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Fang, Karen
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# Empire, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb's Consumer Imagination

KAREN FANG

The ambitions of empire and the pleasure of commodity culture romantically coalesce in Charles Lamb's beloved essay "Old China" (1823), a deceptively modest essay that presents the delights of a Chinese porcelain teacup.[1] The essay belongs to an essay series for the *London Magazine*, in which Lamb developed Elia, a fictional persona. In the series, Elia, who is an employee of a large trading house, discourses with whimsy and irony on the various objects and experiences that provoke his interest. "Old China," for example, opens by according an extraordinary importance to the foreign commodity and minor art: "I have an almost feminine partiality for old china. When I go to see any great house, I enquire for the china-closet, and next for the picture gallery. I cannot defend the order of preference, but by saying, that we have all some taste or other, of too ancient a date to admit of our remembering distinctly it was an acquired one. I can call to mind the first play, and the first exhibition, that I was taken to; but I am not conscious of a time when china jars and saucers were introduced into my imagination" (p. 269).

Elia presents porcelain as a visually beguiling item that induces in him an "almost feminine" desire. Such gendered description of longing suggests Elia's near participation in a distinctively female consumer culture, and hence his representativeness for the set of social and economic attributes historically associated with it.[2] Interestingly, however, his admiration for china also universalizes porcelain: although he can neither recall when his "introduc[tion]" to porcelain took place, nor defend his preference, Elia nevertheless insists his predilection is

Karen Fang is assistant professor of English at the University of Houston. This essay is part of a book project on Romantic writing about imperialism and periodical culture.

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socially widespread ("we have all"). By thus stressing the taste for porcelain as nearly primordial (a "taste . . . of too ancient a date"), and privileging it over traditional aesthetic experiences (such as the paintings, plays, and exhibitions to which he contrasts it), "Old China" figures porcelain as a stimulus to "imagination," and thereby conflates commodity culture with aesthetic inspiration to suggest an inclusive, consumer version of the romantic tradition.[3]

In previous critical examinations of Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is usually cited as the archetypal representative of romantic imagination that Lamb knew. The celebrated philosopher and poet was Lamb's childhood friend, and hence anchors the predominantly biographical criticism on Lamb that accounts for his distinctively precious tone as an evasive expression of his sense of literary inferiority. Similarly, Lamb's sister Mary, who murdered their mother in 1796, has been suggested as another source of Charles's supposed romantic agony. Gerald Monsman, for example, argues that the Elia essays are products of Lamb's exteriorization of his creative longing or personal anguish, and Jane Aaron suggests that his love for and grief associated with Mary are commemorated in "Bridget," a recurring female character in the essay series.[4] A professional rather than psychobiographical paradigm can also be posited, however, for Lamb's literary production, that both more closely acknowledges the source of Elia's imperial identity and shows Lamb actually laying claim to the genius he associated with Coleridge. Significantly, by the time he began the Elia essays—which followed on his failures at verse tragedy and a comic play—Lamb had a thirty-year career at the East India Company, from which he drew a generous income.[5] Clearly, such imperial promotion offered Lamb a standard of social accomplishment that authorial work had yet to offer, and is emulated in a strategic conflation of his periodical employment with his service as an imperial employee. With its references to porcelain—a leading commodity of East India House trade, "Old China" is one of the most nuanced examples of Lamb's related imperial and authorial employment. Indeed, the essay not only represents the sales flows that Lamb, in his role as a clerk, tabulated daily, but also it evokes a burgeoning domestic industry that significantly nurtured Coleridge's literary career as well: as is widely known, Coleridge's career as a poet was supported by an annuity he received from the porcelain manufacturers Thomas and Josiah Wedgwood.[6]

Such an ambitious pretension to high romanticism through imperial and periodical culture as Lamb practices in his essays

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speaks to the issues of both early-nineteenth-century magazines and recent work on literary minority.[7] Specifically, it suggests that the journals flourishing at the start of the century resembled imperial corporations in the extent to which they promoted individual authors, aiding the so-called "minor" romantics in particular. "Old China" illustrates this historically symbiotic collaboration of author with organ not only through its external context in the highly topical *London Magazine*, but also especially internally, in the essay's ventriloquization of Coleridge. I will return to the importance of periodicals at the end of this discussion; here I want to begin by examining the notably double-voiced structure of the essay, which features a monologue objecting to Elia's teacup purchase from Bridget that comprises most of the essay (Elia's exclamations only bookend Bridget's remarks). Proponents of the psychobiographical impetus to Lamb's work usually read this unusual inclusion of a female character—Elia's cousin—as a proxy for Mary Lamb. Such accounts overlook, however, Bridget's role in Lamb's conceptualization of an imperial imagination that also implicates Coleridge—and particularly his important poem on genius, "Kubla Khan." This reading of "Old China," then, references both the history of the porcelain trade in Britain and the scholarship that claims the romantic era encompassed a formative moment in British consumer culture, to outline the economic and consumerist model of imagination with which Lamb identified. I show how an ambitious later romantic writer aspired to the authorial status of high romantic authors such as Coleridge by modeling his literary career on his work as a clerk or "writer" in an imperial firm.[8]

## I. A CONSUMING PASSION FOR PORCELAIN CHINA

Elia's and Bridget's debate in "Old China" foregrounds a historical difference between old and new consumer ethics. The two dispute the virtue of Elia's teacup, a luxury purchase to which Bridget objects. As the elder cousin, Bridget espouses a classical economic theory that calculates value as a function of scarcity and that advocates consumer restraint: she believes that picnics and play-going have "relish" because of "infrequency," and feels that pleasure "above [their] means" is "selfish and wicked" (p. 271). Bridget nostalgically rejects the easy conditions of "their present state," when "[a] purchase is but a purchase," in favor of the incremental pleasures ("the very little more that we allowed ourselves") obtained in their austere past when a purchase "used

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to be a triumph" (pp. 270–1). Indeed, as indications of her hyperconsciousness about cost, Bridget's speech is littered with prices and measures of value, such as "half," "twice," "single share," "a less number of shillings," "the one-shilling gallery," "fifteen—or, sixteen shillings was it?" (pp. 270-1). She also savors the history of items, prodding Elia to "remember" items, just as she herself lingers longer over the memory of Elia's sacrifices than over the objects that his savings purchased (pp. 270–1). Ironically, however, it is precisely Bridget's sensitivity to acquisition that reveals her susceptibility to the dangers of consumer seduction. The heaped clauses of her monologue—including one period comprising a whole paragraph—create a panting, paratactic style that portrays the obsessions of consumption by threatening to overflow the very limits of the essay.

In the economic concerns that distinguish the essay—that topos that the psychobiographical interest in Bridget qua Mary Lamb overlooks—Bridget embodies a high romantic sensibility whose austerity explicitly figures her as a subject of a preexpansion economy. Her role as a personification of an older, conservative resistance to luxury consumption is apparent in anachronistic linguistic characteristics, such as the Napoleonic vocabulary ("triumph") and Wordsworthian refrains ("There was . . . ") that appear in her speech, as well as in her nostalgic, antiaristocratic preference for "the good old times" of poverty (pp. 270–1). Characteristically, she complains that the teacup is not like the "nice old purchases" that Elia used to make (p. 270). Similarly, Bridget's cherished consumer experiences, such as the late-eighteenth-century plays that figure in her reminiscences, are old-fashioned; importantly, these tastes not only date her as a child of the previous generation, but in their outdatednesss also implicitly hail the generation that succeeds hers. Indeed, as the younger cousin, Elia personifies a new possibility of consumption without guilt or corruption. He denies that there is any reason to resist porcelain, arguing that modernity—or at least their own maturity—requires that they "live better, and lie softer" (p. 272). Such blithe conflation of time with entitlement, which espouses modern self-indulgence, evinces Elia's surrender to the spirit of the age, as he insists that "[t]he resisting power" to "luxurious" things "has long since passed away" (p. 272). Thus, as the antithesis of Bridget's obsessively calculating sensibility, Elia's comments on his teacup are brief. His indifference to cost is so ingrained that it passes parenthetically: "(a recent purchase)" (p. 270).

Elia, in contrast to Bridget, speaks for a modern sensibility that is attuned to constant stimulation and that revels in the

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contemporary industrial and imperial economy of surplus and novelty goods. His teacup is an object of debate because it epitomizes precisely the kind of dangerous indulgence Bridget fears: it is a luxury commodity and, with its fashion-dependent pattern and place in a "set" of companion pieces, it inevitably entails additional purchasing (p. 270). Elia's dialectical opposition to Bridget thus is underscored by his capacity to "love" one pattern of porcelain, and "if possible, [love another] still more" (p. 270). Indeed, Elia's susceptibility to new-sprung marketing strategies is suggested by his acknowledgment that china jars were "introduced" into his imagination—perhaps by the recently invented tactics of advertising.[9] Elia's modernity is perhaps most evident in Elia when he suggests that Bridget's doubts about the teacup might by resolved if she were to "just look" at it again (p. 272). In this privileging of visual pleasure as capable of rewarding cost (presupposing, like John Keats, that beauty is truth, and all one needs to know), Elia clearly buys into consumerist ideologies. In the context of his later generation discourse, he thus asserts enthusiastic consumerism as the medium of the later romantic voice.

The historical phenomenon transforming porcelain into the flexible economic symbol that "Old China" depicts is imperialism, the recent "favourable circumstances" Elia points out to Bridget, that have enabled them to acquire such "trifles" as his teacup (p. 270). In discounting the cup as a "trifle," Elia's comment acknowledges both the fall in prices and the rise in Elia's income brought about by the post-Napoleonic expansion of global commerce, identifying both the general and specific forces that have increased his buying power. In fact, the porcelain trade was a key site of such economic growth spurred by empire and, as the contrasting consumer sentiments in Bridget and Elia's debate attest, is a powerful index to imperialism's recent rehabilitative impact on luxury consumption. Bridget's anxieties about the teacup, for example, resemble the literature on "chinamania," a craze for porcelain that swept England in the 1720s and '30s. In this previous era of luxury prohibitions, porcelain was a subject of a moral panic that resulted in social-instruction literature—such as the *Tatler* and *Spectator* essays on porcelain that are obvious topical as well as formal models for "Old China"—which warned women (popularly believed to be china's main admirers) against the dangers of aristocratic emulation.[10] Then the taste for china was perceived as an egregious instance of empire gone wrong—in the words of Henry Fielding, "the gold of one Indies run away with the mud of another."[11] By contrast, Elia's unencumbered pleasure in his teacup depicts a capacity for aesthetic

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delight whose indifference to cost can only result from recent historical changes that had rendered porcelain inexpensive and commonplace. The common consensus that by Lamb's era porcelain was no longer a sign of a dangerously overpaced and foreign-dependent economy is substantiated in contemporary poetry by Joanna Baillie, Mrs. Barbauld, and Thomas Hood, as well as by Coleridge himself, all of whom echo Elia in their treatment of china as a subject of trivial writing.[12] Baillie's fascinating "Lines to a Tea-pot," for example, is a social history of porcelain consumption by way of a cultural biography of a single teapot, tracking the teapot's changes in status as it is acquired by aristocratic women, discarded for reuse by laborers, and finally resurrected for admiration by connoisseurs and collectors.[13] That Elia similarly sees no inconsistency in the fact that porcelain can be both an exclusive luxury item found at "great house[s]," and an ordinary household accessory such as his teacup, affirms empire's newly inclusive economy in which porcelain is inexpensive, and a clerk can live like a king; indeed, Elia foregrounds imperialism's integrative effects on porcelain by intimating that his teacup has become precisely the "cheap luxury" for which Bridget always longs (pp. 270, 271).

The unusual double-voice structure of "Old China" thus strategically combines a pleasure in porcelain with the memory of its recent prohibition. Although the essay does not explicitly mention chinamania, Elia's framing sentiments engage the same issues of diffusion, status emulation, and social promotion by which porcelain was then distinguished. That the essay presents itself as a literary simulation of the imperial commodity is widely acknowledged: many critics have noted the likeness of the essay's hollow and circular structure to the sentimental and plastic qualities of a teacup.[14] More obviously, the essay's title makes such artifactual pretensions explicit. The colloquial term for porcelain bearing such a pattern of Mandarin, lady, river, willow tree, and boat that Elia describes on his teacup was "old china"—or, as in the set Elia possesses, "old blue" (p. 270); both terms refer to the pattern of blue-painted oriental porcelain then most popular in Britain.[15] Indeed, the essay itself is replicated by the visual image on Elia's teacup: the cup's picture of "a young and courtly Mandarin, handing tea to a lady from . . . two miles off" is a miniature, orientalized reflection of Elia's and Bridget's friendly tea-time disagreement—"See how [their] distance seems to set off respect!" (p. 270). Tellingly, such an involute vision, in china, of Elia's quintessentially English scene of tea-cozied domesticity aptly emblematizes the political as well as aesthetic conceits of the essay.[16]

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For, if the title "Old China" refers to a commodity, the rubric also signifies a country—and specifically the territory before the moment of imperial entry. The nominal occasion of Lamb's essay is not just Elia's purchase of the teacup, but also Britain's entrance into China, as it began with the East India Company's annexation of Singa Pura (Singapore) in 1819.[17] The event, which was a pivotal moment in British imperial expansion, extended imperial activity from South Asia to the Far East. More importantly, the development revised a longstanding Sino-British trade imbalance that was particularly caused by porcelain and tea, and hence necessitated a change in British attitudes toward luxury purchases such as porcelain that reversed the animus previously demonstrated by Fielding. Indeed, "Old China" facetiously depicts a cultural sinicization presumably precipitated by this intensification in East Asia-based imperial activity: Elia drinks tea "unmixed," in the Chinese fashion, and experiences an "almost feminine" pleasure in porcelain that likens him to the androgynous "men with women's faces" that Elia associates with China (p. 270).[18] But although such details show that by Elia's era the taste for things from China was desirable—even vital—I depart from typical new historicist concerns in asserting that the force of this historical consciousness is its legacy for the later romantic imagination. The tempest over a teacup that occurs in "Old China" is Lamb's prosaically imperial scramble for the sign of poetic genius that he associates with Coleridge—that is, China.

## II. THE VISION OF CHINA

In his valuable monograph on the Elia essays, Monsman insightfully elaborates on "superfoetation," a Latinate term which frequently appears in Elia's whimsically baroque discourse: "Lamb's is a style sensitive to the precise value of words, a style that often pressed words that have become mainly figurative back into their literal, etymological root meanings. 'Superfoetation' ["*super*, over, above + *foetation* from *fetus*, pregnancy"] suggests, then, a pregnancy on top of a pregnancy, but in which there is no birth, no bringing forth, no life."[19] Although Monsman's definition occurs amidst his discussion of "The South Sea House," a different essay, the term is recalled in "Old China" in Elia's use of the word "superflux" (p. 272). I cite Monsman's perceptive elucidation here, both because it describes the uneventful abundance that distinguishes the imperial economy to which Elia responds (a ceaseless stream of teacups, in which "likeness is identity" [p. 270])

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and, more generally, because it demonstrates the etymological literalism that drives "Old China" and many other Elia anecdotes. Indeed, as a series the Elia essays repeatedly portray Chinese commodities as the definitive form of affordable imperial luxury; they are themselves a superfoetation of chinoiserie.

Elia's interests in Chinese commodities include, in addition to porcelain and his taste for unadulterated tea, the "delicately-turned ivory markers" that are the "work of a Chinese artist" in "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist" (1821), and the titular Chinese recipe in "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" (1822).[20] In conjunction with those other essays, "Old China" illustrates that for Elia porcelain is unrivaled by other exotic commodities as a literary subject. The essay's focused interest in porcelain, for example, is a striking contrast to the way porcelain appears jumbled among the Japan lacquer, Javanese coffee, and Jamaican sugar that appear in Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1712, 1714), and it is similarly distinguished from the Chinese pagodas promiscuously mingling with Egyptian crocodiles and Indian Buddhas in Thomas De Quincey's more contemporary orientalist work, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821).[21] Instead, the Elia essays bear closest comparison to Keats's immersion in Grecian myth and ornament and emulation of Augustan poetic forms. Lamb still differs from Keats, however, most obviously in his reliance on prose rather than poetry, and by reproducing England's explicitly economic concerns in his focus on a commodity rather than a unique work of art. Most importantly, Lamb's imperial difference from Keats's philhellenism consists in a precious orientalism that foregoes Keatsian pretensions to Grecian monumentality by embracing China through porcelain—China's miniature form.

For Elia the aura of porcelain china emanates from its provenance. The very noun "china" names the commodity as a material synecdoche for its country of origin; the word derives from the historical perception, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that the soil unique to Chinese porcelain production sites was the reason for the product's superiority.[22] Notably, although the words "porcelain" and "china" are interchangeable, Lamb's essay betrays its geopolitical concerns by using only the latter term. "Old China" plays upon these geographic connotations of "china" when Elia's description of his teacup juxtaposes England and China, punningly comparing "our optics" and the angles of incidence "in our world," to the exotic and quaintly primitive society of the teacup's painted scene: a

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"world before perspective" that exists "there"—that is, in "their" blue-shaded, otherworldly porcelain spaces (that the blue willow pattern contains just enough landscape and figures to comprise a vignette enables this touristic prospect view) (p. 270). Moreover, Elia's interest in the geographical space of China is also implied by the comparison of the teacup to London and its environs that occurs in Bridget's reminiscences, which encompass Covent Garden, Islington, Colnaghi's, Enfield, Potter's Bar, and Waltham. All this lexical play upon the word "china" that Elia performs has an imperial logic: because it more explicitly makes the object metonymize the East Asian empire, the conceit pretends that porcelain collecting is a way of possessing the country when porcelain purchasers such as Elia display a piece of China earth in British domestic space. Elia's Chinese porcelain commodity thus trumps Keats's hazy visions of Grecian grandeur by offering everyday access to an exotic world that, like a new planet, swims into his ken—every time he indulges in a cup of tea. Deliberately confusing his cup's porcelain glaze with "the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay" (p. 270), Elia imperially assumes the painted pictures on his teacup to be a telescopic vision of China itself ("for so we must in courtesy interpret that speck of deeper blue" [p. 270]).

In fact it was both soil and a mastery of firing techniques, bolstered by a fiercely protectionist economy, that maintained Chinese porcelain superiority for so long. For much of the eighteenth century, British porcelain manufacturers were unable to replicate the intense heats required to properly fire porcelain. In addition, China further strained British market development by requiring all payment to be in specie and by remaining closed to foreign traders. As a result, when in the late eighteenth century the firing process was finally mastered by domestic china makers such as Wedgwood, Minton, and Spode, China's fierce restrictions against import trade still prevented the British competitors from threatening the supremacy of Chinese industry. A British mission to open China, for example, was stalled as late as 1816. Ironically, this disadvantageous balance of trade between Britain and China actually added to porcelain's appeal. Because China's restrictions kept Britain from knowing any more about China than they could learn through the luxury exports—such as porcelain, silk, and especially tea—which were increasingly important in British culture and economy, British culture promulgated a notion of China as a wealthy and highly mannered, albeit bizarre, civilization.[23] "Old China" reflects these re-

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ceived notions of omnipotent and beautiful China in the genteel couple and refined scene Elia admires on his cup, as well as in the "lawless . . . grotesques . . . uncircumscribed by any element" that he feels porcelain typically depicts. For Lamb the country's most memorable commodity must stand in for remote, exotic, and brilliant China.

Coleridge's fragment poem "Kubla Khan" (1816) is an earlier version of the romantic focus on China as a symbol for genius upon which Lamb's interest is based.[24] The poem is a dream-vision of Xanadu, or ancient Mongol China, which Coleridge claims to have composed when he fell asleep while reading *Purchas His Pilgrim*, a seventeenth-century travelogue that assimilates materials from Marco Polo. Coleridge's poem was originally written in 1797, and thus distills eighteenth-century conventions of Chinese beauty into its allegory of high romantic genius.[25] In "Kubla Khan," China is a genius loci, whose earth, like Chinese clay, is ripe with natural creations: a "mighty fountain," "[h]uge fragments," "dancing rocks," and a "sacred river" are all flung up from the ground, and the Khan's impossible creations—such as "a sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice"—qualify him as a personification of China's reputed scientific and architectural genius (lines 19, 23, 24, 36). Significantly, though, Kubla also illustrates a particularly textual form of power, as the Khan invents by "decree" (line 2). Feminine symbols of lyric inspiration, such as a "damsel with a dulcimer" and a "woman wailing" also appear (lines 37–8, 16). These lyric and textual details lead into the allegory on genius that takes shape in the final stanza, where intimations of dynastic change ("'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far/ Ancestral voices prophesying war!" [lines 29–30]) herald the coming of a poet-hero ("he [who] on honey-dew hath fed/ And drunk the milk of Paradise" [lines 53–4]). Although here the fragment stops abruptly—which occurred, as the prose preface to the poem relates, when the reverie in which Coleridge was transcribing the dream is shattered by an interruption—the fragment concludes with the poet-dreamer's wish to recreate the imagery he dream-sees ("Could I revive within me" [line 42]), and thereby crown himself as the Khan's heir: "I would build that dome in air" (line 46; note the pun on "heir"/"air"). "Kubla Khan" thus suggests that Coleridge himself is the poet-hero and successor to China's genius. As a fragment, however, the poem's famously incomplete glimpse of Chinese brilliance foregrounds the poem's failure to realize its promise. Indeed, in the prose preface that Coleridge added for the poem's publication, he high-

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lights this failure by proleptically offering the poem as a "curiosity . . . [rather than something of] *poetic* merits." Moreover, this preface includes a passage from Coleridge's 1802 poem "The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution"; by thus resorting to an excerpt from a previous work in his concluding comments, and by framing the poetry with prose, the preface underscores the aborted nature of Coleridge's poetic opus.

"Kubla Khan" exercises a crucial presence in "Old China" as a precedent for the Chinese vision the essay details. A series of literal and figural borrowings from the poem to the essay are apparent in "Old China," all centering on Elia's response to his teacup as a "*speciosa miracula*," his own Coleridgean "miracle of rare device" that resembles the Khan's pleasure dome in its inverted, dome-like form (p. 270).[26] But, although this likeness between poem and essay would seem to invite suspicions of Lamb's later romantic belatedness in which Lamb imperfectly emulates Coleridgean works, in fact, in "Old China," Lamb adopts "Kubla Khan's" genetic allegory in order to proclaim himself as Coleridge's heir. This substitution occurs by way of a systematic diminishment of the poem's highest romantic attributes, such as miniaturizing and inverting Coleridge's dome into a teacup. The essay also exploits the poem's typology by incorporating a high romantic voice into the essay's own embedded female figure: in "Old China" Bridget's high romantic nostalgia provides a lyric subjectivity that parallels the wailing woman and the damsel with a dulcimer in "Kubla Khan." Furthermore, Lamb's double-voice structure actually goes so far as to perfect Coleridge's interrupted vision by inserting Elia into the Coleridgean position of making framing remarks: Elia dismisses Bridget's "phantom" narrative ("they are dreams . . . now") and, treating her melancholy as if it bears no more import than Coleridge's fleeting vision, he accuses her high romantic "imagination" of having "conjured [them] up" (p. 272). Unlike recent efforts to locate Coleridge's oneiric dome in Western literary and art history, then, Lamb's essay provides a more contemporary source: it responds to the cold and bright porcelain characteristics of the Khan's palace and reads porcelain as the immanent inspiration of "Kubla Khan."[27] Although Lamb's insight may have been aided by contemporary reports of such porcelain palaces in China and the miniature chinaware pagodas and gazebos much prized by contemporary collectors, his inspired connection more importantly reminds us of the very real benefits from porcelain which funded Coleridge's own writing.[28]

Further elaborating Lamb's economy of romantic imagination is the aforementioned essay, "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig"

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(1822), which also implicitly recognizes the porcelain industry as a primary theater of contemporary British imperial dominance.[29] The essay resembles "Old China" in both its paean to Chinese exports ("China pigs have been esteemed a luxury all over the East, from the remotest periods that we read of"), and its detailed understanding of consumer economics (p. 245). The titular anecdote is a fable about a Chinese boy's discovery, in the "ages [when men] ate their meat raw," of the pleasure of roast pig (p. 245). Bo-bo discovers the exquisite flavor when he accidentally sets fire to his house and swine. Like "Kubla Khan," then, Lamb's mock history thus presents aesthetic discovery in the language of historical change, and especially anticipates "Old China" by portraying the acceleration of capitalism as the natural result of spontaneous and inevitable consumer desire: with every bite of roast pig Bo-Bo's smell "was wonderfully sharpened," and as each villager becomes addicted to the flavor of roast pork "prices grow enormously dear" (p. 246). In fact the essay directly prefigures "Old China" by figuring the eating of baby pigs as a facetious literalization of porcelain consumption, for the word "porcelain"—bestowed by the traders who introduced the artifact to Western markets—derives from the Portuguese word for the translucent cowry seashells that were themselves named for baby pigs.[30] Such figural punning evident in the essay is yet another instance of the etymological literalism Monsman identifies in Lamb, and underscores both Lamb's ingenious allusion to porcelain by way of pigs and his more important point about its status as an item of pure exchange value. The essay furthermore resembles "Old China" by suggesting empire as precipitating this specifically commercial depiction of China: the mock-historic anecdote begins with a reference to Thomas Manning ("my friend M.")—a leading British Sinologist, close friend of Lamb's, and also an employee of the East India Company—and purportedly is from "an ancient Chinese manuscript" that comes complete with pseudoscholarly references (such as Confucius and "Cho-fang," an apocryphal Chinese historical epoch) that simulate the newfound knowledge enabled by the recent opening of China (p. 245).

"Roast Pig" congratulates the recent breakthrough of domestic porcelain manufacturers by inverting the long history of Chinese superiority at porcelain-firing techniques, and instead suggesting an Englishman's mastery of these activities. In the essay's account of the Chinese mania for roast pig, consumption causes widespread social breakdown. As all the villagers imitate Bo-bo's house fires in their culinary zeal, only the fortuitous in-

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tervention of someone "like our Locke" is able to stop "the science of architecture [from becoming] lost," and "[t]he insurance offices one and all shut[ting] up shop" (p. 246). The essay thus not only portrays the Chinese as irresponsible consumers but also, more importantly, authorizes English culture as the one safe site of consumption: in the mention of "Locke" the essay suggests fire—the manufacturing process that previously distinguished Chinese porcelain—as a scientific innovation which England understands better than China. These lessons of economic superiority and consumer responsibility are reiterated in the essay's closing anecdote, which also promotes guiltless consumption. The anecdote is a childhood memory of Elia's encounter with a beggar, to whom he gave a plum cake. The adult Elia is chagrined by the loss of his cake, which he now realizes he lost to "the very coxcombry of charity" (p. 248). Elia's revisionary memory thus portrays consumption not only as innocuous, but also as morally responsible; indeed, he even goes so far as to justify selfishness by suggesting that it was his duty to consume it as a way to honor his aunt, the producer of the indulgence.

"I should like to have my name talked of in *China*," Lamb once remarked to Thomas Manning.[31] Such a wish illustrates how China figured for Lamb as an index of fame, as well as how imperial careers such as Manning's might achieve such fame. The comment marks a departure from the traditional notion of high romantic imagination promulgated by M. H. Abrams and others, in that Lamb's turn to a foreign and exotic land replaces the reclusive, domestic love of the Lake poets for rural England. More importantly, the porcelain symbol interchangeable with the place to which Lamb cleaves also shows how second-generation romantics could attain visionary experiences through the visual pleasures of contemporary consumer culture. It is important to recognize, however, the simultaneity of production and consumption in this model, which had a biographical basis not only in the increased buying power Lamb may have had through his imperial earnings, but also in actual private porcelain sales that Lamb occasionally brokered for extra income.[32] These achievements perhaps are more visible not in comparison to Coleridge but in the other visual and intertextual details that emphasize the artifactualness of the essay, its relation to opium—another key factor of Coleridgean imagination, and particularly in a class-based model of Whig economics that hails second-generation imagination as an equivalent of the emergent middle class.

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## III. THE FALL OF CHINA

When "Old China" appeared in 1823, British porcelain had finally gained supremacy over Chinese porcelain. This revolution in the Sino-British trade imbalance was marked when the British porcelain manufacturer Spode began to furnish the Canton branch of the East India Company with English-manufactured "old blue," intended to compete in local Chinese markets against domestically manufactured porcelain. Such a reversal of china trade from Britain to Asia was predicated on what had actually always been the West's association with the blue willow pattern, which Chinese porcelain makers had produced to the specifications of European taste.[33] The event inverted the previously economically crippling import of porcelain to Britain: by 1826 the flow of silver between the countries ran in Britain's favor.[34] Similar changes in Sino-British cultural influence began to manifest themselves as well, such as the first translation into Chinese of the New Testament, which also occurred in 1823. Porcelain provides an obvious material site of this triumphal turn toward British manufacture of Chinese commodities; for example, the British imitations of the ostensibly Chinese blue willow pattern included fake oriental writing intended to simulate the Chinese characters that certified real, Chinese-made porcelain—an irony, since what was important about the manufacture was precisely that it was not Chinese. As a symbolic analogue to Lamb's own fictitious signature on "Old China" and all his "Elia" essays, such false Chinese signatures symbolize the importance of authorial originality in the age of mechanical reproduction. More importantly, this infiltration of the Chinese trade by cheaper English imposters offers a model of class diffusion that further demonstrates the attainability of Lamb's Coleridgean claims.

Religious imagery and the Christian rhetoric of the Fall are recurring discourses in the Elia essays, appearing in the oriental essays as useful motifs by which to illustrate the rehabilitative acquisition of Chinese characteristics.[35] The "Dissertation upon Roast Pig," for example, plays upon the notion of consumption as original sin in order to satirize those social prohibitions. In the essay, eating is a sensual experience in which the wondrous qualities of cooked food produce an immediate "tickling" in one's "nether" or "lower regions"—a physical awakening that is akin to carnal knowledge, facetiously recalling biblical traditions of female consumer susceptibility (p. 245). Yet what is important about this religious propensity, as the criticism emphasizing Lamb's

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evasive qualities well knows, is that such motifs flirt with transgressions, such as sin and temptation, only to convey their independence of those characteristics. In "Roast Pig," for example, the most unclean of foods ("a sloven . . . wallowing in all manner of filthy conversation") is redeemed ("from these sins he is happily snatched away") as a "guiltless" food ("with no original speck of the *amor immunditae*") (p. 247). Similarly, in "Old China," although Bridget's indictment of wealth is severe (she deplores the good fortune that has caused Elia to lose himself among a Dantean "wilderness" of Old Master prints), the teacup itself is immune to her allegations, as Elia rhetorically converts it from a Chinese to a Western good: he describes the Chinese "chit of a lady" as "half-Madona-ish," the China "horses, trees, [and] pagodas" as engaged in an English country dance ("dancing the hays"), and the whole picture painted on Elia's teacup as composed of the conventions of European heraldry ("azure-tinctured," "cow and rabbit couchant") (pp. 269–72). In doing so, Elia's redescription naturalizes these previously exotic luxury goods, acknowledging the real conditions of contemporary china as a Western, if not English, manufacture, just one of the various orientalisms in contemporary porcelain that might also have been a factor for Keats.[36]

As another important commodity in oriental trade of this transitional era, opium also occupies a powerful influence in Lamb's imperial romanticism, exercising an aggressive role in the political economy of imagination that Lamb's essays sketch that is similar to the drug's actual role in Sino-British trade history. In the early nineteenth century, Britain began a reverse trade into China of opium, a product of Britain's colonial holdings in India and the Levant. The economic consequences of this opium penetration into China were significant, as the drug, which rendered many Chinese addicted consumers, augmented the reversal of Britain's previous consumer subjugation to China in their desire for porcelain and tea, and indeed evocatively displaced a kind of chinamania to China itself. With its catastrophic vision of obsessive Chinese consumers, the "Dissertation upon Roast Pig" is a comically topical glimpse of such opium-like needs and, as such, the earlier essay, like opium, paves the way for the kind of unencumbered pleasure in consumption that "Old China" relates.

More importantly, however, this critical impact of opium on the porcelain that was Sino-British trade's most contested symbol corroborates the consumer model of imagination that Lamb's interest in porcelain reveals. Both Coleridge and De Quincey—another acquaintance of Lamb's—are well-known examples of

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contemporary susceptibility to opium who exemplify the link between consumption and sublime oriental imagery that Lamb highlights in his attempts to approximate romantic genius; notably, Lamb's themes of consumption would have additional resonance in 1821, when they appeared in the *London Magazine* alongside De Quincey's *Confessions*.[37] Indeed, "Kubla Khan" underscores this commodifiable quality of imagination on which Lamb insists: in the preface to the poem Coleridge claims to have composed the work when he fell asleep under the influence of opium, so that it is his very ingestion, or consumption, of opium that precipitated his sublime Chinese vision. Importantly, however, the fragmentary condition of the poem also reveals the limits of Coleridgean consumption, which cause him to forever relinquish his glimpse of Xanadu. Hence, Coleridge's opium-indebted experience of genius is shown to be weaker than Lamb's, which uses the teacup to delight in Coleridgean imagery without any subjugating effects.

The fall of the Coleridgean figure of genius-as-China also is apparent in the early Elia essay, "Witches, and Other Night Fears" (1821).[38] In this essay, which anticipates "Old China" in its conflation of genius, class, and China, Elia unfavorably compares himself to "Coleridge, [who] at his will can conjure up icy domes, and pleasure-house for Kubla Khan" (p. 387). By contrast, Elia mourns, he cannot "muster [even] a fiddle" or a "fishwife" (p. 387); the comment highlights the class-based notion of genius as the difference of fishwives and aristocrats who own pleasure houses (it also interestingly recalls the female figures prominent in Lamb's writing). But, although the essay portrays how "[t]he poverty of [his] dreams mortifies" Elia, it concludes with a dream that instead suggests the essay as another attempt, like "Old China," to replicate Coleridgean imagination . The essay describes a recent dream of Elia's, in which he is "the *leading god*" of a procession upon the sea (p. 387). Although Elia attributes the dream to the poet Barry Cornwall, both the marine imagery and the essay's references to Coleridge must also prompt comparison to that poet's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). Thus, although Elia's sea fantasy abruptly ends when the oneiric ocean subsides into the Thames, and "ingloriou[sly]" (p. 387) deposits Elia at Lambeth Palace, the essay participates in a ventriloquization of the voice of high romantic genius that is characteristic of Lamb's series as a whole. The mention of Lambeth Palace, for example, is a particularly cunning topical detail. Lamb had recently moved to the neighborhood of recently built affordable housing located at the foot of Waterloo Bridge. The area was populated by other mem-

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bers of the emergent middle class who, like Lamb, gained their status from imperial expansion, such that the area, like the nearby bridge, was a recent monument to post-Napoleonic progress.[39]

In fact, such an appropriation by Lamb of Coleridgean imagination through consumer sensation continues a troping of genius as class status that first began in "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago" (1820), one of the very first Elia essays.[40] That essay includes a monologue in Coleridge's voice where Coleridge envies the diet of his classmate Elia, thereby reversing the class envy described in "Witches, and Other Night Fears," as in the earlier essay it is Coleridge who envies Lamb's/Elia's frankly consumer possessions. Moreover, Lamb's appropriation of Coleridgean imagination persists through "Blakesmoor in H— shire" (1824), an essay after "Old China," that continues the conflation of aristocracy with high romanticism that the preceding essay overturns.[41] In that essay, which conspicuously uses Wordsworthian phrases in its admiration of a country house, Elia claims to "[receive] into [him]self Very Gentility" (p. 227). The phrase recalls the famous language of aesthetic sensibility in William Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and in its pretensions to social status underscores the democratic ideals pervading Lamb's model of the diffusion of romantic imagination. Similarly, the emphasis on visual pleasure operating in Lamb's consumer imagination strongly demonstrates the "leveling" capacity of vision William H. Galperin has already pointed out in his discussion of Lamb's theories on genius in drama.[42]

In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, sociologist Colin Campbell provides just such an account of the universal privilege that consumption offers previously exclusive experiences such as imagination.[43] His work follows upon Max Weber's seminal *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), which traced the emergence of capitalism within an ascetic and secular morality, by demonstrating the origins of consumerism in a romantic modernity that no longer associated consumption with aristocratic indulgence.[44] Campbell's work is a particularly useful theoretical examination of the class dynamics of consumerism that Lamb intuitively asserts because his account of how romanticism used nostalgia to incorporate—and thereby immobilize—older Puritan codes nicely adumbrates the double-voice structure of "Old China"; in Lamb's essay, the debate between Bridget and Elia regarding the aesthetic rewards and moral consequences of the use of porcelain literalizes the double consciousness Campbell theorizes.

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"Old China" achieves this *de facto* purification of consumption by correcting the gender associations of consumerism, such as the eighteenth-century belief that women were prone to consumer frenzies such as chinamania. The essay engages this cultural tradition through the genders represented in its double voice, where Elia's comments bracket and therefore contain Bridget's more hysterical remarks. Elia's qualified expression of his partiality to porcelain—his "almost" feminine desire—is an especially revealing phrase, suggesting a sympathy for her taste and feelings while also distinguishing himself from her vulnerabilities. Fred V. Randel has already demonstrated how Lamb uses this point to suggest Elia's sentimentality while only buttressing his masculinity; I would add to that insight that such moments as when Elia skirts around feminine sensibility exist primarily as a historical figure for the consumerism that he more importantly embraces as a voice of high romantic lyricism.[45] After all, even Coleridge relied on his *Purchas* for his Chinese vision. Accordingly, in "Old China" Elia expresses sympathy for Bridget's high romantic nostalgia by punningly wishing he could "purchase" those past feelings for her again (p. 272).

The class diffusion and subsequent changes in porcelain status that had such a consequential effect on the romantic imagination are perhaps most generally evident in the new tropes and contexts for porcelain china that the literature on porcelain, to which "Old China" belongs, spawned in the postromantic era. If the eighteenth-century literature on porcelain that preceded "Old China" emphasized the commodity's dangerous domestic and social effects, the "blue willow romances," from the middle of the Victorian era, which followed upon "Old China," display the touristic propensities of the increasingly confident imperial nation that Lamb's essay introduces. These works are ballad theatricals about characters inspired by the figures in the blue willow porcelain pattern; the artificiality and pure frivolity of their subjects demonstrate the unproblematic status of porcelain that existed by midcentury. Moreover, this new genre also epitomized contemporary porcelain conventions in the class diffusion of porcelain interest represented by this change in audience. Whereas literature and drama on porcelain usually portrayed aristocratic or genteel settings that reflected its audience, the ballad theatricals of the blue willow romance embodied middle-class or popular taste.[46] "Old China" plays an important role in this cycle of literature on porcelain; in particular, as a highly topical portrait of the cultural changes wrought by empire, it belies alternative

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readings of Lamb as an anachronistic and hermetically idiosyncratic writer of purely eighteenth-century concerns.[47]

"Old China" thus gleams as the quintessential example of the Elia essay because it most explicitly portrays the series' sustained aesthetic engagement with imperial commodities—what Elia, in the early essay, "Oxford in the Vacation" (1820), "confess[es]" as "my humour, my fancy . . . to while away some good hours of my time in the contemplation of indigos, cottons, raw silks, [and] piece-goods" (p. 365).[48] Significantly, the comment occurs within the second Elia essay, the first to provide details of the Elia persona; Elia's comment, in the context of his resolution to convey "*who is Elia*," hints at the commercial and aesthetic circuit between Lamb's identity as a literary producer and his status as an imperial servant and consumer (p. 365). Elia certainly conflates consumption and production in his droll description of himself as "a votary of the desk . . . one that sucks his sustenance . . . through a quill"; the comment, which might describe literary authorship, actually refers to his and Elia's profession as mercantile clerks (p. 365). As branded, periodically produced literary artifacts that promote Lamb's literary reputation even as they offered consumers a literary means to experience empire, then, the "essays which have appeared under [the Elia] signature" (p. 365) are themselves an imperial export, whose traffic for the *London Magazine* replicates the industrial circumstances of manufacture and dissemination that characterized porcelain's importance for trading empires such as the East India Company. In conclusion, the status-enhancing capacities of the Elia essays are most apparent in their role in the *London Magazine*, the literary commerce that contextualizes the industrial and imperial culture that "Old China" both depicts and itself epitomizes.

## IV. IMPERIAL CULTURE AND THE *LONDON MAGAZINE*

Lamb's conceptualization of his literary contributions to a magazine as an imperial enterprise itself is apparent from the very beginning of the series.[49] The inaugural essay, "Recollections of the South Sea House," corresponds with a brief stint Lamb had at that famous company before his lifelong employment at the East India House. The essay importantly sets a precedent for the meliorative treatment of increased consumption that occurs in "Old China" by addressing another socioeconomic crisis contemporary to chinamania—i.e., the South Sea Bubble. In this first installment of what would become the Elia series,

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Elia characteristically uses visual pleasure to retrospectively ignore the historical significance of that consumer crisis—much as in the later "Old China," he urges Bridget to abandon her anachronistic anxieties by "just look[ing]" at the teacup. Thus, in "The South Sea House," Elia only regards the old account books of the notorious house as visual art: "with their old fantastic flourishes, and decorative rubric interlacings—their sums in triple columniations, set down with formal superfluity of cyphers—with pious sentences at the beginning . . . —the costly vellum covers of some of them almost persuading us that we are got into some *better library*,—[they] are very agreeable and edifying spectacles. [He] can look upon these defunct dragons with complacency" (p. 143).

At the South Sea House, the old account books are no longer dangerous: moths and light have "[made] fine fretwork among their single and double entries" (p.142). The agents of the hoax are likewise neutralized: the vestigial clerks in the company are now "kept more for show than use" (p. 143). The essay thus prefigures "Old China" in the way that Elia's aesthetic contemplation evacuates a formerly controversial history so that the South Sea "dragons" appear "defunct," and are beheld with utter "complacency." The reason for the subject of the essay was the centenary of the South Sea Bubble crisis; by depicting it in such unproblematic terms, the essay heralds a new era of optimistic economic expansion, crucially linking it with the first year of the *London Magazine* in order to name the *London* as the leading journal of this exuberantly imperial era. "The South Sea House" thus is Lamb's apologia for the South Sea Bubble, performing the first of a number of recuperative and triumphal ekphrases of imperial consumption that culminate in "Old China," his apologia for chinamania.

Such overtly modern turns on anachronistic subjects such as chinamania and the South Sea Bubble foreground the contemporaneity of the *London*, which borrowed its name from an eighteenth-century predecessor.[50] In its nineteenth-century version the journal maintained its antecedent's interest in literature and the arts, but was especially known for its coverage of foreign topics: it was reputed to have more news and subjects from abroad than any other British journal. This imperial aspect of the *London Magazine* is evident in the journal's title, which figures the nation's capital as the focal point of the metropolitan culture that the magazine's mix of local and international interests composed (interestingly, the magazine's editor, John Scott, had once been offered a job with the East India Company—a fact

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more closely aligning him with Lamb and which may account for the imperial consciousness of the journal).[51] Clearly, the Elia essays were not out of place in this context. Indeed, Elia essays such as "The South Sea House" work in conjunction with this topical modernity in the organ by producing an industrial mode of iterative production, where the essays follow a template—or "likeness is identity"—similar to the teacups Elia describes in "Old China," such that the essay series parallels its author's employment in industrial and imperial trade. Many Elia essays—and certainly all those I reference in this article—share the same components of nostalgic anecdote, an assertion of taste, some sort of crisis for desire, and a restatement of the past coupled with a return to the present.

Although the sociological, collective, and editorial aspects of periodicals have already been demonstrated by Jon Klancher, Mark Schoenfeld, and Mark Parker, my point in examining Lamb's collaboration with the *London* is to show how such partnerships were mutually beneficial, particularly promoting individual contributors through automatic processes or highly standardized methods of merit such as existed in the military and commercial enterprises of empire. Incorporation into the *London* offered Lamb the diversified appeal gained by a collective and widely distributed publication, theretofore unavailable to him in his previous individual publications. And, when the first Elia essays proved to be a resounding success, Lamb's utility to the magazine in gaining early readership was rewarded by the regular assignments and steady income of the essay series, which was to remain the journal's chief attraction. The establishment of the series also rationalized his literary labor into an effort of constant reproduction rather than original imagination, a fact which was crucial to maintaining the magazine's stability in the wake of its editor's untimely death a year after its founding.[52] Lamb then became a central figure in the organ, prevailed upon by the editors to abate the magazine's eroding sales. "Old China" was written in this period; not surprisingly, its likeness to its subject extends to its manufacture in the processes of mechanical reproduction, as it was composed when Lamb himself had become bored with the series.[53]

In the aforementioned essay, "Oxford in the Vacation," Lamb explicitly articulates these relations between imperial vocation and authorial avocation, describing how "the very parings of a counting-house are the settings up of an author" (p. 365). In the essay, Elia identifies the twofold benefits of his combined literary and countinghouse labor, first describing how his clerking work

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enhances his writing by claiming that work makes one return home with an "increased appetite" for books, energizing an "enfranchised quill" that rejoices in a "midnight dissertation" (p. 365). This scenario notably relies upon the dynamic of a scarcity-driven economy similar to that which Bridget favors. Second, Elia explains that his work at the trading house further facilitates his writing because it provides material benefits such as the "outside sheets, and waste wrappers of foolscap" that are necessary to a writer (p. 365). This literary trickle-down in the imperial industry that Elia describes is of a piece with the expansionist economy he himself espouses. Together the two parts illustrate the double-voiced nature of romantic consumerism that "Old China" dramatizes. When Elia describes how the time and paper saved from his clerkship "receive into them" "sonnets, epigrams, *essays*," and thereby achieves "its promotion," Elia's Wordsworthian language ("receive into them") suggests how the integrative aspects of empire enable him to attain a high romantic voice (p. 365).

Although the conflation of empire and authorship in Lamb's career has already been documented well, their circumstances bear further examination as a consistently beneficial process. The comfortable and steady income offered by his Company clerkship substantially elevated the former bluecoat boy and child of servants; moreover, Lamb's income was especially valued by him because it enabled him to keep Mary with him, and away from the lonely horrors of early nineteenth-century mental institutions. More practically, the kind of enhanced writing that Lamb describes in his use of imperial wastepaper is materially evident in his literary remains: some of Lamb's personal correspondence and manuscripts are written on Company stationary, and perhaps were composed on Company time.[54] Moreover, evidence that Lamb was granted higher wages than his peers in comparable appointments at the East India Company also suggests that the well-known author enjoyed particular favor at the City firm. Similarly, Lamb's success in the *London Magazine*—tied as it was to a persona that was closely associated with his professional appointment—ensured him special status in the journal as well: Lamb earned twice the wages of other *London* contributors.[55] However, all these practical aspects of Lamb's imperial authorship are less relevant as factors of income than as status indices of literary authority. It is significant that Lamb retired simultaneously in 1825 from both the Company and the *London*. Having amassed an amount of money sufficient to support Mary and having earned widespread regard for his writing, Lamb had finally arrived in

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both his literary and imperial professions at the "favourable circumstances" to which he alludes in "Old China."[56]

Finally, Lamb's cultivation of material and artifactual conceits in his Coleridgean writing bear comparison to Coleridge himself, who was fascinated by "that likeness not identity" in literary conceits, in which a text emulated the material thing it took as its subject.[57] Lamb's work, by contrast, whose emblem is industrial production, purports that "likeness *is* identity" (my emphasis), reproducing Coleridge's pleasure-dome of romantic imagination as the teacup that captures Elia's consumer vision. "Old China" takes "Kubla Khan" as such a work. In order to invent a highly commodified mode of romantic literary production, Lamb's essay tropes contemporary developments in English political economy as it was most prominently figured by the porcelain industry. Under the auspices of an imperial organ, they unleash John Bull in a china shop, facetiously troping these radical changes in Sino-British consumer history in order to wreak havoc on existing protections of romantic genius. Like Bridget, I conjure a historicized but self-consciously romantic account to reveal Lamb's compression of Coleridgean genius into the prosaic guise of a familiar essay, the literary equivalent of a china teacup. "Old China" is literary chinoiserie for an age shaped by the new imperial industry.

## NOTES

[1] In the absence of a standard critical edition, these endnotes give the publication information for Charles Lamb's essays for their first appearance in the *London Magazine* and in the collected volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1820–24). Lamb, "Old China," *London Magazine*, March 1823; 7:269–72. Subsequent references to essays in the *London Magazine* will be given at their first mention in endnotes bearing full bibliographical information, and will thereafter appear parenthetically in the text.

[2] For a study of the eighteenth-century gendering of porcelain consumption and the new English tea ritual, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 52–69.

[3] The comment recalls the earlier Elia essay "My First Play," in which Elia clearly remembers that event. Thus, the greater mystification Elia accords porcelain in "Old China" demonstrates its privileged status (Lamb, "My First Play," *London Magazine*, December 1821; 4:603–5).

[4] Gerald Monsman, *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb's Art of Autobiography* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1984); Jane Aaron, *A Double Singleness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). See also Alison Hickey, "Double Bonds: Charles Lamb's Romantic Collaborations," *ELH* 63, 3 (Fall 1996):

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735–71; Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); and, most recently, James Treadwell, "Impersonation and Autobiography in Lamb's Christ's Hospital Essays," *SIR* 37, 4 (Winter 1998): 499–521.

[5] Lamb began his career at the East India House in 1792, first serving a three-year unsalaried apprenticeship. His Shakespearean blank verse tragedy *John Woodvil*, published in 1802, was never performed, and was damned by critics including the powerful *Edinburgh Review*. His short comedy "Mr. H—" was a miserable failure at its single performance in 1806. Although his two-volume collected works in 1818 helped consolidate his status as a recognized writer, it gained mixed reviews, and because critical response was warmer for the prose works, public reception of the 1818 volumes discouraged Lamb from any further efforts in poetry. A detailed account of Lamb's clerking career is available in Samuel McKechnie, "Charles Lamb of the India House," *N&Q* 191 (1946): 178–80, 204–6, 225–30, 252–6, and 277–80; 192 (1947): 9–13, 25–9, 53–6, 72–3, 103–6. The East India Company's status as a modern corporation with meritocratic criteria for promotion, however, is in question. See J. M. Bourne (*Patronage and Society in Nineteenth Century England* [London: Edward Arnold, 1986]), who argues that the Company anachronistically operated on traditional principles of patronage—for Lamb, such a system of patronage in the Company would have been more akin to the charity education he received at Christ's Hospital.

[6] The annuity, which actually came after Samuel Taylor Coleridge's return of a gift late in the previous year, permanently freed him from clerical duties. For Coleridge's gratitude for being "[d]isembarassed from all pecuniary anxieties" that interestingly presages his account of poetic inspiration in "Kubla Khan" (he is "not certain that I am not dreaming"), see his letters to Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Poole, 17 January 1798, letters 222 and 223 of *Collected Letters*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), 1:374–5.

[7] Margaret Russett's *De Quincey's Romanticism: Canonical Minority and the Forms of Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) is a recent examination of these issues. See also Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, *Revisionary Gleam: De Quincey, Coleridge, and the High Romantic Argument* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2000) for a parallel argument about Thomas De Quincey's indebtedness to Coleridge.

[8] The current interest in romantic periodicals began with Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987); and continues in Mark Schoenfield, "Voices Together: Lamb, Hazlitt, and the *London*," *SIR* 29, 2 (Summer 1990): 257–72; his unpublished "Voices Together: British Periodicals and Romantic Identity"; and Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000). The most recent sustained study of the *London Magazine* is Josephine Bauer's *The London Magazine, 1820–29* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1953). For the emergence of consumerism and the diminishing social anxiety over luxury consumption, see John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977); and Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), "The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism: Reflections on

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the Reception of a Thesis Concerning the Origin of the Continuing Desire for Goods," in *Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 36–48, and "Consumption and the Rhetorics of Need and Want," *Journal of Design History* 11, 3 (1998): 235–46.

[9] Cf. *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana Press, 1982); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London: Routledge, 1988); Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990); and John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[10] On chinamania see Harold Donaldson Eberlin and Roger Wearne Ramsdell, *The Practical Book of Chinaware* (New York: Halcyon House, 1925), pp. 1–13; and J. H. Plumb, "The Royal Porcelain Craze," *In the Light of History* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1972), pp. 57–69, 58–9. The actual essays on chinaware are *Tatler* 23, *Spectator* 247, 252, 299, 326, and *Lover* 10. For a review of periodicals in the changing culture of consumption in the eighteenth century, see James Raven, "Defending Conduct and Property: The London Press and the Luxury Debate," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 301–19.

[11] See Henry Fielding's 1730 play *The Coffee-House Politician* (first performed as *Rape upon Rape*) for an example of this literature (*The Complete Works of Henry Fielding*, ed. William Ernest Henley, 16 vols. [London: William Heinemann, 1903], 9:73–158, esp. 96).

[12] Thomas Hood, "A Broken Dish" (n.d.); Mrs. Barbauld, "The Groans of the Tankard" (1825); Joanna Baillie, "Lines to a Tea-pot" (n.d.); and Coleridge's own "Monody on a Teakettle" (1790, first published 1834).

[13] For "social history" and "cultural biography," see *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

[14] E.g., Richard Haven, "The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb," *ELH* 30, 2 (June 1963): 137–46. In fact, since its publication, criticism of "Old China" has often commended the essay in the same metaphors conflating the text with its symbol. E.g., the essay is "constructed with the minute care, almost with the actual harmony, of poetry," and "achieve[s] thematic and artistic integrity" by "[f]ocusing [its] ideas around an unpretentious symbol." (Arthur Symons, "Charles Lamb," in *Monthly Review*, 21, 62 [November 1905]: 38–56, 54, and Donald H. Reiman, "Thematic Unity in Lamb's Familiar Essays," *JEGP* 64, 3 (July 1965): 470–8, 470.)

[15] "The salient features of the traditional English 'Willow pattern' design are buildings in the centre or to the right of centre, a prominent Willow tree and two or three figures crossing a bridge to the left, away from the building, two doves being normally placed in the sky above the fleeing lovers" (Geoffrey A. Godden, *Caughley and Worcester Porcelains 1775–1800* [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969], p. 15). See also N. Hudson Moore, *The Old China Book, including Staffordshire, Wedgwood, Lustre, and Other English Pottery and Porcelain* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1944).

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[16] In his additions to his *Confessions*, De Quincey coined the term "involute" to describe the romantic experience of "deepest thoughts and feelings pass[ed] through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects . . . compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us *directly* and in their own abstract shapes" (*The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. Aileen Ward [New York: New American Library, 1966], pp. 129–30). See also Hugh Sykes Davies, "Involutes and the Process of Involution," in *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words*, ed. John Kerrigan and Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 121–85.

[17] For a punctuated account of the change in the British imperial relationship with China in the context of global imperialism and particularly the role of Stamford Raffles, see C. A. Bayley, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 64–7, 98–9; and Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China, 1800–42* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1951).

[18] Elia's consumption of "unmixed" tea may refer either to his connoisseurship of unadulterated Chinese leaves (Hyson being a famous all-Chinese blend), or the sugar abstention that protested the slave trade. See Kowaleski-Wallace, pp. 19–51, and Charlotte Sussman, "Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792," in *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713–1833* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 110–29.

[19] Monsman, pp. 44–5.

[20] Lamb, "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," *London Magazine*, February 1821; 3.14:161–5, 163; "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig," *London Magazine*, September 1822; 6.33:245–8.

[21] In the eighteenth century porcelain most frequently appears as a sexual metaphor. See Aubrey Williams, "The 'Fall' of China and *The Rape of the Lock*," *Philological Quarterly* 41, 2 (April 1962): 412–25; and Michael Neill, "Horned Beasts and China Oranges: Reading the Signs in *The Country Wife*," *ECLife* 12, 2 (May 1988): 3–17. Lamb had introduced De Quincey to the *London Magazine* in 1820, and in September and October of 1821 his two essays "Old Benchers at Inner Temple" and "Witches, and Other Night Fears" appeared in the same issues as the two-installment publication of De Quincey's *Confessions*. For a study of the Chinese imagery in De Quincey's writing, see John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991). For an examination of opium and the contemporary China trade in De Quincey's economic writings, see Josephine McDonagh, *De Quincey's Disciplines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Lamb and De Quincey first met, in fact, at the East India House, when as a young man De Quincey had been sent to the office on his father's business. See Samuel McKechnie, "Charles Lamb of the India House," *N&Q* 191 (1946): 277–80, 279.

[22] Hilary Young, *English Porcelain, 1745–95: Its Makers, Design, Marketing and Consumption* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), pp. 14–93.

[23] Christopher Hibbert, *The Dragon Wakes: China and the West, 1793–1911* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: Norton, 1998); David Porter, "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England," *ECS* 33, 2 (Winter 2000): 181–

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99; William W. Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: The Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951); Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (New York: Icon Editions, 1961); and Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (New York: Scribner's, 1977). For a recent investigation of porcelain manufacture in English literature, see Lydia H. Liu, "Robinson Crusoe's Earthenware Pot," *CritI* 25, 4 (Summer 1999): 728–57.

[24] Coleridge, "Kubla Khan: Or, A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment," from *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 295-8.

[25] Kathleen Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan' and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theories," *WC* 22, 1 (Winter 1991): 15–24, situates the poem's imagery in terms of contemporary art and landscape culture. The seminal work on the poem's intertextual origins and allusions is E. S. Shaffer, *"Kubla Khan" and The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975).

[26] Interestingly, the term *speciosa miracula* also appears in Walter Scott's "Essay on Romance" (1824), in which Scott attributes the fantastic devices of romance to the imagination (*Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama* [Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972], p. 175).

[27] For recent attempts to trace the poem's origin in Western art history, see Jack Stillinger, "'Kubla Khan' and Michelangelo's 'Glorious Boast,'" *ELN* 23, 1 (September 1985): 38–42 and David Chandler, "Two Notes on 'Kubla Khan,'" in *ChLB* 102 (April 1998): 64–5.

[28] For an example of the contemporary in porcelain pagodas, see "The Porcelain Pagoda of Nanking," *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, 31 January 1824: 65–6.

[29] Possible models for Lamb include Sir William Chambers's 1772 *Dissertation upon Oriental Gardening*, and Henry Carey's 1724 political satire "A Learned Dissertation on Dumpling."

[30] See, for example, the etymological anecdote in "Pottery and Porcelain," *Household Words* 3, 80 (4 October 1851): 33–7, 33.

[31] Lamb, letter to Thomas Manning, 10 May 1806, letter 201 of *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976), 2:225–6, 226.

[32] For example, Lamb discusses a vase commission he was arranging at the East India Company's Canton factory in the letter to Bernard Barton and his daughter, 1 December 1824, letter 537 of *The Letters of Charles Lamb, to Which Are Added Those of His Sister, Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 3 vols. (1935; rprt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), 2:446–8. Such privately executed commissions were a common means by which East India House clerks augmented their income.

[33] David Sanctuary Howard, *Chinese Armorial Porcelain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974); and John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 108–13; *Blue and White: Chinese Porcelain and Its Impact on the Western World*, ed. John Carswell (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985).

[34] Harriet Wynter, *An Introduction to European Porcelain* (London: Arlington Books, 1971), p. 191.

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[35] For a recent examination of these issues, see Monsman, "Charles Lamb's Elia and the Fallen Angel," *SIR* 38, 1 (Spring 1999): 51–62.

[36] For a parallel study of falsely exotic styles of porcelain and their relation to John Keats's poetry, see Dwight E. Robinson, "Ode on a 'New Etrurian' Urn: A Reflection of Wedgwood Ware in the Poetic Imagery of John Keats," *KSJ* 12 (Winter 1963): 11–35, and "A Question of the Imprint of Wedgwood in the Longer Poems of Keats," *KSJ* 16 (Winter 1967): 23–8.

[37] Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953); Barry Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 31–45. In his compelling study of romanticism and early nineteenth-century brain science, Alan Richardson also argues the impact of opium consumption in shaping the materialist tendencies in Coleridge's and De Quincey's thinking (*British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001], pp. 51–9).

[38] Lamb, "Witches, and Other Night Fears," *London Magazine*, October 1821; 4:384–7.

[39] Waterloo Bridge was a contemporary icon the *London Magazine* particularly favored (Bauer, p. 83). The magazine began operations in a house in Waterloo Place; it appeared on the cover of the journal at least once (June 1822, no. 30), and in contributions was a frequent emblem of the metropolitan core—e.g., [Thomas Hood], "A Sentimental Journal, from Islington to Waterloo Bridge," *London Magazine*, November 1821; 4.23:508–15.

[40] Lamb, "Christ's Hospital, Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," *London Magazine*, November 1820; 2.11:483–90.

[41] Lamb, "Blakesmoor in H—shire," *London Magazine*, September 1824; 10:225–8. For William Wordsworth's imagery of "received into" see, for example, *The Prelude* [1805], book 5, lines 412–3, from *The Prelude: The Four Texts*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 192.

[42] William H. Galperin, *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 129–55.

[43] Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 202–27.

[44] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930; rprt. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948).

[45] Fred V. Randel, *The World of Elia: Charles Lamb's Essayistic Romanticism* (Port Washington NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), p. 107.

[46] See Patricia O'Hara, "'The Willow Pattern that We Knew': The Victorian Literature of Blue Willow," *VS* 36, 4 (Summer 1993): 421–42.

[47] Like Jane Austen, Lamb is often read as a belated eighteenth-century author. "Roast Pig," for example, might be read as a fable about the French Revolution where, instead of porcelain, the pigs in the essay refer to Edmund Burke's "swinish multitude" and the cautionary tale against contagious mania is reminiscent of Burke's warning: "Whenever our neighbor's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our own" (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001], p. 154). "Old China" has been interpreted as homage to William Hogarth (see Joseph E. Riehl, "Charles Lamb's 'Old China,' Hogarth, and Perspective Painting," *SCRev* 10, 1 [Spring 1993]: 38–48).

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[48] Lamb, "Oxford in the Vacation," *London Magazine*, October 1820; 2:365–9.

[49] Lamb, "Recollections of the South Sea House," *London Magazine*, August 1820; 2:142–6.

[50] *London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer.*

[51] Bauer, p. 60.

[52] In February 1821, editor John Scott was killed in a duel that began over a dispute with John Gibson Lockhart, then a prominent contributor to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and the author of the squib against the Cockney poets that elicited Lamb's sympathy for Keats.

[53] Lamb notes: "They have dragged me again into the Magazine, but I feel the spirit of the thing in my own mind quite gone." In a later letter Lamb also remarked upon the *London*'s imminent demise by being grateful that "there is cash at Leadenhall. You and I are something besides being Writers. Thank God" (letters to Bernard Barton, 11 March 1823 and 10 July 1823, letters 462, 478 of Lucas, 2:373, 393).

[54] Lamb's correspondence on East India Company stationery is to be found in the collections of the Huntington Museum, Garden, and Library, San Marino, California.

[55] Bauer, p. 68; Frank Ledwith, "The East India Company," *ChLB* 31 (July 1980): 129–35.

[56] Lamb addresses his retirement in his late essay "The Superannuated Man," *London Magazine*, May 1825; n.s. 2:67–73.

[57] Coleridge, *Anima Poetæ*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Heinemann, 1895), p. 87; qtd. in Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980), p. 207. For an exploration of this artistic process in "Kubla Khan," see Wheeler, "'Kubla Khan' and the Art of Thingifying," in *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 123–50; for a more general discussion of the materialist tendency in romantic writing to see words as things (which Lamb reverses), see William Keach, "'Words Are Things': Romantic Ideology and the Matter of Poetic Language," in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 219–39.

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# Abstracts

**Gisela Argyle,** Mrs. Humphry Ward's Fictional Experiments in the Woman Question

Current evaluations of Mrs. Humphry Ward as novelist range from "Victorian anti-feminist" to "New Woman novelist" and "rebel." For a more nuanced treatment of Ward, which would justify her initial reception as an important serious novelist who engaged her readers in imaginative experiments on important social and moral questions, this essay examines five novels as a series, in accordance with Hans Robert Jauss's methodological precept in his seminal essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory." According to Jauss, such a literary series implies "a dialogical and at once processlike relationship between work, audience, and new work."

**Elizabeth Bradburn**, The Metaphorical Space of Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*

This essay offers a new reading of George Meredith's 1885 novel *Diana of the Crossways* from the perspective of cognitive theory as it has been developed by George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner. A cognitive perspective reveals that the novel is as much a network of interrelated metaphors as it is a narrative sequence, and sheds light on Meredith's understanding of the relationship between mind and body. In *Diana*, marriage is a creative blend (an idea developed by Turner), and the redistribution of its input domains constitutes the movement of the narrative.

**Karen Fang**, Empire, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb's Consumer Imagination

Scholarship on Charles Lamb typically presents his essays as responses to personal tragedy or as idealistic fancies detached

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from history, and perpetuates romantic conventions by unfavorably comparing the minor writer to Coleridge. This article intervenes in this trend by reading Lamb's "Elia" essays as emulations of his East India House employment, which adopt its modes of mechanical reproduction and professional promotion in order to elevate Lamb's literary output to that of Coleridge. Porcelain is the key industrial commodity upon which Lamb's analogy hinges. Consequently, this reading centers upon the essay, "Old China," to unveil the triumphal imperialism in Lamb's writing.

**Harriet Hustis**, Responsible Creativity and the "Modernity" of Mary Shelley's Prometheus

This article analyzes how Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* reconfigures, recontextualizes, and thus "modernizes" the myth of Prometheus. It argues that by focusing on the issues of paternal negligence and the need for responsible creativity, Shelley's novel deconstructs the story of Prometheus as a masculinist narrative of patriarchal authority. It concludes that an examination of the "modernity" of Shelley's Prometheus myth has an impact not only on interpretations of *Frankenstein* itself, but also on the function of the novel's 1831 preface.

**Oliver Lovesey**, Reconstructing Tess

"Reconstructing Tess" argues, in the context of a discussion of Victorian virginity's religious, medical, social, journalistic, and pornographic discourses, that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*'s narrative logic or illogic attempts to resolve Angel Clare's apostasy, centered on article four of the Thirty-Nine Articles, through a sexualized reconstruction of the resurrection and particularly through the reconstruction of Tess's virginity. Her virginity's reconstruction is figured in the recuperative allegory of Tess's mouth and in the person of her sister Liza-Lu. Representing the rebuilt tabernacle of Angel's religion of unbelief, Liza-Lu displaces the Christian resurrection for Angel in favor of a material resurrection centered on a reconstructed Tess.

**Andrew H. Miller**, Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century

An assessment of recent scholarly work treating the Nineteenth Century and some general observations on the state of the profession. A full bibliography and price list of the works received by *SEL* for consideration follow.

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