot can be interpreted as the mischievous nature of a young child, or it can also suggest invisible illness since it is "involuntary." Either way, it is to be desisted. The juxtaposition of the corporeal depictions of Mrs. Field and little Alice shows the narrator's intrinsic instinct to govern and to contain one's body, in health or in sickness. Elia continues to describe another family member, John L.,¹⁴ the uncle of the young children. Elia writes:

[T]heir uncle, John L---, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth [. . .] how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain; —and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed. (2: 102-03)

Elia's lame-footedness is assisted with John's physicality, but the psychological self-resentment emerges when Elia could not seem to offer help to his brother when John L. later becomes lame-footed. There is an interesting distinction in the handlings of lameness here, as one is innate and the other acquired. Failing to treat his brother's acquired disability with kindness and patience, Elia, in retrospect, feels regretful and an urgent need to compensate, but it is too late, as the death of John robbed him of the chance to set things right again. Bearing the thought of his brother's death, Elia has been "haunted and haunted" by the guilt as he felt "uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb" (2: 103). The cause for John L.'s lameness and possible amputation are never specified in the essay,¹⁵ but the amputation sur-

¹⁴ The very last sentence of this essay, "but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever" (2: 103), intriguingly overlaps the character of John L. and the persona of James Elia. In some earlier Elia essays, James Elia has been established as the older cousin of Elia. In this essay, John L. is introduced as Elia's brother. By overlapping these two figures, the narrative as well as the credibility of the essay are challenged. And they are even more questioned as in reality, Charles Lamb's older brother goes by the name of John. The narrative structure of this particular essay is therefore complex and intricate.

¹⁵ Lucas notes that the lameness of John Lamb was caused by the fall of a stone in 1796, but he doubts whether the leg was really amputated (2: 377). In the co-authored *Poetry for Children* (1808-09), Lamb also includes a poem "The Lame Brother" and addresses the same topic (3: 364-65).

gery is to keep the rest of the body unaffected under containment by removing the inflicted body part. In this essay, the corporeal depictions mostly prioritise physical pains, but the psychological suffering always ensues. The sudden disappearance of the children in his daydreaming adds another incorporeal dimension, when the children tell Elia, “[w]e are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name” (2: 103). The incorporeal beings are seeking “existence, and a name,” a bodily form of identity for them to return and join the world. The “might-have-been” is “less than nothing,” because it never actually happens. In other words, the incorporeal only represents a medium and room for his unfulfilled wishes and guilt to perform.

If “Dream Children” suggests that through storytelling, the capacity of imagination permits the unfulfilled compensation and imagination to take place, it is in the essay “The Child Angel: A Dream” that Lamb attempts to exercise his mental faculty to an almost allegorical transcendence. “Child Angel” delivers a “prettiest, oddest, fantastical thing of a dream” (2: 245), in which a “Babe Angel” named Ge-Urania is introduced. As the name suggests, the angel is a production of “earth and heaven” when the angel Nadir was once “exiled for mortal passion.” The angelet is “of human imbecility” and with “a lame gait” but it is “immortal” (2: 245). This “imperfect-born” (2: 245) is not rejected, but christened, celebrated, and loved by other angels. Although its imperfection does not permit it “into the heart and inwards of the palace” in heaven, the angels “tended [Ge-Urania] by turns in the purlieu of the palace” (2: 245). Despite its imperfection, the angel still “kept, and is to keep, perpetual childhood,” and is “the Tutelar Genius of Childhood upon earth” (2: 245). Before the essay concludes, the last two paragraphs hint a change in tone and cast opaque shadows onto this ethereal tranquillity when Elia sees another child, “the terrestrial Adah,” loved by the angel Nadir, “lone-sitting by the grave” by the banks of the river Pison, and Adah has “a mournful hue” overcasting “its lineaments” (2: 245). Adah is almost like the antithetical double to Ge-Urania, or a sibling with whom he has a correspondency. The pair catches up on each other as if the melancholy is contagious when Elia depicts “the dimness of the grief upon the heavenly, is as a shadow or emblem of that which stains the beauty of the terrestrial” (2: 245-46). The two, sitting beside their common mother’s grave, share “a correspondency” that is “not to be understood but by dreams” (2: 246). At this very private and intimate moment, this connection goes beyond the separated space where they are now living: “the self-same Babe, who goeth lame and lovely” lives on in the purlieu of the heavenly palace, while

“Adah slepeth by the river Pison” (2: 246).

The juxtaposition of Ge-Urania and Adah is intriguing and enigmatic: Ge-Urania is imperfect because of its disabilities, but it is sent to heaven and attended by angels with the help of Nadir’s “parental love” (2: 246); the terrestrial and seemingly healthy Adah, in contrast, is loved by Nadir only. This reads almost like an allegorical autobiography of Lamb: his anxiety stemming from the terrestrial self is tried, alienated, and rejected, as it goes without a legitimate status; at the same time, the celestial self, though physically and intellectually weak, is celebrated and attended, but it is to be secured and contained in the purlieu of the heavenly palace. This also demonstrates the paradox of disability aesthetics that Lamb wishes to establish: on the one hand, he wants to make his disability aesthetics seen and recognised; on the other hand, he is insecure about being fully exposed to, but not being fully understood or accepted by the public. This contradiction has been a recurrent paradox for Lamb, as it has been manifested repeatedly that Lamb’s uneasiness with the public is due to being stigmatized because of his stuttering, hereditary mental illness, and physical lameness. Such a crowd in London can be further associated with the busy streets in the metropolitan city that provide Lamb the anonymity and a secured hiding place he craves, as previously noted. Tobin Siebers argues in his “Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body” that for people with disabilities, autobiography is “in part autoethnography” because it “has the power to expose how dramatically social representations determine the nature of the disabled body and the forms of self-knowing attached to it, providing a convincing example of the explanatory power of the social construction model” (737). Siebers’s argument is illuminating for Lamb’s ambivalence towards his disability aesthetics. In Lamb’s case, the challenge is not to adapt his disabilities to an alternative image of ability; the challenge for him is to function under the public eye through his art of highly autobiographical writings. In 2013, Siebers further expounds in *Disability Aesthetics*, “[h]ealthy bodies in art do not have details. They are unmarked. Details appear as pathology in aesthetics because they discover the reliance of images on the difference of the disabled body” (125). The aforementioned idea of “being marked” thus becomes pivotal to Lamb’s disability aesthetics as it highlights the mechanism of handling his non-normative embodiments through crafting his pathological performance.

“The Child Angel: A Dream,” one of Lamb’s most ambitious essays, receives very divisive criticism. Daniel J. Mulcahy, when exploring Lamb’s antithetical manner, claims that Lamb “treats wholly fantastic material seriously, with disastrous result” (518), as this essay is an “unnatural attempt” for Lamb “to treat non-realistic material seriously” (531). Judith Plotz carefully examines

Lamb's depictions of childhood, and concludes that "oxymoronic patterns emerge in word-play and in character traits. Lamb adapts habits of word play from the seventeenth-century poets he much admired, regularly counterposing fragility and power, earnestness and lightness, plenitude and emptiness, art and life, and death and life" (112). What Mulcahy sees as "disastrous" and "unnatural" in this essay indicates Mulcahy's own failure to think outside the context of Romantic dream visions: Lamb does not aim at achieving the transcendental power of poetry like Coleridge does with his drug-induced dreams. Lamb's "tame and prosaic" (2: 69) dream visions are profoundly rooted in realistic life experiences, within which he creates a safe comfort zone where he manages to keep his imaginative power in check and his disabilities in containment.

Noting Lamb's disabilities, Monsman compares Lamb's speech impediment to his lameness and comments that "[c]ertainly Lamb's own stammering speech, a sort of verbal paralysis, is akin to a halting gait: 'a natural nervous impediment [L *impedire*, fr. *in-* without + *ped-*, *pes* foot] in my speech' (1: 134), as his persona says" ("Charles Lamb's Art" 542). Monsman's insightful critiques are further expanded by Stanback when she proposes the following:

As Lamb was developing a prose voice that he understood to reflect his non-normative body, so too was he developing a distinct mode of metropolitanism that first made room for and later centered deviant bodies and minds. His was a twin project: first, of undermining standard modes of assessing human bodies and minds; second, of modelling a different way of beholding the diverse human forms that pass through the cityscape. (290)

Examining Lamb's aesthetic development, Stanback highlights the necessity for Lamb to approach his own disabilities by creating what she calls "Elia's Queer Body and Crippled Metropolitan Aesthetics," with which she sees how Lamb's own disabilities open up more aesthetic possibilities to appreciate the peculiarities in the expanding metropolis. Both Monsman and Stanback discern that the world of Elia that Lamb fashions allows the metropolitan space to include and demonstrate the spectacles of the non-normative bodies. Stanback's critiques on Lamb's disability aesthetics, nonetheless, do not consider attentively enough Lamb's depiction of mental disorders, as Lamb's mental derangement does not belong to "a system of performative abnormality that centres the queer and uncommon" (307), because Lamb never intends to demonstrate his lunacy or hypochondriasis to the public. As proposed earlier, "mark" is a critical factor in understanding Lamb's development of disability aesthetics. It is true that Lamb intentionally incorporates metropolitan peculiarities in order to manifest more aesthetic possibilities to the urban readers, but his own paradoxical disability aesthetics is never properly resolved. Through the art of writing, Lamb explores

possibilities for him to accommodate all aspects of his disabilities, but it is in the genre of familiar essay that he finally finds a safe mode as well as therapeutic effects to address his disabilities publicly with privacy sustained. It is highly styl- ish, personal, and confessional, although the confessor always stumbles through his conversation. It takes readers out on a walk, but the city wanderer walks with an unsteady gait. He writes in order to carve out a way for his unique disability aesthetics to be seen, recognised, and understood by the metropolitan beholders, but the disabilities have to be contained, governed, and controlled.

Coda: Reimagining Lamb's "Marked" Body

In 1831, three years before Lamb's death, young Thomas Carlyle was introduced to Lamb upon Carlyle's visit to London. The meeting between the two was neither successful nor pleasant, considering what Carlyle later wrote in his *Reminiscences*, picturing Lamb as "in some considerable degree insane." Carlyle then continues to picture Lamb as "pitiful, rickety, gasping, staggering, stammering Tom fool," which is followed by "a confirmed shameless drunkard" and "despicable abortion" (Froude 65). Carlyle's vituperation may come as a surprise to many, but it defines Lamb not by his whimsicality and gentle- heartedness that he is usually known for, but by his disabilities in all aspects: physical, psychological, intellectual, and behavioural. What Carlyle fails to see clearly is the fact that, perhaps more than anything, the association with dis- abilities is how Lamb wishes to be remembered. For Lamb, many opportunities available to abled bodies are denied because of his disabilities: his marriage proposal, his career, his private life, and his literary ambition. Yet when he rec- ognises the disabilities he possesses, he creates room for the disability aesthetics to develop and to be included by the metropolitan spectacle. He does not intend for transcendental visions or revisions that Coleridge offers in poetry; rather, he is half-ethereal, half-earthly, the amphibian creature sketched in his prosaic dream. As Dart suggests, Lamb celebrates "the spectacular nature of London life as a cure for self-absorption and melancholia" (143-44). The urban space is an extension of his selfhood and family, and perhaps more importantly, it is his theatre. In this theatre, Elia is a crafted character that allows him to accentuate his non-normative embodiment, as long as he keeps it in contain- ment in the disguise of humour and whimsicality. Or, to be more exact, this is a pantomime performance: it can be filled with joyful music, dance, and humorous lines very accessible to the innocent bunch; but "panto-mime" can also be a play without words, in which the plot is expressed in mute gestures

only. The actor's disciplined body and bodily action become the sole vehicle for the incorporeal to materialise. The performance is based on the reality and the quotidian, but it also requires the actor's creativity as it invites the audience's imagination. The audience not only spectates but also participates in the performance. The emotions, however complex, are reduced to a level that can be seen and understood through physical movements. The actor creates an illusion that arrests the spectator's eye upon his body, but the true identity of the actor simultaneously disappears in front of the audience when the performance begins.¹⁶

As this article has sought to demonstrate, Lamb attempts to resist the conventional moral codes associated with disabilities. In so deviating, Lamb features disabilities in many of his works, particularly in his prose writing. The relevance of this article lies in refiguring the scope of Lamb's disabilities and the development of his disability aesthetics when medical science underwent tremendous changes. Lamb's pathological performance, therefore, should be situated in its contemporary socio-medical contexts. Medical historians such as Roy Porter and Wayne Wild have noted that in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the gradual establishment of clinical science helped the practice of medicine to prevail and to become more standardised while the representations of illness varied (Porter 148-63; Wild 17-26). With this understanding, Lamb's paradoxical depictions of non-normative embodiment respond well to these transitions taking place in the metropolis. It is perhaps challenging to argue whether Lamb succeeds in fully realising the potentials of demonstrating disabilities as Stanback concludes (309), but Lamb's persistent attention to developing his disability aesthetics is undisputedly intricate and unique. This article attempts to consider more holistically how Lamb copes duly and sanely with his disability aesthetics along with his neurotic preoccupations. With his disabilities, Charles Lamb marks his own body by penning and performing his pathologies in his prose writing.

¹⁶ The comparison between illness and theatrical performance can also be seen in Lamb's much neglected essay, "The Convalescent," in which Elia falls ill because of "a nervous fever" and then he facetiously jokes about "how sickness enlarges the dimensions of a man's self to himself!" In this "regal solitude" of being ill, he then claims that "the sole and single eye of distemper alone fixed upon itself—world-thought excluded—the man a world unto himself—his own theatre" (2: 186). The state of falling ill is likened to a stage performance, with or without the audience. Lamb's analogy reinforces his intention to build the inseparable yet debatable relationship between the two.

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蘭姆散文書寫中的病理表現

摘要

英國隨筆作家查爾士·蘭姆對於記憶、瑣事和倫敦大都會的依戀，早已是學界不爭的定論；但直到晚近，蘭姆的失能書寫才得到學術界的適當關注。爲了更全面地處理蘭姆的失能書寫，本文透過仔細分析其作品中呈現的身心不適，希冀爲蘭姆的學術研究做出貢獻。若將蘭姆的失能書寫放在十九世紀之交、更廣泛的社會醫學脈絡下閱讀之，可以注意到蘭姆巧妙運用「以籟雅」這個筆名，處理他對於失能所展現的矛盾，以及展現其對於各種失能樣態所書寫的不同面向。換言之，蘭姆的失能書寫，實則爲作者在希冀與倫敦大都會產生聯繫時，以散文隨筆展現其「非正常化體現」的病理表現。本文正是希望透過重新檢視蘭姆如何利用散文處理其自身的失能議題，並使得其病理書寫能得到讀者更好的理解與欣賞。

關鍵字：蘭姆、失能美學、非正常化體現、散文、以籟雅隨筆、病理表現