

British Romanticism/FL3002

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### Reflection on Lamb

Q: My former students once expressed their anger at Lamb's description of the picture on the porcelain as "lawless" "grotesque" "before perspective" and his disowned "repugnance." Do you agree with them?

Lawless were those days before perspective. When even one shilling mattered, happiness obtained from grotesque ways was the only thing that kept life lively. Luxury was seen in the cheap, and terra firma was found in the air. Lamb was not giving a description of the china teacup; the men and women floating were exactly he and his dear sister Mary.

"Old China" is a sheer meditation and a feast for two souls craving the true happiness they once had rather than an art critique on chinaware. As soulmates who went through peaks and valleys hand in hand, Charles and Mary Lamb, or, Elia and Bridget, had their minds flitting through their memories throughout the essay.

Therefore, I think the clue to grasping its motif is to dive into Charles's and Mary's streams of consciousness and read their choices of words from a different stance.

Lamb's partiality for old china was a call from his distant memory. Instead of getting acquainted with a stranger, he was more like having a reunion with his former

已註解 [MOU1]: Gave colour to life?

已註解 [MOU2]: Wonderful.

已註解 [MOU3]: Use quotation marks for title of short works, italics for title of books.

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self. Hence, it is hardly possible for him to have any repugnance then and now towards the bizarre, for the wildness that lies in it was where he came from. In the good old times, money weighed differently as it was worth much more happiness. The joy and the sense of achievement they felt were measured subjectively. Mary and he could remember every detail of the times when they were poor and in need, the inconvenient staircases, the threadbare brown suit, the pleasure of eating strawberries, and it seemed like they could ramble on forever reminiscing. Now that they are rich and sufficient, happiness is valued objectively and probably by the worldliest standard possible. Annoying as it may sound, however, an unchanging ostentatious lifestyle does make people tiresome, too, especially ones like Charles and Mary who prefer to nourish their minds by something metaphysical rather than material. It may be why Lamb mentioned previously in the essay that he was not conscious of when the china jars and saucers were introduced into his imagination but find it strangely enchanting. I suppose it was after they became rich, just the right time before the tough times they lived through too long ago was about to vanish in their memory. Old china must have occurred to him of what he was searching subconsciously. The lawless and grotesque Chinese art designs resemble so much of their life back then which, at first sight, deviates from rules and logic, but charms in its way by the vigor it emanates and the peculiar form it adopts. Western art patterns, ordered, reasonable, elegant, and always

已註解 [MOU4]: Yes.

已註解 [MOU5]: I like it.

已註解 [MOU6]: Yes.

已註解 [MOU7]: "Spiritual" would be a better choice.

已註解 [MOU8]: It is rather intricate.

已註解 [MOU9]: Yes.

已註解 [MOU10]: Yes.

with a fixed perspective was the kind of life he became familiar with after poverty was far away from him and Mary. Nothing is wrong with being methodical, but the spark of hope that once was in those eyes striving for a better life seemed no longer flickering.

已註解 [MOU11]: Good.

Perhaps the idea can also explain why “summer clouds” overshadowed his sister’s brows when Elia / Lamb remarked on how favorable their circumstances are now and why the essay shifted from a description of his fondness for old china to Bridget / Mary recalling the past. That the old blue china being in front of her dear brother’s eyes, yet he thought of the objective pleasures they can now relish nonchalantly but did not occur to the subjective happiness they used to appreciate wholeheartedly. Captivated by their exterior splendors, he saw the eye-pleasing trifles but failed to see their inner lawless beauty. I am much amused by how Lamb delivered a vivid account of the way he sensed an awkward silence in the atmosphere after enjoying himself too much over those “speciosa miracula.” I could almost see Mary’s facial expressions, being left speechless by her brother.

已刪除: Lamb

Unexpectedly, the end of the essay went swiftly back to the description of the china teacup. The word “insipid” appeared to be particularly notable for its contradiction to the idea that Lamb should then be making positive remarks on old china since he had fully understood the true spirit of lawlessness after a long

conversation with Mary. It may thus seem offensive or even a discriminative statement to some people. However, I think it serves perfectly for the conclusion because it accurately expressed how Lamb dispelled his doubts about why he was obsessed with old china. When the lawless and grotesque was the idea and the arts before perspective were the copies, the teacup happened to be magnificently mesmerizing to him as he could see its essence directly through it. It was a moment of realization, shortly afterwards, to find out that the lawless and grotesque force was but a copy, as well, and the ultimate idea was the good old times that never would return; the teacup, being the copy of a copy, eventually turned out to be insipid, for Lamb savored the spirit and forsook the drained flesh.

已註解 [MOU12]: Wonderful.

已註解 [MOU13]: Such a turn.

已註解 [MOU14]: Ok.

I mark this piece 95.

You are almost as amusing as Lamb.