

## Dream Children: Charles Lamb as Romantic Essayist

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No essayist is more egotistical than Lamb; but no egotist can be so artless and yet so artful, so tearful and yet so mirthful, so pedantic and yet so humane. In Lamb imagination conquers fact, romance conquers reality, personal conquers the pragmatic, poetry conquers the prose, and nowhere are all these qualities better embodied than in *Dream children, A Reverie* for here he completely unlocks his heart, unveils his deepest yearnings, unfolds his most intimate relations. Here he is so sensitive and so strong, so cheerful and yet so inalterably doomed to sorrow.

Even though he commences with an objective Baconian declaration about the general love of children for stories about their elders, the personal reference is never far away. “It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me...” Then he tells stories to Alice and John about the ‘great house’ at Norfolk, about their great grandmother Field who was a good and religious woman, about how he roamed about the garden of the house, and about the uncle of children John L-. But the deepest core of Lamb’s personal reference is reached when he speaks of the mother of the dream children, Alice W-n.

That Lamb was a romantic at heart is evident from his love for children, nature and the pathetic aspects of life. He also bears the romantic characteristic of attempting to escape

to the land of imagination only to realise with rue that all escape is transitory, that the realm of imagination is fragile one, that it is a delusive reverse. The essay reveals his longing for children and at the end, when the children were gradually being disappeared, he got heart-break like shock.

Wordsworth may have dubbed Lamb as ‘a scorner of the fields’, but the love that Lamb evinces in nature is almost Keatsian in its rich and abundant sensuousness. He is fascinated with the garden, the red berries and the fir apples, the darting dace and the sulky pink.

Like all romantics he was also interested in the supernatural so as to be fascinated by the story of the two infants gliding up and down the stairs.

Melancholy and angst, personal suffering and personal dejection are at the heart of all romanticism as in Coleridge’s *Dejection: An Ode*, and the title hints at this for the children for those in a dream and not his own. His looking into ‘yew trees’ projects the melancholic sensibilities of Lamb. All the stories described in the essay are of sorrows and sufferings, feelings and frustrations. The great mother of the children dies of cancer, their uncle John L-, so wild and boisterous in his boyhood became lame footed and then ceased to be. He had courted Alice W-n for seven long years ‘in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair’. And at the end children disappears with the apparently parting speech, “We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all.”

So, we can see that Lamb’s essay is very personal. It possesses humour and pathos like most romantic pieces of literature. Lamb is also praised for his allusive quality which is noted by many literary critics. He is highly evocative, a quality possessed by all Romantic writers. All these aspects of the essayist’s mind are enough to prove his romanticism.

