

Thoughtless Cruelty

By Charles Lamb

There, Robert, you have kill'd that fly — ,
And should you thousand ages try
The life you've taken to supply,
You could not do it.

You surely must have been devoid
Of thought and sense, to have destroy'd
A thing which no way you annoy'd —
You'll one day rue it.

Twas but a fly perhaps you'll say,
That's born in April, dies in May;
That does but just learn to display
His wings one minute,

And in the next is vanish'd quite.
A bird devours it in his flight —
Or come a cold blast in the night,
There's no breath in it.

The bird but seeks his proper food —
And Providence, whose power endu'd
That fly with life, when it thinks good,
May justly take it.

But you have no excuses for't —
A life by Nature made so short,
Less reason is that you for sport
Should shorter make it.

A fly a little thing you rate —
But, Robert do not estimate
A creature's pain by small or great;
The greatest being

Can have but fibres, nerves, and flesh,
And these the smallest ones possess,
Although their frame and structure less
Escape our seeing.

n/a



Charles Lamb was an essayist, poet, and contemporary of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Hazlitt, who he counted among his friends. But despite his avant-garde and expansive literary circle, Lamb's conservative poetry never displays any of the traits of Romanticism. He did not have the love of nature or the radical political beliefs that defined the major poets of that era, and remained uncommitted on those issues. In his poetry, he preferred realistic human interaction and stayed away from the personal poetry of his peers. In "Thoughtless Cruelty," Lamb displays this characteristic impersonal tone as he discusses the difference between animal and human life.

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