

B.A. 2nd Year English Hons.

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Paper 4 The Romantic Period Unit 5

Charles Lamb : Dream Children ; A Reverie

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An Essay is short composition or literary writing in prose. The main theme of an essay is usually discussion of a certain matter, or even expressing a certain point of view. It may be an attempt on part of the essayist to persuade the reader to accept a certain thesis or theory. The Essay as a literary form can be either a formal or informal one. The Formal essay as evident in the writings of Francis Bacon are very serious and present a heavy lecture on a certain topic. In The Informal Essay, as evident in the writings of **Charles Lamb**, the style is very intimate and impersonal and the message is delivered in a calm and revelatory mode. The Pseudonym used by Charles Lamb for his essays is **Elia**. He adopted the name from that of an Italian Clerk in the South Sea House where Lamb had worked for some time.

Dream Children : A Reverie is considered a masterpiece in imaginative prose . it was published in the London Magazine with **John Scott as the Editor** in the ***Essays of Elia in 1820***. The essayist entitled the Essay “ ***Dream Children***” because he never married and naturally never became the father of any children. The children he spoke of in this Essay were actually the creations of his imaginations or fancy. Dream Children is a Reverie of a man who was intensely human and whose life was tragedy. Charles lamb was born into a poor family, but poverty was not such a great misfortune as certain other misfortunes that befell him. Following an unsuccessful love - affair with **Ann Simmons**, he became mentally hinged and had to remain for some time in a lunatic asylum. In the following year, his sister was seized with acute mania and in fit of madness stabbed her mother to death. Lamb displayed an admirable self-mastery and exhibited supreme self sacrifice by undertaking the responsibility for the safe - keeping of his sister who became prone to occasional fits of lunacy.

Page 2:- His essential Humanity appears in his noble self renunciation , singular loyalty as a brother. **Charles Lamb** sacrificed his own comfort and convenience for his sister's sake. Charles Lamb was forced to give up the idea of marriage for some time. He had to leave London for his sister's sake. They settled in a quiet countryside. In this way Charles Lamb deprived of the stimulating society of his Literary friends to whom he used to give a monthly " **at home**". His proposal to marry with Fanny Kelly, an actress was rejected and he remain a bachelor through out his life.

Such was the man that wrote this Essay , which is highly moving , heart- rending, being imbued with Tragedy of his life. Lamb gave in this essay a concrete shape to his unfulfilled paternal longings. Alice and John were the Imaginary off- spring of his imaginary marriage with Ann Simmons whom he had loved in his youth but who had not responded to his love. In the Essay **Field** , pseudonym for the actual person, was Charles Lamb's grandmother. He presented her as an ideal grandmother in an imaginary and inflated way before his Dream Children. She was extremely pious, fearless , superb Dancer of the area in her youth and also very compassionate person. Besides his loving and caring Grand mother, Charles Lamb also speaks about his brother **John Lamb** who in his youth was a hand some, high - spirited, strong, fearless person who loved Charles Lamb very much. But in his old age John Lamb became lame- footed and spent the rest of his life in utter hopelessness, irritation and pain. Charles Lamb lamented,

" I did not always make allowance how considerate he was he had been to me when I was lame- footed ; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago , such a distance there is betwixt life and death; I missed his kindness, I missed his crossness and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him...."

Charles Lamb also mentioned about his sister, Mary Lamb who did not marry since she had been attacked by insanity. She had been referred in this Essay as " Faithful Bridget" because she never married and was lamb's only companion all his life. It is undoubtedly a personal Essay. Here Lamb presented a lot of incidents and characters

Page 3:- from his own life. It was written in straightforward, chaste language as befits the melancholy mood of the Essayist. His feelings of despondency and frustration was

effectively conveyed to the Reader and the Writer's tone of sincerity was unmistakable. This Essay is full of reminiscences and anecdotes. Lamb recalled the lonely life of his grand mother, then went on to recall the memories of his early boyhood. The retrospective character of this Essay is clearly seen. Charles Lamb had a genius for reminiscence. He liked to chew the curd of his memory. It is for this reason that he has been called "**A Visualiser of Memories.**"

This is essentially an Autobiographical Essay. The element of humour which is an essential characteristic of his Essays, is not absent from this pathetic Essay. The children's reactions to their father's statements were humorous. On hearing of his father's love for busy- idle diversions rather than for fruits, John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes which had stealthily picked up from there. When Alice heard that her Great Grand mother was a best Dancer in her youth, Alice's right foot began to play movement. On hearing that Field used to sleep in a big empty house, Alice tried to look courageous. In this Essay humour and pathos are inextricably mixed. In the course of his day-dreaming when Charles Lamb looked at his dream - daughter, her physical resemblance reminded him of his dream girl Alice W -- , the fictitious name for **Ann Simmons**. At the end of his Reverie Lamb came back to reality and found his sister Bridget, Mary Lamb by his side. He realized his brother John Lamb who had died and would no more be with them. So, **Charles Lamb** lamented his loss by saying, "but **John L (James Elia)** was gone forever. We are not of Alice nor of thee, nor are we children at all. We are what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name". The style has a poetic quality because of its fanciful subject and the sincerity of emotion. This Essay is "**A Lyric in Prose**". On the whole, ***Dream Children: A Reverie*** is one of the most exquisite of Charles Lamb's Essay.

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Assignments

Answer any Two Of The Following Questions: (10x2=20)

- 1.What autobiographical elements can be found in Charles Lamb's Essay?
- 2.Why is the Essay titled "*Dream Children*" A *Reverie*?
- 3.What is Lethe ? What is "Forbidden Fruits" AS REFERRED TO BY Lamb in his Essay?
- 4.Who is Alice Winterton? To whom is Lamb relating his story?

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