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Essaying the Personal: A Study of *Essays of Elia*

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Charles Lamb is generally considered the master of personal essays of which Montaigne is the greatest exponent. His essays are collected in *Essays of Elia* and *Last Essays of Elia*. In literary history he is remembered as the Prince of English essayists. His essays are marked by self- revelation, humour and pathos, and a conversational style. Lamb delights the reader with his personal details, genial humour, amiable personality and sweetness of disposition. His range of subject matter is amazingly diverse.

Personal essay as a genre evolved from a curious convergence of German and English traditions of essay writing. The German tradition reached English literary domain through the influence of Montaigne who has been considered a literary model since the time of Bacon. The German tradition of essay as a critique of ideology or an expression of commitment blends with the English tradition of the essay as a paradigm of personal freedom in creativity manifest in the history of democracy. The creative insights of Lamb's personal essays derive its critical and innovative impulse equally from these traditions which superimpose in the genric diversities of English essays. Lamb's essays are in fact social criticisms which resist and even subvert the social and cultural structures that restrict the choices of individuals. As the narrator he puts in formidable agency to resist the hierarchical structures that meddle with individual liberty.

The genesis of the essay is traced back to Montaigne, the French essayist who provides the form with a specific philosophy of "radical otherness." But as a genre, essay

eludes categorization and transgresses genric boundaries, challenging rigorous critical scrutiny. In this context, Graham Good observes: "[The] essay opposes doctrines and disciplines, the organizing structures of academic knowledge" (4). Therefore the essay gets marginalized in the academic literary system and this marginality is further enhanced by the lack of academic research and analysis of the genre. Following Harry Levin's concept of Literature as an institution, Peter Widdowson differentiates between "literature" and "Literature." He comments: ". . . while literature exists independently of criticism, 'Literature' is only created by criticism" (37). The binary opposition between "literature" and "Literature" challenges the position of the essay as a critical discourse and a creative discourse at the same time. By "Literature" he means the canonical body of textual creativity whereas "literature" stands for individual creating writings. Widdowson means that the essay's position in relation to "Literature" is contentious.

The essay hardly makes its presence in neo-classical criticism. Johnson defined essay as "a loose sally of the mind; an irregular indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition" in his *Dictionary*. This definition is a paradigmatic value judgment of the culture of eighteenth century England. In this regard, Steven Lynn points out that in a literary and social culture "that valued success (over endeavour), regularity and method (over loose sallies), accomplishment (over trials), and the final (over the initial), the essay would appear always to be an inferior genre" (913). But the Romantics find in the essay a model of personal freedom and democratic humanism. Hazlitt regards the essay "as the best and the most natural course of study" (16). He regards Montaigne as "the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man" (16). This emphasis on the "self" of the author as shaped by society and culture has continued till the modern period. Thus the essay conceived as the personal genre has found a secure position in the framework of criticism. In this regard, Graham Good points out:

> The Study of modern literature was first organized along national-historical lines . . . The assumptions were historicist and the structure was sequential narrative; the objects so ordered were seen as "works" or "products" of the author's personality, his society and his age. The essay fared reasonably well

> in this period, since it could be "personally" expressive as well as "historically" revealing. (178)

Good underlines the historicist dimension of the essay notwithstanding its expression of the personality of the essayists. W. Wolfgang Holdheim, while exploring the nature of the essay as a form, finds the "perspectivist nature" as its defining characteristic and he locates the same at the very roots of the form in Montaigne (21). His view based on the deconstructive orientation of the essay as "genre" is further consolidated by what G. Douglas Atkins calls "temperamental affinity": the similarity of approach of "deconstruction" and the essay (*Estranging* 11).

In spite of these efforts by both conventional and contemporary critics, the essay's position as a genre has not been improved by any of the critical or theoretical traditions since the seventeenth century. But the essay as a literary form withstands the scrutiny of times and the critical sensibilities of generations. An alternative approach to "theorize" the essay in terms of the theoretical functions it performs in different discursive structures is possible. There are two possible approaches to the English personal essay as a form.

The first is the concept of the "essay as a critique" based on the German school of "Philosophical Essayism." Conceptualization of the essay as a form within this tradition is rooted in the German Idealist thoughts, specifically in the systematic aesthetics (Good 15). There are three aspects unique to this mode of theorizing the essay. First, within this theoretical mode the essay is conceived as a form of intellectual probing essentially critical in nature. Second, the essay is more closely related to concepts of knowledge and ideology rather than imagination. In this regard, Philip Lopate points out that "a fragmented, aphoristic, critical type of essay-writing . . . became used as a subversive tool of skeptical probing, a critique of ideology in a time when large, synthesizing theories and systems of philosophy are no longer trusted" (84). Therefore the ideologically subversive form of the essay has found its ontological justification in the German tradition. Third, the realization of this subversive potential of the form logically leads to the revelation of its value as a mode of discourse and its repositioning at the centre instead at the margins. In this regard, G. Douglas Atkins points out: "In Europe the essay receives a quite different treatment in line with the

intellectual, cultural, and critical responsibilities associated with it. In Europe in fact the essay is a very ambitious form . . . a genre making literary and cultural difference" (*Estranging* 54). He emphasizes the cultural and critical significance of the essay as a discourse.

Georg Lukacs, in his essay on the essay titled "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," identifies the essay with "critique" that has the status of a unique art form and declares that ". . . the essay has a form which separates it, with the rigor of law, from all other art forms" (2). Lukacs designates the essay as "an entirely different kind of expression of the human temperament" (3). He places the essay in an ancient lineage of writings of "the greatest essayists . . . Plato's *Dialogues*, the texts of the mystics, Montaigne's *Essays*, Kierkegaard's imaginary diaries and short stories" (3). What distinguishes these writings according to Lukacs, is the "life problems . . . raised in them" (3). Lukacs conceptualizes the essay as a suitable form of expression for the concerns of life and highlights the inherently critical dynamics, introspective and open-ended character of the form. Lukacs underlines the value and significance of the essay form as related to life. For Lukacs the essay is a form of expression as well as a form of knowledge.

The elements of critique related to the essay also form the focus of Max Bense's "On the Essay and its Prose." Bense sees in the essay an experimental method in the treatment of the subject under study in the context of what he calls "a literary configuration" (71). By "configuration" Bense means the essayistic procedure of putting the subject matter in contact with as many different perspectives as possible to bring out a "capacity of perspectives . . . a philosophical perspectivalism" (72). For Bense, the unique "character" of the essay is manifested in the configurative, experimental method of its composition. Both Lukacs's idea of the essay as a form and Bense's idea of the essay as experimental method are rooted in the idea of critique. The notion of the "critique" is also the definitive criteria of the essay for Theodor Adorno who categorically terms the essay "the critical form *par excellence*" in his famous "The Essay as Form." Adorno calls the essay "the critique of ideology" thereby locating the form and its function in a deeper and more complex context (166). The conjunction of critique and ideology that Adorno explores is the most analytical defense of the form. By relating the essay to the concept of ideology he lifts the form out of the narrow

bounds of literature or criticism and places it in the wider context of textuality as discursive and cultural practice. The German critics offer an explanative poetics for the form of the essay instead of the simple description of its qualities.

The second is the concept of "the essay as freedom" based on the Anglo-American tradition of "theory." The essay is considered a descriptive body of analysis which valourizes it as a unique form of creative writing distinguished by an element of individual and imaginative "freedom." The tradition of the essay has been recognized in two types of textual practices, literary histories and essay anthologies. In Britain some of the best historical and critical analyses of the form's development in relation to the socio-cultural determinants of the respective ages as well as that of individual essayists can be found in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* and *The Oxford History of English Literature*. In the United States, an impressive and consistent array of essay anthologies has kept the national tradition of essay writing alive. The anthologies offer an introductory commentary of the form written by well known contemporary essayists and literary critics. One finds in Anglo-America "a significant body of commentary" on the essay as a form rather than an explanative "theory." But it is a "self-reflective" commentary written by essayists themselves in "prefaces, introductions, letters, journals and essays on essays" and it constitutes the "certainty of a collective poetics" of the form. In this context, Carl H. Klaus regards the scattered reflections "as an alternative source of commentary on the form" and it serves an important purpose:

> All in all these self-reflective statements and pieces engage in a wide range of issues and problems concerning the purpose of the essay, the subject matter of the essay, the form of the essay, the length of the essay, the variety of the essay, the essay and other forms of writing, the style of the essayist, the voice of the essayist, the personality of the essayist, the mind of the essayist, the knowledge of the essayist, the composing process of the essayist, the essayist and the reader, the essayist and culture, the essayist and the journalist, the essayist and the critic, the essayist and the scholar, the essayist and truth. (155-56)

In this tradition reflections on the essay come mostly from the practicing artists of the form, the essayists themselves.

Within Anglo-American essay criticism, the essay is a unique space for free individual creativity marked by the presence of the essayist's personality or subjectivity and an open, flexible shape distinguishing it from any kind of formal, prescriptive or logically bound discourse. In this regard, Virginia Woolf remarks that to bring "personality into literature [is] the essayist's most proper but most dangerous tool" (46). Scott Russell Sander reiterates this view in "The Singular First Person": "In this era of pre-packaged thought, the essay is the closest thing we have, on paper, to a record of the individual mind at work and play . . . the essay is a haven for the private, idiosyncratic voice in an era of anonymous babble" (660). This perspective elevates the essay from a literary form to a principle of individual freedom. The personal and discursive freedom of the essay is considered at two distinct but interrelated levels. The first is the primary level of formal or stylistic orientation where the element of free subjective expression is identified with the presence of the first person 'I' as a major distinguishing mark of the form as a whole. In this regard, Woolf assert that "almost all essays begin with a capital I [and] is primarily an expression of personal opinion" (25). Similarly, discursive freedom is the flexible open-ended shape of the essay that permits to break free of any restriction on the selection of the subject matter and its development. This stylistically defined aspect of freedom is accentuated by a contrast with those forms of expression where conformity to traditional frames is prescribed over individual creativity. In this context, a distinction can be made between the essay and the essay's order in the mind. The most elaborate account of the distinction is made by William H. Gass in his essay "Emerson and the Essay":

> The essay is obviously the opposite of that awful object, "the article," which, like items picked up in shops during one's lunch hour, represents itself as the latest cleverness, a novel consequence of thought, skill, labour, and free enterprise; but never as an activity-the process, the working, the wondering. As an article, it should be striking of course, original of course, important naturally, yet without possessing either grace or charm or elegance, since these

> qualities will interfere with the impression of seriousness which it wishes to maintain . . . it must appear complete and straightforward and footnoted and useful and certain . . . the article pretends that everything is clear, that its argument is unassailable, that there is no saggy patches, no illicit interferences, no illegitimate connections . . . its manners are starched and stuffy . . . it knows, with respect to every subject and point of view it is ever likely to entertain, what words to use, what form to follow, what authorities to respect; it is the careful product of the professional . . . writing to be born for its immediate burial in a Journal. (Gass 25)

The binary opposition between the essay and the article maintained by the essay critics is primarily a matter of formal or expositional contrast. The essay's creative flexibility and freedom is preferred to the intellectual and specialized authority of the article. Philip Lopate remarks in his introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay* that the essay is "a mode of being." He adds that "it points a way for the self to function with relative freedom in an uncertain world" (xliv). Therefore the dichotomy between the essay and the article is reframed as a dichotomy between organic and mechanistic form or between humanistic and technological values.

In Anglo-American tradition the essay is valourized not simply as a form of writing with a unique formal attribute of freedom. It is also identified with a democratic and egalitarian stance of epistemological position. The formal logic of the essay as conceived by Montaigne is related to its identity derived from its essential exclusion from canonical discourses. Virginia Woolf refers to the personal orientation of the essay in "the essayistic 'I'." It represents a free and subjective model of cognition which is antithetical to any dogmatic or prescriptive view of reality or life. The Romantic personal essays are characterized by highly reflective and predominantly subjective personality of the essayist. In the Romantic period, the principle of individualism and creative reflection get strengthened in the genre of personal essay like *Essays of Elia* by Charles Lamb. In these essays, the centre stage is held by the various shades of the essayist's self- reflective subjectivities which constitute a conscientious record of his memories, feelings, inhibitions and fantasies. Douglas

Atkins also points out the extent to which the Romantic view of the reflective self and the form of the personal essay find a compatible relation in the essays of the Romantic poets. In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth called his and Coleridge's poems "short essays." Atkins explains in *Tracing the Essay*: "In Wordsworth, whose *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* often reads like an apology for the essay and whose revolutionary poems are lyrical essays in verse, the self may be called the principal 'focalizing device' and more; indeed the self is the object of study as it perceives and responds to ten thousand daffodils" (58). The ethos of deep self reflection accompanied by introvert and solitary musing is pervasive in the Romantic personal essays. The essay in its familiar mode within Anglo-American tradition is a blend of values of individual creativity and democratic individualism. It is elevated to a state which Philip Lopate calls "a mode of being." This conjunction of values of individual freedom, creativity and democracy elevates the essay ontologically to the ideal state of a mode of being, which holds the focalized view of the essay.

Within Anglo-American tradition, the essay fulfils the role of a formative influence on social and cultural identities. The essay performs certain social and cultural functions through its unique formal capacities. Such a conviction works at three levels. First, the essayistic values like freedom, individuality, simplicity and familiarity are considered parts of a democratic and innovative world view capable of building healthy lives, both individual and national. Emerson's "The American Scholar" is the representative American essay which captures the national spirit in its essayistic form whereas Thoreau's *Walden* embodies the essayistic principles in the life of an individual. Second, the characteristic essayistic concern with the concrete and particular nuances of familiar existence is considered a healthy and much needed antidote to the growing self centeredness and self obsession of contemporary culture. Essays like Hilaire Belloc's "Mowing of a Field" or E.B. White's "A Report in January" are examples of unassuming essays which can work as a principle of socio-cultural criticism. Third, a serious and subversive form of cultural criticism is inherently yet latently present in the essay's familiar attribute. The political subversion performed by the essay is equivalent to Adorno's "critique of ideology." This is possible only through the discursive agency created by the essayist which challenges the restriction of freedom through the

imposition of structures. The Anglo-American tradition underlines not only the creative aspect of the essay but also its subversive aspect as an alternative discursive politics.

As already stated, the personal essay as a literary form is subjective and self reflective. It is in this context that Alexander Smith regards the essay as lyrical: ". . . a literary form [that] resembles the lyric, in so far as it is molded by some central mood—whimsical, serious or satirical. Given the mood, and the essay, from the first sentence to the last grows around it as the cocoon grows around the silk worm" (Walker 3). This mood is central to the essayist's dramatization of the self wherein his feelings, thoughts and attitudes lie. In the Romantic age the self is understood as a conscious individual aware of his identity in all his changing experiences. Linguistically, the self is realized by the first person pronouns.

Lamb assumes the role of a commentator and narrator in his essays. His narratives blend images of the self and others in realistic situations. His essays represent a projection of his own self which is amiable and friendly. He captivates his readers by creating a confidential tone in his essays which in effect functions like a dialogue between the essayist and his readers. This makes the essays participatory and the reading process interactive. Reading Lamb's essay is a totalizing experience similar to watching a drama. The experience is theatrical in which Lamb's personality is dramatized through various means and revealed to the readers. In this regard, Dyson and Butt appropriately observe: "Lamb's personality is stronger and many of his admirers are apt to treat him as a personal friend. They claim that to get the best from Lamb one must develop a personal allegiance to him" (95). They emphasize that the personal element or the subjectivity in Lamb's essay is an experienced reality to the readers. This makes Lamb endeared to generations of readers.

Lamb is a master in the mystification of facts in his essays. His essays therefore appear as at once autobiographical and fictional narratives. Even the pseudonym Elia is a mystification. Though Elia stands for Lamb's persona, he was a clerk in South Sea House where Lamb was working. The mask of Elia provides Lamb a cover to make a series of personal confessions, mingling skillfully humour and pathos. In the *Last Essays of Elia*, Lamb wrote a preface assuming the mask of a friend of Elia. He introduced the essays as a posthumous publication made by a friend to perpetuate the memory of Elia. Lamb blends

humour and mystification in the essay "Recollections of Christ Hospital." Lamb dramatizes himself and his friend Coleridge in the essay. He describes Coleridge as a boy having no friends and whose parents away in Wiltshire for whom his heart was yearning. Lamb narrates many incidents of his school life assuming the mask of Coleridge. Lamb was a privileged student as his father was a Barrister's clerk whose employer was one of the trustees of Christ's Hospital. Other boys were envied of his privileged position. Lamb refers to this by transferring his privileged position to Coleridge and describes the reaction of other boys: ". . . he had the privilege of going to see them [his relatives], almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction which was denied to us . . . He had his tea and hot rolls in the morning, while we were battening upon our quarter of a penny loaf-our crag-moistened with attenuated small beer . . ." (21). This is an example of the genial humour Lamb maintains throughout his essays. He indulges in himself as a comic character and laughs with others. But Lamb appears sober in the sequel "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago" where he reminiscences his memories of boyhood. His friendship with Coleridge is an invigorating factor in his life. He addresses Coleridge as "Logician, Metaphysician, Bard" (33). The memories of his school days are juxtaposed with the experiences of adulthood and reality of life.

He continues his mystification in "Dream Children: A Reverie" where he refers to his love Anne Simmons and presents her as Alice Winterton. He names his dream children John and Mary after his elder brother, who was trained in the Inner Temple, and his sister who suffered from insanity. He also refers to his sister and mystifies her as his maid Bridget and he apprehends that she will disturb his dream children. He presents his sister as a maid and his brother as the children's uncle and his grandmother as the great grandmother of the dream children. The essay ends in a note of melancholy when the dream shifts to reality. This is evident in Lamb's cryptic comment: "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The Children of Alice call Bartrum, father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams" (145).Lamb seems to have been constantly regretful of leading a lonely life. This sadness is again explicitly stated in the essay "Mackery End in Hertfordshire" where he presents his sister Mary Lamb as his housekeeper Bridget Elia: "We house together, old

bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness" (108). Lamb always refers to his state of bachelorhood with humour, pathos and irony as in "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behavior of Married People."

In the essay "Oxford in the Vacation," Lamb expresses his lingering anguish related to the denial of university education. Though Coleridge and Lamb were school fellows, Coleridge was speedily selected by Dr. James Boyer, the grammar master, as a boy to be trained for university education. He remained the head boy of the school and was later sent to Cambridge with extraordinary reputation. Boyer did not overlook Lamb but he perceived the genius of Coleridge, especially his versatility reflected in his exposure to classics and his English compositions. It remained a mystery to generations of the bluecoat boys of Christ Hospital how Lamb had not been sent to Cambridge. It is generally inferred that an impediment in his speech and the relative poverty of his parents forced him to turn away from "the seat food of academic institutions." All through his life the makings of a collegian persisted in Lamb's outlook and the disappointment of his unfulfilled university education despite his exemplary studies at Christ Hospital was part of it. Lamb used to visit Oxford in the vacation. For him the university is the most favourable place of visit. He wanted to roam on the campus, the quadrangle and to visit the library and to smell the moth scented books. Lamb humourously tells that he is often mistaken for a scholar or a student and the employees of the university were courteous and respectful: "I can here play the gentleman, enact the student. To such a one as myself, who has been defrauded in his young years of the sweet food of academic institution, nowhere is so pleasant, to while away a few idle weeks" (13). As Lamb is dressed in black, he is mistaken as an ecclesiastical scholar: "I have seen your dim-eyed vergers, and bed-makers in spectacles, drop a bow or curtsy, as I pass, wisely mistaking me for something of the sort. I go about in black, which favours the notion" (15). Lamb proclaims himself as an antiquarian and he finds the library the abode of the souls of ancient authors. Lamb says that their souls remain within the books, continually inspiring readers: "It seems as though all the souls of all the writers, that have bequeathed their labours to these Bodleians, were reposing here, as in some dormitory, or middle state" (17).

Lamb satisfies himself by smelling the books and states that he does not want to profane them: "I do not want to handle, to profane the leaves, their winding-sheets. I could as soon dislodge a shade. I seem to inhale learning, walking amid their foliage; and the odour of their old moth-scented coverings is fragrant as the first bloom of those sciential apples which grew amid the happy orchard." (19). Lamb's annual visit to the universities seems to be a consolation to his anguished soul that consistently bewails the loss of opportunity for university education. Lamb becomes nostalgic when he speaks about Oxford and his comments are poetic passages of pathos aestheticized in his humour.

The axiom that the style is the man is more suited to Lamb than to any other essayists. The style of essay is gentle, archaic and irresistibly fascinating. Lamb borrows from almost all English essayists. He is apparently influenced by the precision of Bacon, the Latinism of Milton, the melancholy of Burton, the rhetoric of Browne, the wit of Addison, the critical temper of Steele, the irony of Swift, the argumentative tone of Dryden and the humour of Fuller. But Lamb expresses his new thoughts through their quaint expressions. In this regard, Dyson and Butt comment on Lamb's style: "His style is like himself, allusive, whimsical, remote, familiar and almost wanton" (96). Though the essays are social criticism of his age, they present excellent pictures of humanity in general and of Lamb in particular.

Lamb's style consists of an alchemic mixture of many different styles. In his love for word coinage, fondness for alliteration, use of compound words, formation of adjectives from proper names and frequent use of Latin words, Lamb visits his Elizabethan counterparts. This fact is confirmed by Saintsbury: "That a certain amount of his material is derived from actual loan supplied by the quainter writers of the mid seventeenth century, especially Burton, Fuller and Browne, is perfectly true, as also that the essay is debt to these for manner and method is even greater than his borrowings of actual matter or word. But a great deal remains which is simply Lamb himself and nobody else" (700). Saintsbury means that despite his borrowings in style, his thoughts remain his own, fresh and original. Lamb also uses a variety of quotations like real quotations, half quotations, misquotations, disguised or pretended quotations in his essays. This is a craft evolved from the borrowing and blending of styles of his predecessors.

Lamb's style has wit, humour and fun. Wit is based on intellect, humour on insight and sympathy, and fun on vigour and freshness of mind. His humour is largely benign or genial. He never laughs at people; he laughs with them at the follies of human life. Before he assumed the mask of Elia, he tried a number of masks. He wrote on Charles Lamb as if he were a chance acquaintance of Lamb. He borrowed the person but not the personality of Coleridge. The cheerful and dynamic pen life of Elia helped Lamb to circumvent the misfortunes of his personal life. In this context, Hugh Walker's striking commentary on Lamb's style is remarkable:

> Lamb's style is inseparable from his humour. His "whim-whams," as he called them found their best expression in the quaint words and antique phrases and multiplied and sometimes farfetched yet never forced comparisons in which he dwells. Strip Elia of these and he is nothing . . . Of no one else is the saying that the style is the man more true than of Lamb. In the deepest sense his style is natural and all his own. (239)

Walker also emphasizes that Lamb's personality is pervasive in his essays. Every page of his essays is punctuated with his true self.

Lamb always begins his essays without any trace of self assertion. He begins with some purely personal mood or experience and builds a rapport with the reader and leads him to view life or literature as he experienced it. Lamb thus succeeds in combining the personal with the universal. His original and fresh ideas are garbed in old style and quaint humour. Though Lamb expresses broad and deep sympathies with humanity, he highlights his self. Lamb's personal essays point to their quality of self dramatization. In this context, Craig observes: "The secret of Lamb's style is that he was himself an actor forever assuming some role . . . He was forever pretending to be scholastic philosopher or a seventeenth century preacher dividing the human species into great new categories . . ." (493). Lamb's matter always harmonizes and coheres with his manner of presentation. Lamb recalls his memories as materials for his essays and transforms them through his fancy. As most of his personal memories are painful, he expresses them humourously. Lamb uniquely but skillfully blends humour and pathos in his essays. So the effect produced by the essays is almost

Shakespearean. Like Shakespeare he looks at life as a mixture of tears and smiles. Like Shakespeare he laughs through tears and wails over laughter. His essays constantly remind the reader that life is a queer mixture of pain and pleasure. This makes him endeared to readers, perhaps the best loved of the writers.

Lamb's personal essays at once subscribe to the concepts of essay as a critique and essay as a choice of personal freedom of creative expression. Lamb deals with an amazing variety of themes and fills his essays with familiar faces of his life. His essays are the products of the domestic economy of his relationships which are emotionally committed. A writer's politics is reflected not only in his themes but also in the techniques which treat the themes and transform them into literary texts. The politics of Lamb's personal choices in his life as well as writings is overshadowed by the transparent and familiar personality of Lamb as the narrator of his essays. In subjective and intimately personal writings it is very difficult to trace the ideological undertones of the writer. This is because the pervasive presence of the self is foregrounded in the text relegating the ideological structures to the margins. Lamb's choice of personal freedom in creativity is reflected in the choice of content and the desire for innovation in his essays. Some of the essays like "The Dissertation on a Roast Pig" or "On the Artificial Comedy of the Eighteenth Century" are not strictly personal and elude genric classification. They point to Lamb's will to choose freedom in the content and form of his essays. His aptitude for innovation as reflected in the essays like "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behavior of Married People" also testifies to the choice of freedom in conformity with British tradition. But this personal choice of freedom is an oblique critique of ideology though the presence of Lamb's self overshadows the critique with its apparent visibility. It is therefore evident that Lamb's essays conform to both the German tradition of critique and the English tradition of freedom in creativity. All great works of art elude hermeneutic adventures of critics. Lamb's essays also elude classification with his profundity and prolificacy.

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