

A STUDY OF THE STYLE
OF
CHARLES LAMB'S "ESSAYS
OF ELIA "

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"Essays of Elia" is very interesting from a stylistic point of view. There are many stylistic features characterizing his Essays. What we notice first is his antiquated words and expressions. He himself called it "a self-pleasing quaintness" and considered it the effect of his preference for ancient authors. Another characteristic is many quotations from, and allusions to, various authors, mostly from Shakespeare, the Bible, and Milton.

Besides these, there can be found many characteristics in these Essays very interesting from a stylistic point of view.

I have collected some examples of these stylistic features of Lamb's Essays, and am going to mention them below. Of course, they are not exhaustive. They are only partial and introductory, and many days must pass before my study in this line will be completed and see the light of day.

A. *Archaic words (or words of rare occurrence) used.*

His use of archaic words come from his love of ancient writers, mostly from Elizabethan writers. Here I will give some of them.

1. additament
2. agnize
3. amatorious
4. arride

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|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 5. auspicate | 6. bewray | 7. cognition | 8. conniscent |
| 9. contermine | 10. defiliation | 11. defunct | 12. deodant |
| 13. descry(reveal) | 14. engendure | 15. indivertible | 16. peradventure |
| 17. periegesis | 18. reduce (bring back) | 19. recognitory | |
| 20. reluct | 21. sciental | | |

B. *Alliteration.*

Opening his Essays we come across many alliterative words and phrases. Sometimes even five words are in alliteration.

1. "and while I was repairing some of the *loose leaves* with paste"
—"*Old China*" "*The South-Sea House*"
2. "to perform a *dead dividend*."—*ibid.*
3. "for the establishment did not admist of superfluous salaries."—*ibid.*
4. "He did, indeed, *scream* ond *scrape* most abominably." —*ibid.*
5. "The *fractional farthing* is as dear to his heart as the thousands
which stand before it." —*ibid.*
6. "portion of the same flesh, *rotton-roasted* or *rare*."
—"*Christ's Hospital*"
7. "a furlong off on the other side of the same strange stream!"
—"*Old China*"
8. "How profoundly would he nib a pen—with *what* deliberation
would he *wet* a *wafer*!" —"*The South-Sea House*"
9. "to *mitigate miserable morrows* for nights of *modness*."
—"*Confessions of a Drunkard*"
10. "How I *would wake weeping* and in the anguish of my heart ex-
claim upon sweet calm in Wiltshire." —"*Christ's Hospital*"
11. "How the *first feeling* besets me, after stretchng out the hours
of recumbence to their last extent."—"*Confessions of a Drunkard*"

12. "The *weary world of waters* between up oppresses the imagination."

—"Old China"

A close study of these alliterative words and phrases will prove that besides their euphonic effect, there are some other elements intended. Sometimes humour or irony, etc., sometimes weariness, pain, or sorrow or something like it, seems to be intended.

From (1) to (7) the former seems to be the objective, while from (8) to (12) they seem to express the latter.

C. *Metaphorical repetition.*

By metaphorical repetition I mean a repetition of words or expressions of similar meaning. These repetitions are one of the prominent features of his Essays. They add a great deal of beauty and variety to these Essays.

1. "Mistake me not, reader—nor imagine that I am by nature destitute of those exterior twin appendages, hanging ornaments, and (architecturally speaking) handsome volutes to the human capital. Better my mother had never borne me.—I am, I think, rather delicately than copiously provided with those conduits; and I feel no disposition to envy the mule for his plenty, or the mole for his exactness, in those ingenious labyrinthine inlets—those indispensable side-intelligencers.

In the above ears are expressed in various ways.

2. "If peradventure, Reader, it has been thy lot to waste the golden years of thy life—the shining youth—in the irksome confinement of an office; to have thy prison days prolonged through middle age down to decrepitude and silver hairs, without hope of release or respite; to have lived to forget that there are such things as holidays, or to remember them, but as the prerogative of childhood, then and then

only will you be able to appreciate my deliverance."

—"*The Superannuated Man*"

In the above the sorrow of an accountant who sat at his office-desk for many years is described in various ways.

3. "Words are something ; but to be exposed to an endless battery of mere sounds ; to be long a dying ; to lie stretched upon a rack of roses, to keep up languor by unintermitted effort ; to pile honey upon sugar, and sugar upon honey, to an interminable tedious sweetness ; to fill up sound with feeling, and strain ideas to keep pace with it ; to gaze on empty frames, and be forced to make the pictures for yourself ; to read a book, all stops, and be obliged to supply the verbal matter ; to invent extempore tragedies to answer to the vague gestures of an inexplicable rambling mime—these are faint shadows of what I have undergone from a series of the ablest-executed pieces of this empty instrumental music."

—"*A Chapter on Ears*"

The above passage describes the wearisomeness of listening to music.

4. A poor relation—is the most irrelevant thing in nature,—a piece of impertinent correspondency,—an odious approximation,—a haunting conscience,—a preposterous shadow,—lengthening in the noontide of our prosperity,—an unwelcome remembrancer,—a perpetually recurring mortification,—a drain on your purse,—a more intolerable dun upon your pride,—a drawback upon success,—a rebuke to your rising,—a stain in your blood,—a blot on your 'scutcheon,—a rent in your garment,—a death's head at your banquet,—Agathocles' pot,—a Mordecai in your gate,—a Lazarus at your door,—a lion in your gate,—a frog in your chamber,—a fly in your ointment,—a mote in your eye,—a triumph to your enemy, an apology to your friends,—the one thing not needful,—the hail in harvest,—the ounce of sour in a pound of sweet."

—" *Poor Relations* "

All the words and expressions meaning "a poor relation" are mobilized here. This is the longest metaphorical repetition in these Essays.

D. *Contrast.*

Contrast is an essential element in literary production. From ancient times, this rhetorical figure has been used very often. The most remarkable instance is Lyly's "Euphues." Lamb also knew the value of this rhetorical effect. In some cases, like "Old China," the whole effect of an essay is composed of two or three principal contrasts.

1. "Competence to age is supplementary youth, a sorry supplement indeed, but I fear the best that is to be had." —" *Old China* "

2. "with such a maximum of glee and minimum of mischief in his mirth." —" *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers* "

3. "The same execrable tyranny drove the younger part of us from the fires, when our feet were perishing with snow."

—" *Christ's Hospital* "

4. "and under the cruellest penalties forbade the indulgence of a drink of water, when we lay in sleepless summer nights, fevered with the season and the day's sports" —*ibid.*

5. "I had left the temple a devotee and was returned a rationalist" —" *My First Play* "

6. "better foes today, sugared darlings tomorrow."

—" *Mrs. Battle's Opinion on Whist* "

Now we will proceed to the case of essays the effect of which consists of two or three important contrasts. For an example I will take "Old China," one of Lamb's masterpieces. This essay begins with a talk of Elia and Bridget about old china, how much they like it and how strange

the picture on it is. Then he talks about] their present happy circumstances, when suddenly a passing cloud darkens Bridget's countenance and why? Bridget says, "I wish the good old times would come again when we were not quite so rich. I do not mean that I want to be poor; but there was a middle state"—as she was pleased to ramble on,—“in which I am sure we were a great deal happier. A purchase is but a purchase, now that you have money enough and to spare. Formerly it used to be a triumph.”

Thus the present circumstances are contrasted with those of the former days with good effect, the great charm of this essay coming from this contrast, and the detailed description of the former circumstances, earnestly wished for [by Bridget, forms the climax of this essay. To conclude this essay another contrast is presented, that is, the present happy circumstances with which, Elia says, they should be contented, for competence to age is supplementary youth. Thus this essay consists of three contrasted parts. The first is the description of the present favourable circumstances. The second is the contrasted former circumstances under which they were, Bridget thinks, much happier. The third is the conclusion and returns to the praise of the present circumstances.

The same technique is also employed in "The Superannuated Man." This essay consists of three contrasted parts. First, Elia's lamentation over his life of official confinement. Second, his pleasure of emancipation. Third, his yearning for his former state. The construction of these essays may be illustrated in the following way.

SECOND PART

FIRST PART

THIRD PART



“My First Play” is constructed on the same plan. Here contrast is between the plays enjoyed when Elia was a child and those which he saw many years after. The concluding part is as follows:—

“Comparison and retrospection soon yielded to the present attraction of the scene; and theatre became to me, upon a new stock, the most delightful of recreations.”

Some essays consist of two contrasted parts. They are “The Old and New School master,” “The Two Races of Men,” etc.

E. *Compound-words.*

The use of compound-words is a marked feature of current American English. This is a very convenient and clear way of word-formation. The word-order of the Japanese language is on the same pattern. In Lamb's Essays a two-word combination is quite common. Sometimes a three-word or a four-word combination is met with and all parts of speech are combined in various ways.

A. *Two-word Combinations.*

I. *Adjective+Noun*

1. “to make up one poor *gaudy-day* between them.”

—“*Oxford in the Vacation*”

2. “those *whole-day* leaves”

—“*Christ's Hospital*”

3. “a fortunate piece of *ill-fortune*”

—“*Witches and Other Night Fears*”

II. *Adverb+Verb (Past Participle)*

1. "Our *well-carpeted* fireside" —"Old China"
2. "*half-forgotten* humours" —"Oxford in the Vacation"
3. "that *much-injured*, reduced man" —"A Quakers' Meeting"

III. *Noun+Verb (Present Participle)*

1. "a *home-seeking* lad" —"Christ's Hospital"
2. "this *excitement-loving* lad" —"Oxford in the Vacation"
3. "the *all-swallowing* indiscriminate orifice" —"Valentine's Day"

IV. *Adverb+Adjective*

1. "an *else-irrevocable* law" —"The Child Angel"
2. "the *half-heavenly* novice" —*ibid.*
3. "that *super-subtle* region" —*ibid.*
4. "it is not *over-new*, threadbare as thy stories" —"All Fools' Day"

V. *Noun+Verb (Past Participle)*

1. "For myself—*earth-bound* and fettered to the scene of my activities." —"Imperfect Sympathies"
2. "I was *awe-struck* and believed these significations to be something more than elemental fires" —"My First Play"
3. "at long *worm-eaten* tables" —"The South-Sea House"

VI. *Noun+Preposition*

1. "with few or no traces of *goers-in* or *comers-out*" —"The South-Sea House"
2. "Its poor rents and *comings-in* are soon summed up and told." —"A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars"

VII. *Adjective+Noun+ed*

1. "I have seen your *dim-eyed* vergers." —"Oxford in the Vacation"
2. "*Azure-tinctured* grotesques" —"Old China"
3. "Le G—, *sangiune*, volatile, *sweet-natured*." —"Christ's Hospital"

4. "Fine *frank-hearted* Fr.

—*ibid.*

VIII. *Noun + Noun*

1. "an *exhibition-goer*"

—" *Productions of Modern Art* "

2. "the *cart-rucks* of figures and ciphers"—" *Oxford in the Vacation* "

3. "such *water-pastimes* "

—" *Popular Fallacies* "

4. "the casual *street-talk* "

—" *Popular Fallacies* "

IX. *Noun + Gerund*

1. "a *friendship-hunting* "

—" *Popular Fallacies* "

2. "It is long since you went a *salamander-gathering* down Aetna "

—" *All Fools' Day* "

3. "They are a sort of *dream-fighting* "

—" *Mrs. Battles Opinion on Whist* "

X. *Verb (Past Participle) + Adverb*

1. "a large *worn-out* building "

—" *Christ's Hospital* "

2. "This so *cried-up* faculty "

—" *A Chapter on Ears* "

B. *Three-word Combinations*

1. "to regret the abolition and *doing-away-with* altogether, of those consolatory institutions." —" *Oxford in the Vacation* "

2. "the *half-earth-born* "

—" *The Child Angel* "

3. "a *without-pain-delivered* jest." —" *On Some of the Old Actors* "

4. "the decent, though *low-in-purse* enthusiast."

—" *The Tombs in the Abbey* "

C. *Four-word Combinations*

1. "that part-French, *better-part-English-woman*." —" *New Year's Eve* "

2. "our bald *bread-and-cheese-suppers*."

—" *Grace before Meat* "

These combinations may be profitably compared with the following:—

1. "a most important and sure to be profitable estate deal."

—" *Dreiser, "Dawn"* "

2. "a for her years ridiculous but absolutely sincere reflection."

—*Dreiser, "A Gallery of Women"*

3. "The leather is iron—hard." *William Faulkner, "Light in August"*

4. "a tobaccostained goat's beard and mad eyes." —*ibid.*

5. "He speaks now with a kind of spurious brusqueness which, flabby-jowled and darkcaverneyed, his face belies." —*ibid.*

F *Oxymoron and Paradox*

These figures of speech are often found in his Essays.

1. "busy-idle." —"Dream Children"

2. "being nothing, art everything." —"Oxford in the Vacation"

3. "The mighty future is as nothing, being everything, the past is everything being nothing." —*ibid.*

4. "Common qualities become uncommon"—"*The South-Sea House*"

5. "a fortunate piece of ill-fortune."

—"Witches and Other Night Fears"

6. "sweet enemy." —"Some Sonnets of Sir Philip Sydney"

7. "fair disgrace," —*ibid.*

8. "biblia a-biblia=books that are not books."

—"Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading"

9. "nonsense (best sense to it)" —"Popular Fallacies"

10. "the wise impertinence." —*ibid.*

11. "a rack of roses." —"A Chapter on Ears"

12. "The only dish which excited our appetites and disappointed our stomachs in almost equal proportions."—"Oxford in the Vacation"

13. "They gave time to form rooted friendships to cultivate steady enmities." —"Mrs. Battle's Opinion on Whist"

14. "Whom single blessedness had soured to the world."—"My Relations"

15. "awoke into sleep and found the vision true."

—" *Witches, and Other Night Fears* "

G *Quotations and References*

Lamb's Essays are full of quotations from, and references to, various books and authors. In this connection I call to mind the famous words of a man who went to see *Hamlet*, "Will Shakespeare was a very clever fellow, but he is so damned full of quotations."

In the case of Charles Lamb I wish to say, "Charles Lamb is admirably full of quotations."

Taking much interest in these quotations and references I have made a list of authors and books quoted from or referred to in Lamb's *Essays of Elia* and it shows what books and authors he loved better than others.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
1. Shakespeare	252
2. the Bible	
{ Old Testament 128	
{ New Testament 90	218
3. Milton	111
4. Virgil	39
5. Homer	29
6. Horace	28
7. Spenser	28
8. Wordsworth	28
9. Pope	24
10. Coleridge	21
11. Ben Jonson	17
12. Dryden	16
13. Samuel Johnson	11

<i>Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
14. Goldsmith	11
15. Swift	10
16. Sheridan	10
17. Plato	10
18. Sir Thomas Browne	9
19. Sydney	9
20. Cowley	8
21. Stern	8
22. Tennyson	7
23. Hazlitt	7
24. Fuller	6
25. George Dyer	6
26. Burton	6
27. Michael Drayton	6
28. Richardson	5
29. Thomas More	5
30. Bacon	5
31. Fielding	5
32. James Thomson	4
33. Cowper	4
34. Scott	4
35. Landor	4
36. Farquhar	4
37. Shelley	3
38. Percy	3
39. Bunyan	3
40. Byron	3

<i>Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
41. William Temple	3
42. Marlowe	3
43. Keats	3
44. Defoe	3
45. Smollett	3
46. Burns	3

(Less than three omitted)

The above list tells us that the writer Lamb loved best was Shakespeare. What he loved next was the Bible. Milton occupies the third place. Virgil, Homer, Horace, Spenser succeed him in due order. The high places occupied by these classical writers show how much he loved these literary figures of the first magnitude. It is interesting to notice that such writers as Shelley, Keats, Byron cannot enjoy prominent positions in his Essays from the point of view of frequency.

The following table of quotations from, and references to, Shakespeare may serve to show the order of Lamb's preference with regard to Shakespeare's works.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
1. Henry IV ^{I Henry IV 13} ^{II Henry IV 14} References common to both 3	30
2. Twelfth Night	23
3. Hamlet	21
4. Macbeth	18
5. As You Like It	18
6. Othello	13
7. King Lear	13
8. The Tempest	12
9. Mid-summer Night's Dream	9

<i>Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
10. Merchant of Venice	8
11. Romeo and Juliet	6
12. Antony and Cleopatra	6
13. Merry Wives of Windsor	6
14. Richard II	6
15. Richard III	5
16. King John	5
17. Timon of Athens	5
18. Winter's Tale	5
19. Sonnets	4
20. Love's Labour's Lost	4
21. Henry V	4
22. Henry VIII	4
23. Coriolanus	4
24. Taming of the Shrew	3
25. Julius Caesar	3
26. Troilus and Cressida	3
27. Cymbeline	3
28. All's Well That Ends Well	2
29. Measure for Measure	2
30. Titus Andronicus	1
31. Venus and Adonis	1
32. Henry VI	1
33. Lover's Complaint	1
34. Much Ado About Nothing	1
35. Two Gentlemen of Verona	1
36. Lucrece	1

As is clear from the above, Lamb quoted from, and referred to, almost all the works of Shakespeare. Only "Pericles" and "Comedy of Errors" are exceptions, so far as my investigations are concerned.

This shows how much he loved Shakespeare, and always having his beautiful lines in his mind, Lamb quoted them freely and appositely whenever occasion arose. In the frequency of quotations and references, the Bible comes next in order. The following list will show which book of the Bible he loved best to quote from and refer to.

OLD TESTAMENT

<i>Name</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
1. Psalms	29
2. Genesis	21
3. Exodus	12
4. Daniel	9
5. Proverbs	1
6. I Kings	7
7. Judges	5
8. Ecclesiastes	5
9. Joshua	4
10. Isaia	4
11. Jeremia	4
12. Deuteronomy	3
13. Job	3
14. 2 Kings	3
15. 1 Samuel	3
16. Esther	2
17. Numbers	1
18. Ezekiel	1

1. "start like a thing surprised." —"*Oxford in the Vacation*"
 from "started like a guilty thing." —"*Hamlet*," I. 1. 148.
 and "Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised."
 —Wordsworth, "*Intimations*," 147.
2. "I know the fathom line that ever touched a descent so deep as I
 would be willing to bury more wealth in than Croesus had."
 —"*Old China*"
 from "I'll break my staff, Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
 And, deeper than did ever plummet-sound, I'll drown my book."
 —"*The Tempest*" V 55
 and "Or dive into the bottom of the deep, Where fathom line could
 never touch the ground." —"*1 Henry IV*," I. 3. 204
3. "weep tears of blood." —"*Popular Fallacies*," XVI
 from "Purple tears that his wound wept." —"*Venus and Adonis*," 1054
 and "My heart wept blood."
4. "the least retreat and recess." —"*Ellistoniana*"
 from "My late, my last retreat." —Swift, *Dean Smedley's Petition*,
 and "the temple's last recess." —Pope, "*Dunciad*," 3
5. "drop like mellow fruit." —"*New Year's Eve*"
 from "So mayst thou live, till ripe fruit thou drop."
 —"*Paradise Lost*," XI. 538
 and "Fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long."
 —Dryden, "*Oedipus*," IV, 1.

II. *Modified quotations*

Lamb often used quotations in modified forms, frequently compressing them into simpler forms.

1. "It looks like "refining a violet." —"*A Dissertation upon Roast Pig*."
 from "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily To throw a perfume

on the violet,.....Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."

—"King John," IV. 2. 11

2. "true ballad"

—"Decay of Beggars"

from "The ballad is very pitiful and as true."—"Winter's Tale," IV. 3

3. "the vain stuff out of which dramas are composed."

—"Popular Fallacies," XIV

from "We are such stuff

As dreams are made on."

—*The Tempest*, IV: 1. 126

4. "Neighbour grice."—"Decay of Beggars"

from "Every grise of fortune

Is smoothed by that below."—"Timon of Athens," IV. 3. 16

5. "with sweeps of wind"

—"Popular Fallacies," XV

from "the sweeping whirlwinds' sway."—Gray, "The Bard," II. 2. 28

6. "fret and fever"

—"The South-Sea House"

from "And quite forget

The weariness, the fever, and the fret,

Here where men sit and hear each other groan."

—Keats, "Ode on a Nightingale."

III. Formal quotations.

By formal quotations I mean the quotations in which only outer forms are imitated, as are shown below.

1. "Age, thou hast lost thy breed."

—"Decay of Beggars"

from "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods,"

—"Julius Caesar," I. 2. 151

2. "The age of discipline is gone by."

—"A Dissertation upon Roast Pig."

from "But the age of chivalry is gone."—Burke, "Marie Antoinette"

3. "Praise hath her cadences."

- from "Peace hath her victories." —*Milton, "Sonnet to Cromwell"*
 4. "borrowing and to borrow." —"*Two Races of Men*"
 from "conquering and to conquer." —"*Revelation,*" VI. 2

IV. *Single-word quotations*

Lamb often used single-word quotations.

1. "Something untender," —"*The Wedding*"
 from "So young and so untender." —"*King Lear,*" I. 108
2. "if we would catch the flame, the odour."—"*Popular Fallacies,*" XV
 from "Our gentle flame." —"*Timon of Athens.*" I. 1. 23
3. "She had declared her sister's history to be a 'blank.'" —"*On Some of the Old Actors*"
 from "a blank, my lord." —"*Twelfth Night,*" II. 4. 110
4. "whether he has not found his brain more 'betossed.'" —"*Sanity of True Genius*"
 from "My betossed soul did not attend him." —"*Romeo and Juliet,*" V. 3. 76
5. "prate not of their 'whereabout.'" —"*Sanity of True Genius*"
 from "For fear
 They very stones prate of my whereabouts." —"*Macbeth,*" II. 1. 58

V. *Imperfect quotations*

Lamb's vague memory often introduced imperfect quotations into his Essays.

1. "I passed by the walls of Balclutha and they were desolate." —"*The South-Sea House*"
 from "I have seen the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate." —*Ossian, "Couthon"*
2. "— that's form, and has his years come to him,

In some green desert." —"*The Superannuated Man*"
from "I know no more the way to temporal rule. Than he that's
born and has his years come to him

In a rough desert." —*Middleton*, "*Mayor of Queensborough*"

VI. *Quotations from his own books.*

1. "It has been prettily said that 'a babe is fed with milk and praise.'"

—"*Popular Fallacies*," XII

"A child is fed, etc."—*Charles and Mary Lamb's Poetry for*

Children, "*The First Tooth*."

2. "Through the green plains of pleasant Hertfordshire."

—"*My Relations*"

"And I shall nurse on thee, slow journeying on,

To the green plains of pleasant Hertfordshire."

—*Sonnet (Tittleless)*