

Indicate the autobiographical elements in Lamb's *Dream Children*.

Lamb's essays are personal. Lamb is the subject matter of his essays. Montaigne, the French philosopher first introduced the subjective essays and Lamb is the perfecter of this personal, subjective type of essay. He speaks in the first person because the first person is the most familiar person to him. This is an egotism devoid of self-assertion. Lamb's egotism is blended with a sweetness all its own. A genial and urbane mind permeates the essays.

In *Dream Children*, Lamb speaks about his boyhood and youth. In his boyhood days he used to spend his holidays in his grandmother's house at Norfolk (Herdforshire). He tells us of his grandmother Mrs. Field who was a good and religious lady. He speaks of his love of loneliness, his habit of indulging in busy-idle diversions. He loved his grandmother, his elder brother John whose death was a great loss to him.

More than his outer life, the inner life of Lamb is revealed in the essay. He is romantic at heart. He loved the old things— old house, old gardens, old pictures. He used to look intently at the marble busts of the twelve Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian. He liked to roam about in the gardens and looked at the variety of sweet flowers and delicious fruits without ever desiring to have any of them. When he looked at the busts of twelve Caesars, he felt identified with them. He saw oranges ripening in the orangey and felt that he ripened like them.

Dream Children does not give so much of Lamb's outer life as his dreams, desires, yearnings and unfulfilled longings. Lamb was nearing fifty when he wrote it. It can be seen, specially from the last line that the death of his elder brother, John Lamb was fresh and heavy on his

mind. In youth, he had had a disappointing love affair with a girl named Ann Simmons, who afterwards married a man named Bartrun. We know that one of his influences of his childhood was his grandmother Mrs. Field, housekeeper of Blakesware house in Herfordshire. He was a bachelor living with his sister Mary who was subject to homicidal mania. His sister Mary (Bridget) was always with him.

In the essay, Lamb gives expression to his inmost desire for married life. He loved children and knew their innocence, ingenuousness, little naughtiness. The essay reveals his sense of extreme loneliness of life. He is a lover of life, of nature, of children. His sense of loneliness suggested in the essay touches us. He reconstructs in his dream what might have been had he married Ann Simmons. The essay is a kind of wishfulfilment. The scenes and beings he describes assume clear outlines and solid shapes. The essay with its pathos and ruminations evokes our spirits. This is the essence of romanticism. Lamb often blends facts with fictions. He often mystifies the readers. Mrs. Field's house was in Herfordshire and not in Norfolk. Mrs. Field was housekeeper to the Plumers of Blakesware. He calls his brother John. The sweet-heart of his early youth is called Alice W — n in place of Ann Simmons. His sister Mary Lamb is changed to faithful Bidget. Through all these mystifications, he wants to throw the readers off the scent. But these fictions do not seriously interfere with the genuineness of his confidence. The greatest mystification of the essay is his dream excursions to the past where he weaves the yarn of his fanciful wife and children and his blissful life with them.

Humour and pathos in 'Dream children: a reverie'

⇒ "Some things are of that nature as to make one's fancy chuckle while his heart doth ache", wrote Bunyan. The nature of things mostly appeared to Charles Lamb in this way. In Lamb humour and pathos are, indeed, very often allied. Lamb could not prevent his mind from passing at times to the sadder aspects of life and there is belief that he laughed to save himself from weeping. In fact, Lamb's personal life was full of disappointments and frustrations. But, instead of complaining, he looked at the tragedies of life, its miseries and worries as a humorist — "the frolic and the gentle" as Wordsworth calls him.

In Lamb's writing wit, humour and fun are interwoven and it is humour which is most notable for its extreme sensitiveness to the true proportion of things. Lamb often brings out the two sides of a fact and causes laughter at our own previous misconceptions. Therefore, it borders on the painful realization. Thus, his humour is very nearly allied to pathos. They are different facets of the same gem. His 'Dream children: a reverie' is a true testimony of his blending of humour and pathos in a single row.

The whole essay is permeated with a note of heart-sob. With the "viewless wings of poesy" Lamb journeys back to the good old days and pops up stories in front of his dream children. He relates his childhood days, and the lives of Mrs. Field, his grandmother and John Lamb, his brother. He describes how much fun he had at the great house and orchard of Norfolk. He describes his brother (John L—) as a handsome, brave and spirited youth, who won admiration from everybody. Lamb's grandmother Mrs. Field is the other living picture. She was a good-nurtured and pious lady of respectable personality.

Lamb's beloved "Alice W—n" is the other shadowed reality. His dream children, Alice and John are mere bubbles of fancy. Thus, Lamb's nostalgic memory transports us back to those good old golden days of his life. But, even in those romantic nostalgia the hard realities of life does not miss our eyes. Death, separation and suffering inject us with deep-rooted pathos. Whereas Mrs. Field died of cancer, John Lamb died at an early age. The story of his beloved (Ann Simmons) is a tale of unrequited love of Charles Lamb. Above all, the children are not really

they are the creation of imagination of a bachelor man.

In his actual life Lamb courted Ann Simmons, but could not marry her. He wanted to have children, but he could not have any. Thus, he strikes a very pathetic note towards the end of his essay when he puts the following word ~~in front~~ in front of his imaginary offsprings:

We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all ... We are nothing, less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been ...

Lamb's humour was no surface play, but the flowers plucked from the nettle of peril and awe.

In any well-balanced piece of writing, humour is supplemented to pathos. This present essay of Lamb also appropriates this trademark feature. Lamb's life arouses both laughter and sorrow. But, the most exuberant source of humour is his fictitious creation of children. In fact, the subtitle of the essay "a reverie" that literally means a daydream, ~~preparation~~ or a fantasy, prepares us for the pathos of the return to hard reality, although the essay begins on a deceptively realistic note.