

‘I cannot muster a fiddle’: De Quincey, Lamb, Opium, and Addiction

Peter J. Kitson

THIS ESSAY IS CONCERNED WITH TWO Romantic writers and their contrasting response to opium, creativity, and the modern idea of an ‘addiction’. In contrasting the cases of Charles Lamb and Thomas De Quincey and their strikingly different responses to that most romantic of all drugs, opium, we can see how De Quincey’s literary depiction of his relationship with opium established the type of the addict that later commentators deploy in their critiques of modernity. Lamb provides an alternative set of opium-related associations to those of De Quincey, which evoke not the exotic, sublime, and oriental but the mundane and everyday world of work and the office. The challenge for critics of nineteenth-century opium writing is to do justice to the plurality of meanings that opium had in the period and to appreciate that, as in the case of Lamb, opium could sometimes symbolise nothing more than the domestic and quotidian.

In a letter of 1815, Charles Lamb complained of the mind-numbing pressures of his work as a clerk for the East India Company at India House, ‘[w]hy the devil am I never to have a chance of scribbling my own free thoughts, verse or prose, again? Why must I write of Tea & Drugs & Piece Goods & bales of indigo[?]’¹ In the same year, in a letter to Wordsworth, he grumbled about the “‘merchants & their spicy drugs” which are so harmonious to sing of, they lime twig up my poor soul & body, till I shall forget I ever thought myself a bit of a genius! I can’t even put a few thoughts on paper for a newspaper. I engross when I should pen a paragraph’ (III 149). It is not clear what exactly Lamb is referring to as ‘drugs’. It is tempting to assume that in his use of the term he takes within his purview the Company’s East Indian opium, produced by its Bengal territories and sold to private merchants for contraband sale off the south-east coast of China. However, the meaning of the word at the time remains somewhat vague. Dr. Johnson, for example, defined ‘Drug’ in his *Dictionary* entry of 1755 as merely signifying ‘an ingredient used in physick; a medicinal simple’.² Johnson cites Milton’s suggestive simile from the second book of *Paradise Lost*, also alluded to by Lamb in his letter, in which he compares Satan’s epic and fateful journey to Eden with the progress of the East Indian merchant fleets conducting the Indonesian spice trade, conveying nutmeg and cloves to Europe,

As when farr off at Sea a Fleet descri’d
Hangs in the Clouds, by *Æquinoctial* Winds
Close sailing from *Bengala*, or the Iles

¹ *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975-78), III 200. Further references to this edition are included in the text by volume and page number.

² Samuel Johnson, ‘Drug’, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. and P. Knapton et al., 1755), accessed via <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com>.

Of *Ternate* and *Tidore*, whence Merchants bring
 Thir spicie Drugs: they on the Trading Flood
 Through the wide *Ethiopian* to the Cape
 Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole.³

Like Lamb, Adam Smith described the eastern commodity of Chinese tea in this way in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), commenting that ‘Tea, for example, was a drug very little used in Europe before the middle of the last century’.⁴ Jonas Hanway later incurred Johnson’s wrath when he referred to the Dr.’s precious tea pejoratively, as an effeminizing ‘Chinese drug’, and in 1795 in a similar vein, Samuel Taylor Coleridge would call tea ‘a pernicious beverage’.⁵ Yet we know that as the British East India Company did not directly export its opium from Bengal for use in Britain, it is unlikely that Lamb’s clerical work at India House would have involved accounting for any cargoes of this drug. Cargoes of Turkish opium for British consumption were auctioned off in Mincing Lane, not far from Lamb’s East India House on Leadenhall Street, and he, no doubt, was aware of these commercial activities and transactions.⁶

The actual opium that Lamb knew of and would have experience of would not characteristically be the opium produced in Bengal by the British for a very good reason. This product had a significantly lower morphine content than that of the more potent Turkish product and was less marketable for pharmaceutical purposes in Britain as a consequence, though its milder nature made it ideal for recreational smoking in China where it was mainly exported.⁷ De Quincey famously claims that he sampled ‘East-Indian opium’ along with the Turkish and more prestigious Egyptian or Theban varieties, and that at one stage it was ‘rather dear’, being sold at ‘three guineas a pound’.⁸ However, this may signify opium produced by the independent Indian states of Malwa, outside of Company control, or, possibly, if this was opium produced in British-controlled Bengal, it might be that brought privately to Britain by the Company captains, such as the Wordsworths’ brother, John, as part of their lucrative private trade allowance.⁹ If Lamb, in this letter, is indeed referring to opium, rather than just Miltonic generic spices, in his letters, he represents the

³ *The Poetical Works of John Milton, Vol. 1: Paradise Lost*, ed. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 42.

⁴ *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith, Vol. 2: An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Vol. 1*, ed. William Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 223.

⁵ For a recent discussion of this debate, see Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, ‘Tea and the Limits of Orientalism in De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*’, in *Writing China: Essays on the Amherst Embassy and Sino-British Cultural Relations*, ed. Peter J. Kitson and Robert Markley (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016), 105–31. For the history of tea and its changing cultural significations, see Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁶ Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 3–10.

⁷ See Jonathan Spence, ‘Opium Smoking in Ch’ing China’, in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, ed. Frederic Wakeman and Carolyn Grant (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 143–73, R. K. Newman, ‘Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration’, *Modern Asian Studies* 19 (1995): 765–94 and Frank Dikötter, Lars Laamann, and Zhou Xun, *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (London: Hurst & Co, 2004).

⁸ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40. Further references to this edition are cited by page number in the text.

⁹ Peter J. Kitson, ‘The Wordsworths, Opium, and China’, *The Wordsworth Circle* 43 (2012): 2–12.

drug not, in the manner of De Quincey, as a life-changing revelation and apocalypse, a 'dark idol' and catalyst to creativity, as a key to unlocking powerful and repressed memories, but, rather, in a series of stultifying associations with his humdrum routine work as a clerk in the pay of the East India Company and the nexus of deadening commercial relations that this entailed for him: in effect, an obstacle rather than a spur to romantic creativity. In this spirit, Lamb writes to Wordsworth very much against the expansive spirit of Adam Smith's free trade economic theory and belief in enlightenment progress: 'Confusion blast all mercantile transactions, all traffick, exchange of commodities, intercourse between nations, all the consequent civilization & wealth & amity & link of society, & getting rid of prejudices, & knowledge of the face of the globe' (III 149). Lamb's clerical work was extremely tedious and precise, matching goods with monies exchanged. For Lamb, opium remains somewhat tarred with the pitch of his work; as Eric G. Wilson insightfully comments, 'Lamb did this all day, six days a week, for thirty-three years. He had to spell each word correctly, record each price correctly, add it all up correctly . . . [t]he pressure, the tedium, the hours: this was Lamb's hell'.¹⁰

Lamb figured his infernally mundane working life in the dreary pile of East India House from 1792 onwards, the 'eight, nine, and sometimes ten hours' a-day attendance at a counting-house' six days a week, as akin to a form of imprisonment or slavery and entirely antithetical to creativity. This view is memorably depicted in his essay 'The Superannuated Man', in which Elia writes how he 'had grown' into his desk 'and the wood had entered into' his 'soul'.¹¹ Wilson and others have drawn our attention to the related paradox of 'the irreverent, sensitive Lamb' and his employment by 'the most brutal engine in London's imperialistic machine'.¹² This aspect of his work, however, does not seem to have over-troubled Lamb as he completed his endless ledgers. Nevertheless, the drugs and the opium that were so inspiring for his friend Coleridge in the late 1790s, and his fellow *London Magazine* essayist, De Quincey, probably signified for Lamb something of a more quotidian nature with a host of unpleasant, work-related associations. In his essay 'Witches, and Other Night Fears', Lamb complained knowingly of the sheer poverty of his dreams when compared with those of the laudanum-user Coleridge who 'at his will can conjure up icy domes, and pleasure-houses for Kubla Khan, and Abyssinian maids, and songs of Abara and caverns . . . to solace his night solitudes when I cannot muster a fiddle' (*Elia* 79). In 1801, he humorously complained to his friend, the China enthusiast, Thomas Manning, that he had been taken ill with a 'bad cold'. To recover he has been 'successively . . . drugged with Spanish licorice, opium, ipecacuanha, paregoric, and tincture of foxglove (digitalis of the ancients)'. Notably, Lamb worries that as a result he

¹⁰ Eric G. Wilson, *Dream-Child: A Life of Charles Lamb* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022), 60.

¹¹ Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia*, ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 221. Further references to this edition are cited by page number in the text.

¹² Wilson, *Dream-Child*, 56; see also Gerald Monsman, 'Charles Lamb's Elia as Clerk: The Commercial Employment of a Literary Writer', *The Wordsworth Circle* 21 (1990), 96–100.

must abstain from his more characteristic recreational vice and 'leave off drinking' (*Letters* II 3).

While it seems to have left Lamb somewhat cold, as it were, opium obviously played an apocalyptically transformative role in the writing of De Quincey, and to a lesser extent, Coleridge. However, for many other artists, such as Byron, who also used it, it appeared to have little inspirational effect.¹³ In his 'Confessions' of 1821, De Quincey asked of himself the primal addict's question: how 'came any *reasonable being* to subject himself to such a yoke of misery, *voluntarily* to incur a *captivity* so servile, and knowingly to *fetter himself* with such a seven-fold chain' (*Confessions* 6). Lamb also addresses De Quincey's notion of addictive cravings in a characteristically oblique way in his 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig', published in the *London Magazine* in 1822, just a few months after the 'Confessions'. Here Elia presents a Chinese fantasy tale about the supposedly ancient origins of the practice of consuming roast pork having resulted from the accidental burning and roasting of a pig's flesh:

Some of the crumbs of the scorched skin had come away with his fingers, and for the first time in his life (in the world's life, indeed, for before him no man had known it) he tasted—*crackling!* Again, he felt and fumbled at the pig. It did not burn him so much now; still he licked his fingers from a sort of habit. The truth at length broke into his slow understanding, that it was the pig that smelt so, and the pig that tasted so delicious; and, surrendering himself up to the new-born pleasure, he fell to tearing up whole handfuls of the scorched skin with the flesh next it, and was cramming it down his throat in his beastly fashion, when his sire entered amid the smoking rafters, armed with retributory cudgel, and finding how affairs stood, began to rain blows upon the young rogue's shoulders, as thick as hailstones, which Bo-bo heeded not any more than if they had been flies. The tickling pleasure, which he experienced in his lower regions, had rendered him quite callous to any inconveniences he might feel in those remote quarters. (*Elia* 138)

Once this discovery is communicated, the practice of eating roast pork spreads rapidly as an irresistible compulsion for all. Karen Fang has ingeniously related this essay to an emerging nineteenth-century British consumer society and its imperial periodical culture, in which both Lamb and De Quincey were important writers.¹⁴ The Chinese craving for roast pork once sampled, Fang argues, may be used analogously by Lamb to allude to the growing craving for the recreational smoking of opium in China, as well as the use of laudanum in Britain. Fang is reading Lamb's essay proleptically in the light of a twentieth-century Chinese nationalist and western post-colonial consensus that largely accepts the notion of China as undergoing an opium pandemic, purposefully

¹³ See Althea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), 30–31.

¹⁴ Karen Fang, *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs: Periodical Culture and Post-Napoleonic Authorship* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 170.

poisoned by the East India Company (and later the colonial Indian government) actively pushing this addictive drug to soften the Qing empire for conquest or domination.¹⁵ We know that it was in the decade of the 1820s that, both in Britain and China, the use of opium boomed. The Company, in an effort to drive out its independent Indian competitors (Malwa opium), reduced the price of its product and substantially increased its production for export to China by independent traders. In both Britain and China, opium became cheaper and available to all classes, a phenomenon that we know highly alarmed both Coleridge and De Quincey.¹⁶ Fang is thus arguing that Lamb is essentially anticipating this alleged opium 'pandemic', the first of history's drug plagues, through his depiction of 'addled Chinese consumers and the social degradation their consumption depicts'.¹⁷

Recent revisionist historical writing on the subject, however, has tended to see the later narrative as an exaggeration. Frank Dikötter, for instance claims that, in fact 'opium [in China] was used by many people in moderate quantities' and that 'the relative absence of problematic users—rather than a proliferation of “drug fiends”—is the most striking feature of narcotic culture in late imperial China'.¹⁸ Phillipe Cacuet, in his study *Opium's Orphans* (2022), suggest that an average opium dosage for a Chinese smoker might be c. 5.5 grams per day, which would realistically suggest in the region of 15 million smokers (or 3.3 percent of the population). It is estimated that annual consumption in China per capita was around 600 grams (1.3 lb.) per thousand people, which is less than an estimated 725 grams (1.6 lb.) per thousand in England and Wales, where the drug was sold without regulation. Cacuet concludes that though this 'puts the Chinese opium epidemic at a far from negligible level', it is 'nowhere near impressionistic notions of an entire country held in drug slavery'. For contrast, Cacuet notes that in 2015 an estimated 13 million people in the US abused opiates and synthetic opioids (c. 4 percent of the population). The 'Chinese opium plague was [. . .] in all likelihood comparable to the modern American opioid epidemic: acute, but not quite as cataclysmic'.¹⁹

It might be instructive to compare Lamb's Chinese creation, Bo-bo, and his first encounter with the 'addictive' roast pork to De Quincey's first encounter with opium from the 'Confessions'. It was De Quincey, with Coleridge (and their various biographers), who established the crucial convention of the opium user as a passive subject or victim of a powerful, enigmatic, and mysterious agency, the drug serving as the active agent. Famously for De Quincey, opium is the 'true hero of the tale', a dark idol, the 'marvellous agency' of which is the subject of the 'Confessions' (*Confessions* 66, 71, 77). De Quincey confesses that opium-eating is both 'a sensual pleasure' as

¹⁵ See Alan Baumler, *The Chinese and Opium under the Republic: Worse than Floods and Wild Beasts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Carl A. Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 74–86; Berridge and Edwards, *Opium and the People*, 55–56.

¹⁷ Fang, *Romantic Writing*, 170.

¹⁸ Dikötter et al., *Narcotic Culture*, 4.

¹⁹ P. E. Cacuet, *Opium's Orphans: The 200-Year History of the War on Drugs* (London: Reaktion Books, 2022), 65–68.

well as a medical treatment (4). He insists, however, that his original recourse to the drug in 1804 was neither recreational nor experimental but an expedient to alleviate a toothache. He tropes his mysterious first experience with opium as a weird encounter with an 'immortal druggist' constructing a vignette, evocative of one of his favourite texts, the *Arabian Nights*, that features a druggist fatalistically 'sent down to earth on a special mission'. This uncanny druggist disappears, never to be found or seen again. This event is formulated as fully predestined, symbolizing perhaps De Quincey's 'addictive personality', and thus effacing his free choice in a quotidian commercial and medical transaction. Opium is depicted here in exotic hyperbole as the 'celestial drug', a powerful 'dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain'. Its use will henceforward precipitate a special insight, unlock buried, palimpsestic memories and provide the user with profound revelations, presenting the quintessentially romantic 'apocalypse' of 'the world within' (38–39). De Quincey's 'Confessions' will thus establish itself as the user's sacred text, the officially sanctioned De Quincey version, which will reveal to the initiated, the esoteric 'doctrine of the true church on the subject of opium', of which he is the sacrifice and messiah, 'the alpha and the omega' (42). It seems that what his 'Confessions' is doing, and why it was such a revolutionary and interventionist Romantic text, was to exoticize and mystify what by the 1820s was at one level an ordinary household medicine: a substance 'dark brown', 'rather dear', and potentially fatal 'if you eat too much of it' (40).

This bewildering interplay between the exotic and the quotidian informs much of the polyvalent, overdetermined nature of opium over its long and troubled history. De Quincey's 'Confessions' continually plays on this ambivalence. As Robert Morrison argues, the 'Confessions' was a crucial text in that it 'reconceived the confessional genre and transformed our perception of drug use and abuse in ways that continue to inform current debates', deploying now-familiar narratives of the 'inexorable decline and collapse of the addict' and the 'terrors of withdrawal' (*Confessions* ix–x). The 'Confessions' charts a paradigmatic descent from promising literary and intellectual brilliance to addiction, illness, penury, and destitution, followed by the promise of either moral reformation or wasteful death. Now, two hundred years since its publication in the *London Magazine* in 1821, we can affirm that De Quincey's construction of what we have come to define as the state of 'addiction' and the persona of the 'addict' has powerfully influenced later discourse about the drug and its global representation. De Quincey's narrative of 'addiction' was subsequently absorbed as medical truth, a case history, by many in the nascent British medical profession.²⁰ The anti-opium trade and missionary lobby, with their puritanical, evangelical preference for temperance and sobriety, were most assiduous in exploiting extreme depictions of the horrors of the opium habit, such as De Quincey's; while the defenders of the opium trade with Qing China and their hired lobbyists were keen to point to how De Quincey's exaggerated

²⁰ Barry Milligan, 'Morphine Addicted Doctors, the English Opium Eater, and Embattled Medical Authority', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.2 (2005): 541–53.

literary versions of the horrors of opium use had been imported into the debate from non-medical literary discourses. De Quincey's well-known depiction of the pains of opium and his harrowing struggle with the drug was thus profoundly influential in the changing nineteenth-century understanding of drug use from that of habit to disease and addiction. The comparison with Lamb's experience thus remains instructive.

Addiction, as we understand it today, is a state which manifests itself in powerful cravings and an overwhelming desire to take a drug substance. This desire is characterized as virtually irresistible, obsessional, and stronger than all other desires. It is something that has mutated from an initial and voluntary act of free will to becoming as necessary as our involuntary biological processes, such as respiration and ingestion. De Quincey himself describes his state from 1813 onwards as 'a regular and confirmed opium-eater, of whom to ask whether on any particular day he had or had not taken opium, would be to ask whether his lungs had performed respiration, or the heart fulfilled its function' (*Confessions* 54). This state of addiction has been privileged in much contemporary criticism, as well as post-colonial theory. For example, Susan Zeiger affirms that the 'overwhelming historical cultural studies consensus is that addiction is a side effect of modernity', arguing that 'addiction, with its incoherent subjects, chronic repetitions, wretched stupidity, and debilitating intransigence, presents its own distinct *burr* in the side of rational Enlightenment modernity and progress. Such deconstructive readings, of which there are many,²¹ echo De Quincey's experience and locate addiction within culture itself as the trace or absence necessary for the affirmation of the presence of the western subject, or conversely as the negative determinism that nullifies the positive affirmation of modernity's alleged free will and choice. Such readings accomplish two things. On the one hand, with De Quincey, they hypostatize (or perhaps even fetishize) the special case of the 'addict' as the normative, and, perhaps, the exemplary case of drug user and, on the other, they imply that this is, in effect, the authentic inauthentic state of all subjects under late western capitalism: all of us are, they infer, addicted to something. The problem with this general line is that, as many historians of drug use point out, it excludes the more normative category of the moderate user of such substances.

This link between De Quincey's presentation of the state of addiction and the debate about the opium trade with China, can be witnessed in several discussions of the trade. In 1840, the Romantic novelist, physician, and erstwhile writer for *Blackwood's* Samuel Warren published his defense of the opium trade, commissioned by the British opium traders.²² Warren, like other

²¹ Susan Zeiger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 10; Peter J. Kitson, 'Opium and Addiction in a Cross-Cultural Context: De Quincey's "Confessions" (1821) and the Chinese novel, *Romantic Illusions of the Fool of Yangzhou* (Fengyue meng) (c. 1848)', *Romanticism* 27 (2021): 309–21.

²² For Warren, see Peter J. Kitson, 'Romantic Nationalism, De Quincey and the Public Debate about the First Opium War, 1839–42', in *The Politics of Romanticism*, ed. Sebastien Domsch and Christoph Houswitschka, *Studien zur Englischen Romantik* 22 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2019), 141–55.

defenders, attempted to minimize the harm caused by the drug in China and pointed the finger directly at De Quincey's *Confessions* as the main culprit:

As to the fatally-fascinating qualities of this drug, a vast deal has been said, that is, it is suspected, based upon a gross exaggeration; and it may not be impossible to detect one subtle, and perhaps, unsuspected source of prejudice against everyone concerned in the supply of it. Ever since the year (1820) [*sic*] when Mr. De Quincy [*sic*] published his remarkable 'Confessions of an English Opium Eater'—a work which produced a thrilling sensation over all the country, owing to the extraordinary nature of its details—to the wild, dazzling, but often dismal splendour of his dreams; his unearthly ecstasies; the fearful mental re-action and physical agonies which he endured; all of which were described in a style enriched with evident fruits of universal scholarship—in a strain, too, of very great power and pathos—OPIUM has been invested with a mysterious kind of interest and awe, producing an impression long retained by minds suffused with recollection of that extraordinary performance.²³

Warren, himself a sophisticated and accomplished literary writer, knew the 'Confessions' well. Here, like many others, he accuses De Quincey of 'gross exaggeration' for literary effect. He highlights the wild, dazzling speed of De Quincey's dreams and the great power and pathos of his literary performance. Unfortunately, Warren claims, naïve and ill-informed critics of the opium trade have taken this account as largely factual and deployed it for polemical purposes. Thus,

persons of excitable fancy are presented with frightful pictures of—as it were—two millions of De Quincys created in China, by the opium merchants, and represented in all stages of suffering, and frequency of death, infinitely transcending all that has been described by that accurate and minute observer, and faithful narrator of his own sensations and sufferings; (and who, moreover, took opium to an extent—namely, *eight thousand drops of laudanum a-day, equal to three hundred and twenty grains of opium*, utterly beyond the reach of any but the richer Chinese); the very mention of those who are accessory to so fearful an infliction of alleged suffering, excites feelings of indignation and aversion. . . . The observation . . . as to the extent to which Mr. De Quincy took opium, leads one to hope and believe, that we have received very greatly exaggerated accounts as to the effects of opium upon the Chinese, in respect both of extent and intensity. . . . The twenty or thirty thousand chests of opium which we distribute among three hundred and seventy millions of Chinese, surely produce scarcely a greater amount of physical suffering, and of immorality, than

²³ Samuel Warren, *The Opium Question* (London: J. Ridgway, 1840), 83–84.

the ardent spirits sold openly and without complaint in all parts of our own virtuous and happy country[.]²⁴

De Quincey, who wrote of his dark interpreter, of Piranesi's imaginary prisons and their multiple selves, of all those many horrid and hidden orientalist alien natures that infested and disturbed his Protestant English identity, and whose opium dreams were haunted by endlessly multiplied human faces, would no doubt be entranced by the notion of two million Chinese pariah versions of himself aimlessly wandering the celestial kingdom. A frightful picture indeed!

Thus, the comparison between Lamb and De Quincey, who had so very much in common as leading periodical essay writers from the period, may in the case of addiction be instructive. For Lamb, opium is a medicine to alleviate a bad cold. It is also something that, if it has any associations at all, are those of the quotidian world of work, which Lamb figures in his writings as antithetical to creativity. In this world he 'engrosses' rather than 'pens' his paragraphs. Opium is connected with commerce not creativity. It may spur Coleridge to conceive of 'icy domes' and 'Abyssinian maids', but it leaves Lamb cold, unable to muster even a fiddle in comparison. Conversely, in Lamb's world, the true nature of addiction is best illustrated by Bo-bo's overwhelming desire to consume roast pork. Lamb's case provides us with a series of alternative readings of the state of addiction as we have come to know it, and of opium itself. It decentres the more paradigmatic example of De Quincey, who travels away on the high road of addiction, leaving Lamb to trudge the lower road of everyday life in which opium stimulates no dreams or visions, but is just used to treat a miserable cold. Drugs, tea, and opium are merely subjects for Lamb's endless lists and ledgers at East India House. Yet it would be De Quincey and Coleridge who defined for a generation the figure of the doomed addicted Romantic dreamer, which is profoundly attractive to biographers, moralists, and post-colonial and post-modern criticism. It was De Quincey's representation of opium addiction that became absorbed into the enduring scandal of the Indian opium trade rather than that of Lamb, for whom the substance signified very little beyond its medicinal properties.

²⁴ Warren, *Opium Question*, 84–85.