

TRAITS OF CHARLES LAMB ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT:

Charles Lamb unites many of the characteristics of each of this writers-refined and exquisite humour, a genuine and cordial vein of pleasantry and heart-touching pathos. His fancy is distinguished by great delicacy and tenderness; and even his conceits are imbued with human feeling and passion. The work of Charles lamb its colour from the personal events of his life. It is also true of some other great writers of the period, such as *Byron, Shelley and Coleridge*. The manner and tune of lamb's essays is as changeful as them occasion and topic, for lamb saw English prose as an instrument flexible enough to be used for various purposes. His essays cover a wide range so far as their themes are concerned.

Key words; lamb approach to the characters, moral, humor and pathos.

INTRODUCTION:

The word *Essay* came into use on the *Essais of Montaigne*, who is described as “**the first to say as an author what he felt as a man**”. In this description, we find a characteristic of the essay its personal approach to its subject. Bacon's essays were notes on things outside himself, whereas Montaigne's give us himself. Bacon may have massive wisdom and Browne may reach the lofty heights of eloquence in his musical prose. But there is no essayist as charming as lamp. The secret of this power to charm is “**the incomparable sweetness of disposition which lamp not only possessed but had a unique gift of communicating to his writing**”. Charles lamp's, famous was under his pseudonym of Elia. “Elia” was actually the name of an Italian, who was like lamb a clerk at the south-sea house. This was the pseudonym that lamb adopted. Lamb's contribution to **The London Magazine** continued till 1825. Eventually, most of these contributions were gathered in two books called “*The essay of Elia and The Essays of Elia*”. Charles lamb was a shining star in the sky of English essays. He was called the prince among English essayists. His essays are the finest in English prose. He brought to prose the finest qualities of Romanticism. Lamb's readers appreciate him for his wisdom for his humanity for his genial humour for his profound pathos for his sweet temperament and for his style. Lamb reveals much of himself indirectly and incidentally in his essays. Like Montaigne he is ‘forever speaking of himself’. The fictitious figure of Elia is his own shadow and round it he weaves musings that are very much his own; personal reflections and memories of books and things, taking the opportunity of bringing in diverse opinions and characters, the comedy and drama of everyday life and in every case he is expressing the reaction of his own mind. What is to be noted is that in supreme artistic detachment he treats of things that personally affect him. Whenever he takes himself as a subject and touches on any aspect of his experience, he transforms it, and the total absence of self-conscious vanity is unique in the matter of self-revelation.

CHARACTERS IN LAMB ESSAYS:

The essays of lamb are interspersed with brief character sketches. He shows a gift of characterization that would have done credit to the stage. His character sketches are brief, but vivid. Most of the

individuals who are sketched in these essays were real persons. In “the south sea house”, for instance, we are given sketches of several persons with whom Lamb used to work. He refers to them as “humorists” and us “odd fishes”. Lamb loves to give interesting anecdotes in his essays. These anecdotes are, in most cases, intended to serve as illustrations of the points made by the author or the arguments put forward by him. These anecdotes are, therefore, made to appear integral to the essays. They certainly enhance the interest of the essays in which they appear, and lend a narrative quality to them. Lamb was in a way pioneer in writing critical essay, as we find in his *Essays of Elia*. In mood as in theme, his writings are delightfully various, and they peculiarly display that rare blend of the whimsical and the lovable which was Lamb’s nature. Obviously, his essays were a new development. For this particular reason, to all Englishmen, he remains the,

*“Gentlest name
That ever clothed itself with flower-sweet fame,
Or linked itself with loftiest names of old
By right and might of loving”*

The charm of Lamb’s essays is the blending of humour and pathos. Such a fusion was the result of an extreme sensitiveness to the true proportion of things. Humour is a necessary equipment of a writer like Lamb who has perforce to black out all that troubles him in spirit and to turn his attention to men and things outside himself. His humour has so much a personal colouring that we cannot for a moment lose sight of a pensive, gracious character, brooding over things of the past and with nostalgic longings for a world they have been his but for the freak of fate.

STRUCTURE OF LAMB ESSAYS:

The essence of the personal essay consists in its conversational tone, and its truthfulness to the subject discussed, bordering on the self, and providing too much distraction on the way. Apart from poetry, which was considered the crowning glory of the Age, the Romantic age was also rich in literary criticism and prose. Literary prose of the period gave a lot of importance to aesthetic autonomy of a work of art, egalitarian ideals, imaginative thinking, overtly emotional language, and uniqueness of the individual, etc. Humour, Descriptive style, reflective style, quotes and anecdotes are other features of the personal essay. The Structure of a text tells us the way in which information is organized within a text, and the way in which its constituent elements are connected. Authors present information to their readers in a structured way, so that students can analyse how information is organized, and thereby also understand the author’s craft. In other words, the structure of a text helps us understand ‘how a text is built’.

HUMOUR AND PATHOS:

Lamb’s humour was a blend of jest and tears. It was akin to pathos. Humour was his saving grace. It could detach him from the painful and tragic realities of the world. It was rather a drawing a veil over the ghastliness of his experiences of life. He does not jest his life, he cannot for he has known all that is given in life; but his humour relieves him of the painfulness and tedium of life. His humour makes for a sane appraisal of life. The tender willfulness with which his humour invests everything is a unique in Lamb. The famous essays begun in 1820, dealt with subjects chosen apparently at random; *A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig, Old China, The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers, Imperfect Sympathies, A Chapter On Ears, Mrs. Battle’s Opinions On Whist, Mackery End, Grace Before Meat, Dream Children, and others*. All these essays are a delightful interpretation of the life of London, its crowded streets. The first and the last essays named above, *Dissertation upon Roast Pig* and *Dream Children* represent the extremes of Lamb’s humour and pathos.

CHARLES LAMB STYLE AND THEMES:

Lamb essays exhibit infinite variety. Here was god's plenty. His essays satisfy the appetite of every taste. In his essays Lamb reveals himself. He was a visualizer of memories. His essays are given a glimpse into his life and thoughts. The essay Dream Children was noted for its autobiographical description. It was a reverie. The reason behind the creation of this essay was the death of his brother John. It unveils the author's soul. It was full of pathos. A Bachelor's Complaint was also an auto biographical and humorous essay. Here Lamb describes various oddities of the married couples.

His essays embody as many themes as he liked. From personal to professional, from imaginary to factual, from pathetic to humorous, his essays satisfy the appetite of every taste. To give a few examples, his essay, The Christ's Hospital gives an account of his early education The South Sea House records his experiences of past associations, now fallen into neglect, though situated as it is in the very center of business life. The essay Oxford in the Vacation describes Lamb's enjoyment of the vacation. In Mrs. Battle's opinions, Lamb describes the character of his grandmother Mrs. Field. In My Relations and Mackery End in Hertfordshire he gives the character sketch of his brother John and Sister Mary. In The old Benchers of the Inner Temple, he cherishes his memory of old friends of his father. In On Chimney Sweepers and The Decay of beggars he gives his sympathetic views about the class of intemperance. Thus the Essays of Elia are marked with an interesting variety. In the words of Blunden, in treatment almost every essay moves through a series of moods; wild and sweet, grave and subdued, clear and practical, sumptuous and sonorous-Elia was all these. They are promiscuous, meager and fragmentary, the essays are differenced, many blossomed and handsome".

CONCLUSION:

Thus Lamb was the finest and most charming of all English essayists. He brought perfection to art of essay writing. It was Lamb who combines all the essential elements of essay writing in his essays with great artist excellence. In short Lamb's essays have been a perennial source of interest and delight to all the readers of English literature. Lamb remains one of the best-loved essayists of English literature not only for the nobility of his life and gentleness of heart but also for producing a body of literature unique in value.

Lamb's essays limited in number though they are, exhibit infinite variety. About them it may be said, 'Here is God Plenty'. As Edmund Blunden observes "they range from the vision of beautiful children that never to be to the drollery consequent upon old George dyer's stumbling into the new river's tenuous trickle, from nonsensical rebellion against Beethoven, Bach, Mozart to the contemplation of true and false painting". Lamb's essays embody as many themes as he liked.

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