

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

Altering Behaviours Through Poetry: An Analysis Of Select Poems By Mary Ann Lamb

Joshua Gnana Raj P

Full Time Ph. D. Research Scholar

Department of English

Periyar University, Salem

Email: joshuaraj10@gmail.com

Dr.B.J.Geetha

Associate Professor

Department of English Studies

Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvarur

Email: geetprem05@gmail.com

Joshua Gnana Raj P, Dr.B.J.Geetha, Altering Behaviours Through Poetry: An Analysis Of Select Poems By Mary Ann Lamb- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x,

ABSTRACT

Mary Ann Lamb is a writer and the sister of Charles Lamb, had written poems for children, dealt with various themes, and contributed to mould a child's behaviour. Years before her literary career Mary, on 22 September 1796 in a sudden outburst of psychotic wrath stabbed Elizabeth Lamb her mother, to death with a kitchen knife. Charles dedicated himself to the care of his sister. Mary though a dutiful daughter spent her whole life in the ins and outs of madhouses due to the recurring fits of mania throughout her life. This paper intends to seek to finds how Mary had written poetry to make children avoid anger and laziness. The poems taken for analysis are "Anger", and "Why not do it, Sir, To-day?" from the poetry collection *Poetry for Children*.

Introduction

Mary Ann Lamb wrote works mainly focused on children's literature. Mary though a writer, never got her fame because of her Bipolar Disorder. Mary Ann Lamb was ten years older to Charles Lamb, and one amongst three children of John Lamb Senior and Elizabeth Lamb to survive a childhood of the seven they had. Mary one day on 22 September 1796 in a sudden outburst of a psychotic frenzy stabbed her mother. She was then certified insane and was taken to a madhouse. On her release from the asylum, she was placed under the care of Charles. Charles, on the other hand, devoted entirely to the care of his sister until his death. Mary, throughout her life, had suffered from the regular fits of mania, until her death. Since then, Charles Lamb took care of Mary and brought her to the art of writing literature. It was also the era where women

writers had to pen their written works by utilising a male pseudonym or being accompanied by a male writer. Mary had Charles to guide her.

Mary and Charles had written literary works for children, dealing with various themes, which had contributed to mould a child's behaviour. The seventeenth- eighteenth-century century is also termed as the Romantic Era had famous poets such as William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, John Keats, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, etc. Yet, Mary was unique from all these writers, she had kept her main focus on moulding children's behaviour, without imposing it forcibly. The works written by both Mary and Charles Lamb were *Tales from Shakespeare*, which introduces Shakespeare for children, wherein the original dramas were rewritten as Tales. Mary had Trans Positioned comedies, and Charles worked with the tragedies. *Mrs Leicester's School* is a short story collection ten short stories, where Mary had penned seven and Charles worked with three. This paper intends to seek how Mary had written poems to make children avoid anger and laziness from the collection *Poetry for Children*.

The poem titled "Anger" (Lamb 1878 55) from the collection is a short poem of twenty lines and a single stanza. The concept of getting angry in this poem is defined as:

ANGER in its time and place
May assume a kind of grace.
It must have some reason in it,
And not last beyond a minute.
It to further lengths it go,
It does into malice grow. (Anger 1-6)

This is an initial stage when a young child mostly comes to know about anger. Children do have anger, but then this is not very serious. Anger in younger minds might look graceful, but the poet warns that if the same outrage continues it may grow to be mean, for "It inflicts a hasty stroke, / Puts you to some little pain, / But it *never stings again*" (Anger 10-12). In the end, the poet states that "The vile snake will *always sting you*" (Anger 20). The sense of this poem is to warn children against anger. The feeling intended explains what anger does. The tone used is soft, which can also be seen with the length of the poem. Finally, the intention designed is not to get much anger. This is the first time a young reader might come across of how anger affects a person and the destructive effect that it spreads along with it.

The poem, "Why not do it, Sir, To-day?" (WST) (Lamb 2015 146) is a short poem of seventeen lines. It is a poem which is against the act of being lazy. The poem is about a procrastinator who blames to a friend about his pet parrot. The poem begins by he stated to the parrot that, "Why so I will, you noisy bird, / ... I'll advertise you, / Perhaps some ... may prize you. / A fine-tongu'd parrot ... / I'll word it thus ... all charms about you" (WST 1-5), In the second part of the poem, a gentleman saw the bird and then talked to the procrastinating protagonist of the poem and the protagonist himself agreed to the fact that he was:

... "An old procrastinator,
Sir, I am: ... you wonder that I hate her?
Though she but seven words can say,
Twenty ... times a day

She interferes with all my dreams,
 My projects, plans, and ... schemes,
 Mocking ... my sorrow:
 I'll advertise this bird to-morrow." (WST 8-15)

By the end of the poem, the parrot repeats those words, that it had uttered all times in the day by stating the title of the poem. The sense seen in this poem is to throw our laziness, the feeling emoted is to be active. The tone is expressed as a story, and the intention is not to procrastinate again. This poem is moralising and states that one must not postpone matters, which is said to the owner through his pet parrot's voice.

Thus with these two poems, it can be said these poems tend to change or mould the behaviours of children. All these poems are found in the poetry collection *Poetry for Children* is a double authored work between Mary and Charles. This work is unique for the poems have been written by both the Lambs, and they have not mentioned their names. Some poems had been written by passing papers, where Mary would pen one stanza and Charles the other, but Charles in one of his letters to Thomas Manning had written that "The best you may suppose mine; the next ... you may amuse yourself in guessing them out; but I must tell you mine are but one-third in quantity of the whole" (Hitchcock 204). Since then, the Lambs poetry collection had been speculated which of the Lambs have written which poem, but sadly there has not been much research exploring this poetical treasure penned by the Lambs for children's literature.

The fate lies still since even today as Mary's name is pushed secondary or is never mentioned by certain publishers even though most of the works were done by her. The second cause may include her being affected by Bipolar Disorder and her having stabbed her mother, she was from since leading her life under Charles Lamb's shadow. Hence it is time now to relook at the pages of history.

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