

Food, Morality and Beyond

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Eating is necessary for survival. The element of food and relevant symbols has been as a read within the field of writing from the beginnings of time, it also gives an impact which can be both verbally and visually felt. Food is a theme of importance seen most in both the literatures written by women and those written for children. Mary Lamb is one such woman writer who had written tales, short stories, and poems for children. This paper intends to seek how of how Mary, sister of Charles Lamb had written poems based on food as a symbol. Mary sees food, as something different, she sees it not alone as a part of survival alone, but she with it views it to be as a part of moulding one's own behaviour. Three poems of Mary are taken for analysis namely: "The Peach" (Lamb 1903 7), "Moderation in Diet" (Lamb 1903 123-125), and "Charity" (Lamb 1903 127-129) from the collection *Poetry for Children*.

"The Peach" (Lamb 1903 7) is a poem which almost includes autobiographical elements that are to be found within the life of the Lambs. There were seven children born to John Lamb Senior and Elizabeth Lamb of which only three survived, who were John Lamb Junior, Mary Lamb, and Charles Lamb. The first two lines of the poem states the family conditions which is written as: "Mamma gave us a single peach, / She shar'd it among seven" (TP 1-2); and this single peach which was divided amongst the seven, which was of a small share, it did flavoured so fine.

This effect of showing the happiness of one peach to be shared amongst seven, shows both the condition of how the Lambs had lived, at one point of their lives, before they earned a proper living through their art of writing. This also shows the child who reads this poem, to learn or know about the class divide, which cannot be understood by the child at a very young age, yet the poet had intended to write the poem in such ways and the poem still continued to show the love that a mother has for her children which is evident from the lines that there were written that, "The tear was in our parent's eye;- / It seem'd quiet out of season; / When we ask'd wherefore she did cry, / She thus explain'd the reason:" (TP 9-12) the reply thus given by the mother was:

"The cause, my children, I may say,

Was joy, and not dejection;
The Peach, which made you all so gay,
Gave rise to this reflection:- (TP 13-16)

Here the word gay in line number 15 previously meant to mean happiness, thus Mary utilises old English in her poems. The poem finally ends, by Mary writing the present condition or stance by mentioning that always, “It’s many a mother’s lot to share, / Seven hungry children viewing, / ... / As I this Peach was doing.” (TP 17-20) Thus this poem narrates the issue that the Lambs faced in the past and the last line shows the present sense, thus proving that the sight of the peach made Mary to remember the past life lived by her and her family.

“Moderation in Diet” (Lamb 1903 123) is a poem which moulds the child of how not to spend much money on food, but to also regulate and to have a considerable regard on one’s own ways of eating. The poem opens up first with a punch line on to stop the habit of drinking, where the first stanza begins by advising to a boy named Jim which is written as:

The drunkard’s sin, excess in wine,
Which reason drowns, and health destroys,
As yet no failing is of thine,
Dear Jim; strong drink’s not given boys. (MiD 1-4)

Children are always fond of sweets, and for this addiction, to be moderated it is said by Mary that, “A sweet tooth in an infant’s head / Is pardon’d, not in a grown child” (MiD 23-24). This poem also reads out the universal behaviourism of elders giving children money so that they could buy what they desire and so Mary writes, “If parent, aunt, or liberal friend, / With splendid shilling line your purse, / Do not the same on sweetmeats spend” (MiD 25-27), and she also advises the children to go and buy books instead and she gives a reason for this by stating that, “They who their minds with knowledge sweeten, / The savour long as life retain” (MiD 31-32). Thus Mary points out the truth that it is better to quench the thirst and hunger of the mind, rather than to spend much money on food.

The final poem, “Charity” (Lamb 1903 127-129) talks about class divides, and makes children to attain the behaviour of sharing and finally become charitable. In the seventh stanza of the poem Mary writes to the children by addressing them as, “You eat, and you drink; when you rise in the mor / You are cloth’d; you have health and content” (Charity 25-26) in the next line she writes of how a child never knows what it is meant to be when one is unable to get or eat proper food. These lines may also imply to mean the ways that Mary had suffered during the times she spent in the ins and outs of madhouses, where she was sent due to she being affected of

Bipolar Disorder and which was the cause of her murdering her mother Elizabeth Lamb with a knife and so she adds the line by keeping in the mind the then treatment found in the madhouses by writing that, “And you never have known, from the day you were born, / What hunger or nakedness meant” (Charity 27-28). Thus she also adds the line to the poem as in to share food by writing, “Give thy bread to the hungry, the thirsty thy cup” (Charity 33); and she had also written that if, “Having two cloaks, give one (said our Lord) to the poor” (Charity 37); and she also writes this by including what the Lord had said in the Holy Bible and she also writes that, “This can only be practis’d by persons grown up, Who’ve possessions which children have not” (Charity 35). This line could have been included in the poem since this collection was read along with the guidance of the parents, so they can make their wards understand the poems in a better ways.

Thus all these four poems make the children to attain and share a responsibility to give, to have a moderation in diet, to quench the mind with knowledge, and to be charitable this makes Mary to give importance to food, and to say food not to be an ultimatum for survival alone, but to challenge and make children to eat in moderation, and share what they have. Hence Mary in her poems talks of food, yet goes a step further and beyond by inducing morality without moralising young readers much. Mary thus in these poems concludes the fact that eating is not necessarily an act of survival alone.

Work Cited

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