

Drama, Writing, and Speech

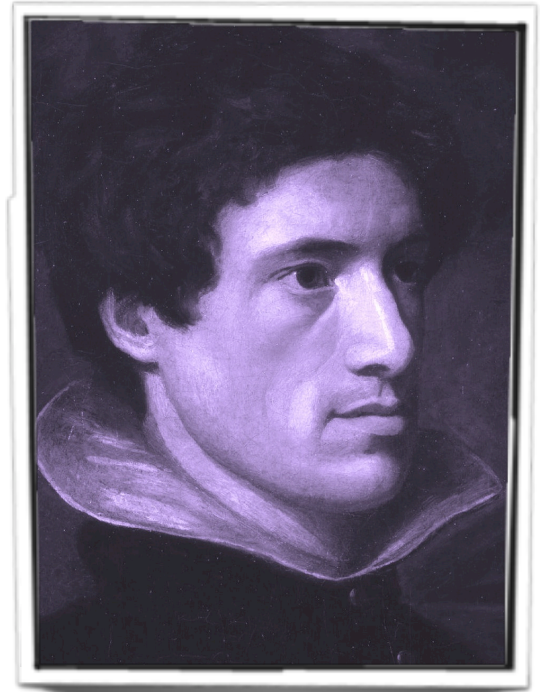
Assignment 3

1. We are now beginning our study of essays and essay writing. Read the following essays and complete the material contained in your study guide:

- Joseph Addison’s “Valetudinarians”
- Joseph Addison’s “Reflections on the Tombs at Westminster”
- Charles Lamb’s “The Superannuated Man”

2. Finish working on your five-paragraph essay on *Our Town*, due this coming Friday.

3. On the right is a picture of Charles Lamb, one of the greatest essayists of the 19th century. Lamb was personally acquainted with the great Romantic poets of his day, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. Read the letters below that reveal some personal details of the essayist’s life.



Long-Term Assignments

- Your classification and division essay will be due **the second Friday in November**.
- Remember to plan for **Friday night, the third week in November**, as we watch a production of the play. Please let me know whether you can come or not. Feel welcome to bring desserts or savory foods (if you wish) and name them to indicate themes or any other aspects of the play. I personally will be baking something. Also, we will have a little “charade” of sorts that we will be playing on that Friday—details forthcoming.

About Charles Lamb

The Romantic essayist Thomas De Quincey described Charles Lamb as “a brilliant star forever fixed in the firmament of English Literature.”¹ His essays in particular have survived the test of time and remain some of the best written in the English language. Although Charles Lamb’s essays are light and often humorous, the reality of his life was one that inspired pity. One of the most

¹ from *Recollections of Charles Lamb*, quoted in *English Romantic Writers* (Ed., David Perkins). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1967.

terrible and therefore formative experiences of his life was the time that his mother died as a result of a fit of madness that came upon his sister. Lamb sought to drown his various sorrows in alcohol, and his bouts of intoxication are written about not only by himself, but by other essayists of the period. He was, however, “a general favourite” with those who knew him,² as the contemporary essayist William Hazlitt remarked. The first two letters below talk about the great tragedy of Lamb’s life in a correspondence between Lamb and Coleridge. The third letter, addressed to the great nature poet William Wordsworth, reveals Lamb’s preference of urban life over “groves and valleys.”

To Samuel Taylor Coleridge

By Charles Lamb

September 27, 1796

My Dearest Friend,

White, or some of my friends, or the public papers, by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines: My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of our own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses; I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgement, I believe, very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris, of the Bluecoat School, has been very kind to us, and we have no other friend; but, thank God, I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write as religious a letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone and done with. With me “the former things are passed away,” and I have something more to do than to feel.

God Almighty have us in His keeping!

Mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Do as you please, but if you publish, publish mine (I give free leave) without name or initial, and never send me a book, I charge you.

Your own judgement will convince you not to take any notice of this yet to your dear wife. You look after your family; I have reason and strength left to take care of mine. I charge you, don’t think of coming to see me. Write. I will not see you if you come. God Almighty love you and all of us!

A Letter to Charles Lamb

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)

September 28, 1796

Your letter, my friend, struck me with a mighty horror. It rushed upon me and stupefied my feelings. You bid me write you a religious letter; I am not a man who would attempt to insult the greatness of your anguish by any other consolation.

² see William Hazlitt’s *The Spirit of the Age*. London: Collins Publishers, 1969.

Heaven knows that in the easiest fortunes there is much dissatisfaction and weariness of spirit: much that calls for the exercise of patience and resignation; but in storms, like these, that shake the dwelling and make the heart tremble, there is no middle way between despair and the yielding up of the whole spirit unto the guidance of faith. And surely it is a matter of joy, that your faith in Jesus has been preserved; the Comforter that should relieve you is not far from you. But as you are a Christian, in the name of that Saviour, who was filled with bitterness and made drunken with wormwood, I conjure you to have recourse in frequent prayer to “his God and your God”; the God of mercies, and father of all comfort. Your poor father is, I hope, almost senseless of the calamity; the unconscious instrument of Divine Providence knows it not, and your mother is in heaven. It is sweet to be roused from a frightful dream by the song of birds, and the gladsome rays of the morning. Ah, how infinitely more sweet to be awakened from the blackness and amazement of a sudden horror by the glories of God manifest and the hallelujahs of angels.

As to what regards yourself, I approve altogether of your abandoning what you justly call vanities. I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God. We cannot arrive at any portion of heavenly bliss without in some measure imitating Christ; and they arrive at the largest inheritance who imitate the most difficult parts of His character, and, bowed down and crushed under foot, cry in fullness of faith, “Father, Thy will be done.”

I wish above measure to have you for a little while here—no visitants shall blow on the nakedness of your feelings—you shall be quiet, and your spirit may be healed. I see no possible objection, unless your father’s helplessness prevent you, and unless you are necessary to him. If this be not the case, I charge you write me that you will come.

I charge you, my dearest friend, not to dare to encourage gloom or despair—you are a temporary sharer in human miseries, that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine nature. I charge you, if by any means it be possible, come to me.

To William Wordsworth
By Charles Lamb
January 30, 1801

I ought before this to have replied to your very kind invitation into Cumberland. With you and your sister I could gang anywhere; but I am afraid whether I shall ever be able to afford so desperate a journey. Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don’t much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead Nature. The lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street; the innumerable trades, tradesmen, and customers, coaches, wagons, playhouses; all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden; the very women of the Town; the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles;—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night; the crowds, the

very dirt and mud, the sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old bookstalls, parsons cheapening books, coffee houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes—London itself a pantomime and a masquerade—all these things work themselves into my mind, and feed me, without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impels me often into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much life. All these emotions must be strange to you; so are your rural emotions to me. But consider, what must I have been doing all my life, not to have lent great portions of my heart with usury to such scenes?

My attachments are all local, purely local. I have no passion (or have had none since I was in love, and then it was the spurious engendering of poetry and books) to groves and valleys. The rooms where I was born, the furniture which has been before my eyes all my life, a bookcase which has followed me about like a faithful dog (only exceeding him in knowledge). wherever I have moved, old chairs, old tables, streets, squares, where I have sunned myself, my old school,—these are my mistresses,—have I not enough, without your mountains? I do not envy you. I should pity you, did I not know that the mind will make friends of anything. Your sun, and moon, and skies, and hills, and lakes, affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects. I consider the clouds above me but as a roof beautifully painted, but unable to satisfy the mind: and at last, like the pictures of the apartment of a connoisseur, unable to afford him any longer a pleasure. So fading upon me, from disuse, have been the beauties of Nature, as they have been confinedly called; so ever fresh, and green, and warm are all the inventions of men, and assemblies of men in this great city. I should certainly have laughed with dear Joanna.

Give my kindest love, and my sister's, to D.³ and yourself; and a kiss from me to little Barbara Lewthwaite. Thank you for liking my play!

³ Dorothy, who was William Wordsworth's sister