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# Thomas De Quincey's Retreat into the "Nilotic Mud": Orientalism as a Response to Social Strain

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THOMAS DE QUINCEY'S RETREAT INTO THE "NILOTIC MUD": ORIENTALISM AS A  
RESPONSE TO SOCIAL STRAIN

by

PATRICK WILLIAM FRANK OSBORNE

Under the Direction of Michael Galchinsky

ABSTRACT

The thesis examines Thomas De Quincey's opium use as a product of social strain. De Quincey's collection of work provides evidence that he felt alienated from society prior to his addiction and that his feelings of inadequacy contributed to his dependence on drugs. Utilizing Robert K. Merton's strain theory, this thesis delineates De Quincey's aspirational references and perceived failures through an examination of his imagery and interprets his perceptions of human life as a catalyst for his compulsions to cope with opium. De Quincey, strained by the aspirations of an industrial and imperialistic society, looked for several avenues of escape. The Romanticism of William Wordsworth presented De Quincey with a method for alleviating social strain; however, when De Quincey failed to discover the transcendence evident in *Lyrical Ballads* he turned to the intoxicating effects of opium and retreated from English society.

INDEX WORDS: Thomas De Quincey, Social strain, Retreatism, Orientalism, William Wordsworth, Euripides, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, Robert K. Merton, Drug addiction

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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August 2010

To Wayne and Janie Osborne

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## INTRODUCTION

### Interpreting Thomas De Quincey's "World of Strife" as a Product of Social Strain<sup>1</sup>

Thomas De Quincey concludes *Suspiria de Profundis* with a somber statement concerning death and the human experience. He states, "Death we can face: but knowing, as some of us do, what is human life, which of us is it that with out shuddering could (if consciously summoned) face the hour of birth?" (181).<sup>2</sup> As an autobiographer, De Quincey understood too well the dangerous process of coming to terms with his own subsistence. Roger J. Porter notes in his essay, "The Demon Past: De Quincey and the Autobiographer's Dilemma," that the opium-eater's autobiographic process "involves the risk of reliving misery as well as happiness: *reliving*, not merely rediscovering, for the purpose is to bring to the surface and experience again the terrible buried life" (591-2, emphasis Porter). As Porter correctly suggests, much of De Quincey's writing serves the primary function of depicting his own suffering—dictated by life's hardships—to provide the audience with a clear "foundation of the writer's habit" (De Quincey, *Confessions* 4).

The following thesis examines this foundation, De Quincey's "World of Strife," in order to examine the social phenomenon that produced the English opium-eater's dependence on drugs. Much of the recent criticism concerning De Quincey's texts perceives the majority of his mental anguish as a product of extreme opium use, typically in the terms of his ultimate orientalization. By contrast, the following scholarship will operate in a reversed manner by interpreting De Quincey's perceptions of human life as a catalyst for his compulsions to cope

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase "World of Strife" derives from De Quincey's *Autobiographic Sketch* of the same name. I will refer to the title throughout the following thesis to illustrate a particular mindset De Quincey maintained concerning the society from which he stemmed.

<sup>2</sup> For all references to *Suspiria de Profundis*, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, and the "English Mail-Coach" see Grevel Lindop's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*. Quotations from De Quincey's diary and *Autobiographic Sketches* derive from Lindop's *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*.

with a tincture of purple narcotic. Drug addiction, as Alethea Hayter briefly notes in *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, often stems from a predisposition that plagues individuals

who are unable to face and cope with painful situations, who are conscious of their own inadequacy and who resent the difficulties which have revealed it; who long for relief from tension, from the failures and disappointments of their everyday life, who yearn for something which will annihilate the gap between their idea of themselves and their actual selves (40).

De Quincey—throughout the collection of his works—provides solid evidence that he indeed held such a predisposition for drug dependence by consistently confessing his consuming desire for deliverance from a harsh social world. The following chapters of this text will examine several key images in De Quincey’s writings to expose the opium-eater’s social pathology of addiction. As a result, this will argue that De Quincey felt dislocated from society prior to his drug dependence and that his feelings of inadequacy produced by social strain significantly contributed to his opium habit. To provide a solid foundation for the following arguments, I will turn to social strain theory—a contemporary sociological theory used to understand deviance—in order to demonstrate how De Quincey’s aspirations, failures, and antisocial behaviors instigated coping mechanics that ultimately prompted his drug use.

To begin delineating the opium-eater’s strained existence, I would like to recall the final lines of *Suspiria* and endeavor to understand the dread De Quincey associates with the commencement of human life. Nearly halfway through *Suspiria*, in a brief essay titled “Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow,” De Quincey provides evidence for the source of his anxiety concerning nativity. The passage recounts a Roman myth regarding Levana, the goddess of early childbirth, which De Quincey corrupts in order to accommodate his melancholic disposition and

achieve cosmic irony. De Quincey begins the section by informing his audience “at the very moment of birth, just as the infant tasted for the first time the atmosphere of our troubled planet, it was laid on the ground” (147). Birth, for De Quincey, can be equated with risk as the newborn begins life lying upon the hard soil of a world plagued with afflictions. However, Levana provides a form of solace through her duty of bearing infants to their father. Joel D. Black provides a description of this process in his essay, “Levana: Levitation in Jean Paul and Thomas De Quincey”:

According to the ancient ritual, the child was placed at the father’s feet in the temple, and the father then raised him up to his own height. This act of elevation signified the father’s agreement to accept responsibility for ‘bringing up’ his child and introducing him to the world (46).

Levana’s actions, as Roman mythology suggests, instigate a relationship between father and son and signify the first step of an educational process that will allow the child to become a successful adult.

De Quincey’s recollection of the myth, on the other hand, slightly blasphemes Levana in order to demonstrate the insignificance of the human child. De Quincey’s altered version states:

Levana, or some near kinsman, as proxy for the father, raised it upright, bade it look erect as the king to all this world, and presented its forehead to the stars, saying, perhaps, in his heart—“Behold what is greater than yourselves!” This symbolic act represented the function of Levana. (147)

De Quincey injects cosmic irony into his depiction of Levana (greatly altering her function) through a twofold process. Levana first begins her ritual by elevating the infant to the position of a godlike monarch, a role that must be forced onto the child as Levana commands it look upon

the stars. De Quincey aggrandizes the child in order to ironically nullify its importance with the following statement: “Behold what is greater than yourselves” (147)! Black provides insight into De Quincey’s mythical paradox by suggesting:

although the text ostensibly states that the father’s action reveals the child as a superior being with respect to Nature (the stars), the father actually reveals Nature to the child as an infinitely more powerful force. De Quincey glorifies the child only to show how utterly wretched and pathetic a creature he actually is. (51-52)

Levana’s contradictory actions, De Quincey argues, are vital in the development of the newborn as they serve as a model for the “tutelary power that controls the education of the nursery” (147). As an agent of every child’s socialization, Levana thus signifies two major pieces of a social structure that individuals must negotiate. First, Levana—through the act of raising the child—instills an aspirational reference within the newborn by commanding that it look to the stars as their king. Levana, symbolic of this social regulation, excites and coerces the child into forming lofty aspirations that are by definition unattainable to many individuals who hold an ascribed status beneath royalty on the class hierarchy. Thus, Levana’s ritual creates an unhealthy desire for success as she ultimately abdicates the infant’s dominion and, in turn, generates the second element of the social structure. The goddess’ final statement creates a blockage for acquiring the recanted goal and thus asserts the child’s ascribed status as, to reuse Black’s diction, “ a wretched and pathetic creature” (52).

By both instigating and restricting the child’s aspirations, Levana represents a social structure that creates unrealistic and impossible ideals for what constitutes success. Sociologist Emile Durkheim in his influential book, *Suicide*, states that “to pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness” (248). In a

similar manner, De Quincey in *Suspiria* illustrates socialization (personified by Levana) as a constraining force that introduces the child to world of sorrow. Robert K. Merton in his seminal work, “Social Structure and Anomie,” provides a theoretical framework for understanding the effect of the socialized strain De Quincey depicts through his representation of the goddesses:

It is only when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain *common* symbols of success *for the population at large* while its social structure rigorously restricts or completely eliminates access to approved modes of acquiring these symbols *for a considerable part of the same population*, that antisocial behavior ensues on a considerable scale. . . [because] frustration and thwarted aspiration lead to the search for avenues of escape from a culturally induced intolerable situation. (680, emphasis Merton)

De Quincey’s quest to negate the social strain controlling his life ultimately led him to two major coping agents: William Wordsworth’s Romanticism and an anodyne deriving from opium. The anomic condition portrayed in Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* attracted a young De Quincey, struggling with similar feelings, and instilled hope within the boy by providing an avenue for escaping strife. By abjuring the metropolis and the popularized ideals of England, Wordsworth’s poetry presented De Quincey with an alternative means for acquiring success. De Quincey perceived Wordsworth as the embodiment of a Romantic ideology characterized by a rebellious nature. Lilian R. Furst states in “The Romantic Hero, Or is He an Anti-Hero?” that the Romantic hero can be defined by “his antagonism to society [which] takes the negative form of a withdrawal; in many instances it is a literal retreat into the backwoods” (58). Laudanum, in a similar manner, provided De Quincey with the agency to completely eradicate his strained existence by essentially dropping out of society; effectuated by the transformation of the opium-eater into an orientalised pariah.

De Quincey's attraction to Romanticism and opium can be better understood as a repercussion of social strain. Merton, in his theoretical framework, sketches five distinct modes of reaction an individual might employ to avoid pain: Conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Conformists accept both the aspirational references produced by society and the institutionalized means for acquiring them. Innovators desire the socialized symbols of success but reject the culturally accepted means for obtaining them by committing criminal offenses rather than adhering to societal norms. Ritualists understand the impossibility of acquiring their aspirational references but continue to abide by the rules of society regardless of the outcome. Rebellion, as Stephen Jones defines it in *Criminology*,

involves the less common situation where not only are the ultimate goal and prescribed means of achieving it rejected, but a new means are substituted. This form of reaction would cover both people who withdraw from society for spiritual reasons (perhaps to meditate) and revolutionaries. (123)

Chapter one of the following work will examine De Quincey's misconstrued application of Wordsworth's Romanticism as an attempt to rebel against the socialized goals that generated his strained existence. Through Romantic ideology, De Quincey attempts to escape the aspirational references of industrialization and London's mercantilism by rejecting the stimuli of a mechanized society and embracing the conciliating tranquility of the natural world.

However, Romantic escapism ultimately failed the opium-eater and thus a secondary reaction needed to be employed. This final adaptation type—and where De Quincey's journey ends—is a version of Merton's retreatism. Retreatism, Jones summarizes, “comprises. . . people who, because of internalised pressure or their own conscience, reject both the ultimate goal and the means of achieving it. . . the tramp, vagrant or addict drops out of society, but does not

attempt to create anything” to compensate for their thwarted aspirations (123). Chapter two of this thesis will explore De Quincey’s drug addiction as a coping mechanism that instigated his retreat from a British society that upheld imperialism and aristocracy as a symbol of success for the world at large. I will describe De Quincey’s struggle with strain, his attempts to assuage his pain, and his ultimate retreat into what he calls the “Nilotic mud” in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (74). The confining Egyptian mud of the opium-eater’s nightmares signifies De Quincey’s ultimate destruction at the hands of social strain; for it is there he succumbs to his greatest fear and the ultimate symbol of his subjugation: the crocodile. As Porter fittingly notes, “De Quincey’s autobiographical writing is built in large measure around flights from elements which master him—schools, tutors, creditors, and even opium itself” (596). I have briefly explored De Quincey’s earliest hypothetical flight (i.e. from the commencement of human life) as the symbolic personification of social strain itself. I will now begin Chapter one by delineating De Quincey’s aspirational references, failures, and coping mechanics through an examination of the retreat that essentially initiated his path to addiction: the youthful Thomas’ departure from Manchester Grammar School.

## CHAPTER ONE

## “With Providence My Guide”: Thomas De Quincey’s Antecedents of Addiction

When De Quincey abandoned his role as a student at Manchester Grammar School, he departed towards North Wales with the works of two great poets in his coat-pocket. De Quincey states in *Confessions* that “‘with providence [his] guide,’ [he] set off on foot,—carrying a small parcel, with some articles of dress, under [his] arm; a favourite English poet in one pocket; and a small 12mo. volume, containing about nine plays of Euripides, in the other” (11). De Quincey’s favorite English poet was undoubtedly William Wordsworth and considering the date of his famous flight from Manchester on July 20, 1802 it would have likely been a freshly printed copy of the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in the young man’s pocket (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 66). This date is of importance because it denotes the infancy of Wordsworth’s poetic career: the point at which his Romantic ideology was gaining popularity. For this reason, I will detail the seventeen-year-old De Quincey’s impression of Wordsworth’s early work, specifically *Lyrical Ballads*, in order to demonstrate how the opium-eater’s views shifted when confronted by an overwhelmingly unromantic world.

Of the two writers mentioned in *Confessions*, Wordsworth has persisted as the only influence to be intensively studied by literary critics. The rationale behind this uneven distribution of scholarly interest is, of course, because of Wordsworth and De Quincey’s contemporary status. The vacillating relationship between the opium-eater and Wordsworth, beginning with De Quincey’s early hero worship and ending in his ultimate rejection by Wordsworth, has attracted much attention and fascinated Romanticists for decades. As a result, the 12mo. volume of Euripides has (for the most part) remained tucked away in De Quincey’s coat-pocket. This scholarly neglect is extremely unfortunate because the dichotomous



relationship De Quincey produces by alluding to *both* poets provides significant insight into the persona infamously known as the opium-eater.

By juxtaposing and alluding to the two markedly different poets in *Confessions*, De Quincey instigates a severance between Wordsworth and Euripides to symbolize his lofty Romantic aspirations and the grim reality he ultimately discovers while homeless in North Wales and London. To accurately illustrate both the aforementioned goals and realities, Wordsworth and Euripides must be characterized through a close examination of each other. Therefore, the following chapter will explore De Quincey's allusions through a twofold process: First, by examining both De Quincey's motivation for absconding from grammar school and his aversion to city life, I will expose the feelings of social strain he held as a student and tourist in Manchester and London. A thorough analysis of De Quincey's interpretation of Wordsworth's theory of aesthetics aids in understanding his attraction to *Lyrical Ballads* and divulges the reasoning De Quincey used when deciding to abandon his role as a student. The Romantic ideology promoted in *Lyrical Ballads* provided the young De Quincey with a radically new lifestyle that rebelled against the anomic condition generated by the ideologies of the metropolis and bestowed an alternative aspirational reference that encouraged the solidarity of humankind in response to a system advocating the pursuit of glory, sycophantism, and commerce.

Subsequently, I will examine the holes in De Quincey's understanding of Wordsworth's poetical approach through an analysis of De Quincey's life, his attraction to opium, and his allusion to the classic dramatist, Euripides. Throughout *Confessions*, De Quincey presents Euripides' aesthetic as an antagonism to his Romantic aspirations and employs the conventions of tragedy to symbolically explicate the pain generated by his world of strife. When De Quincey absconded from Manchester Grammar School he left as a socially strained child looking for

deliverance. In Wordsworth's poetry he discovered the possibility of redemption and a method for rebelling against the anomic condition produced by city life. However, when Wordsworth—the man and the theorist—failed to meet De Quincey's lofty expectations he turned to the intoxicating influence of opium and inadvertently educed his own tragic end.

## SECTION ONE

### De Quincey's Cultural Palimpsest: Delineating a Young Man's Aspirations for Wordsworthian Redemption

A seventeen-year-old De Quincey surely identified with the depictions of cultural destruction at the hands of industrialization in *Lyrical Ballads* and shared a similar opinion with Wordsworth, concerning cities and the sense of alienation they force upon the individual, throughout most of his life. In 1800, De Quincey visited the great capital of England and during his brief stay discovered the anomic condition Wordsworth portrays in *Lyrical Ballads* and confronts directly in his acclaimed Preface. De Quincey states in an autobiographic sketch titled "The Nation of London," that

after passing the final post-house on every avenue to London, for the latter ten or twelve miles, you become aware that you are no longer noticed: nobody sees you; nobody hears you; nobody regards you; you do not even regard yourself. In fact, how should you, at the moment of first ascertaining your own total unimportance in the sum of things—a poor shivering unit in the aggregate of human life? (111)

London, as De Quincey suggests, dislocates the individual from community; it produces emptiness in collectivity. While this statement appears oxymoronic it holds truth for several reasons. First, as Louis Wirth notes in "Urbanism as a Way of Life,"

the individual gains, on the one hand, a certain degree of emancipation or freedom from the personal and emotional controls of intimate groups, he loses, on the other hand, the spontaneous self-expression, the moral, and the sense of participation that comes with living in an integrated society. This constitutes essentially the state of *anomie*, or social void, to which Durkheim alludes. (153)

Secondly, as a mere “unit” for the production of human life, the individual becomes nothing more than a commodity needed for the nation’s survival. De Quincey suggests that the individual becomes reduced to a domesticated animal, “vast droves of cattle,” seduced into entering London with the promise of acquiring the “infinite means needed for [his/her] infinite purposes” (109). In this sense, it becomes aspiration and desire that generate a loss of self in urbanites as they embark on unending quests for goal obtainment. Humanity becomes trapped, losing its identity, through its role as an agent of industrialization.

The alienation De Quincey depicts in his sketch of London life also provides evidence for the cause of his flight from Manchester Grammar School. In a letter addressed to De Quincey’s mother, the young student beautifully illustrates his abhorrence of Manchester and the pursuit of material wealth he associates with it:

In this place trade is the religion, and money is the god. Every object I see reminds me of those occupations which run counter to the bent of my nature, every sentiment I hear sounds a discord to my own. I cannot stir out of doors but I am nosed by a factory, a cotton-bag, a cotton-dealer, or something else allied to that most detestable commerce. Such an object dissipates the whole train of romantic visions I had conjured up. (Japp 54)

De Quincey's revulsion echoes Wordsworth's sentiments concerning city life expressed throughout his *Lyrical Ballads*. For example, Wordsworth bemoans in "Lines Written in Early Spring":

To her fair works did Nature link  
 The human soul that through me ran;  
 And much it grieved my heart to think  
 What man has made of man. (Lines 5-8)

For each writer, money and self-seeking causes man's ultimate alienation from society and destroys the romantic ideal concerning the natural world. Annemarie Estor provides a reason for this dislocation in her essay, "'We Murder to Dissect': A Philosophy of Science in *Lyrical Ballads*": industrialization causes "man [to] move away from an idyllic state of nature, maybe from paradise; and human nature [becomes] estranged from its former true identity" (103). Estor, employing romantic discourse, suggests technical progress alienates the individual from his/her cultural past as he/she becomes an apostate, rejecting Nature by bowing to a mechanical god.

De Quincey's fear concerning the loss of the intrinsic identity of English society is acutely expressed in his brief essay, "The Palimpsest." De Quincey, describing the physical process of superimposing a text onto another to construct the palimpsest, asks his audience to imagine

a parchment which contained some Grecian tragedy, the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, or the Phoenissae of Euripides. This had possessed a value almost inappreciable in the eyes of accomplished scholars, continually growing rarer through generations. But four centuries are gone by since the destruction of the Western Empire. Christianity, with towering grandeurs of another class, has founded a different empire; and some bigoted yet perhaps

holy monk has washed away (as he persuades himself) the heathen's tragedy, replacing it with a monastic legend; which legend is disfigured with fables in its incidents, and yet, in a higher sense, is true, because interwoven with Christian morals and with the sublimest of Christian revelations. (142)

The monk's creation of the palimpsest essentially instigates the eradication of one society's cultural origins. The palimpsest represents—for De Quincey—not the natural progression of history but rather a violent imperial-like expansion, the ruthless erasure of one historical document by another (Dillon, "Reinscribing" 254). Much like monk's Christian legend, the industrial revolution and the commoditization of London and Manchester has superimposed self-making and the pursuit for glory onto the primordial and intrinsic values that should govern English society.

Much of Wordsworth's poetry in *Lyrical Ballads* expresses feelings similar to those evident in De Quincey's "The Palimpsest" by depicting the horror of cultural erasure. For example, in Wordsworth's "The Female Vagrant" a young girl lives with her father in a realm of "sweeter pleasure" until a "stately hall" rises up in the woods and brings the threat of industrialization with it (9, 12). Commercialization quickly blankets the father's "hereditary nook" with the sorrow and destruction produced by an "evil time" of industry and commerce (17, 64). Wordsworth's phrase "evil time," employed several times within *Lyrical Ballads*, can be better defined as a moment in which an outside societal force suddenly breaches and corrupts a moment of pastoral happiness and consequently destroys peaceful bucolic lives. The totality of Wordsworth's images of anomie forewarn—as lucidly expressed in the Preface—against "the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities" and strive to instill a desire for change within Wordsworth's audience (64). Wordsworth

embeds a theme of redemption into *Lyrical Ballads* not by writing for the bucolic but rather writing about rural life for the enlightenment of the city dweller (Heffernan 424). Wordsworth's project strives to eliminate the anomic condition plaguing urbanites by demanding that humanity abjure the socially constructed values of industry and return to a fundamental understanding of human nature.

City life subjugates the populace to a number of various stimuli that can overpower the creative mind. De Quincey indubitably felt this socialized strain while staying in Manchester and traveling through London on his summer holiday in 1800. Georg Simmel in his essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," notes that "with each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life" (48). In order to manage the influx of incessant stimulation, Simmel suggests the metropolitan man "reacts with his head instead of his heart" (48). De Quincey's essay, "The Nation of London," provides an excellent illustration of Simmel's notion. The essay recounts De Quincey's vacation in London and the many monuments and museums he witnessed while staying there.

De Quincey describes his experience at St. Paul's stating "one thing interrupted our pleasure. The superb objects of curiosity within the Cathedral were shown for separate fees" (115). The commoditization of relics located in the Cathedral corrupted the perceptions of awe that should derive from the grandeur of St. Paul's. In De Quincey's London, beauty has become merely another means to a desired end. De Quincey writes that throughout St. Paul's he was "followed by a sort of Persecution—'Would we not see the bell?'—'Would we not see the model?'—'Surely we would not go away without visiting the Whispering Gallery?' solicitations which troubled the silence and sanctity of the place" (115). In London, men's hearts cannot

generate feelings of awe and inspiration from art because their heads are continually being bombarded by the stimulant most valuable to society: money. In order to avoid the anomic condition propagated by the metropolitan life, De Quincey required a deliverance from the conflicting forces of social strain. De Quincey, as a young boy, found himself forced to live in a city ““where the soul and universal object of pursuit [was] precisely that which [he held] most in abhorrence” (Rzepka 152). De Quincey’s saving grace would arrive in 1802 with the republication of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*. Through poetry, De Quincey aspired to reconnect with “the real language of men” and discover a method for recovering the romantic visions he had lost while living in a world of strife (Wordsworth 57).

Albeit De Quincey’s essay, “The Palimpsest,” expresses an overwhelming anxiety concerning England’s cultural effacement due to industry and imperialism, it simultaneously conveys De Quincey’s hope for redemption. As Sarah Dillon notes in *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*, the palimpsest’s most intriguing characteristic is that “although the first writing on the vellum *seemed* to have been eradicated after treatment, it was often imperfectly erased. Its ghostly trace then reappeared in the following centuries as the iron in the remaining ink reacted with the oxygen in the air producing a reddish-brown oxide” (12 emphasis Dillon). The palimpsest—by its very definition—suggests the possibility of regaining cultural origins. Thus, the pagan Greek tragedy enveloped by the monk’s Christian beliefs may be recovered regardless of the violent seizure of historical documents the palimpsest originally signified. Although De Quincey clearly understands the scriptural death that must ensue to create palimpsests, he also recognizes the possible resurrection that can transpire following the effacement of a text (Dillon 26). De Quincey’s hope for salvation, his expectation of the reappearance of lost culture, likely developed as a response to his understanding of

Wordsworth's theory of aesthetics and his description of the palimpsest mimics Wordsworth's definition of the poetic process. In the Preface, Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (82).

Throughout much of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth attempts to recover the lost nature of humanity by rejecting the ideology of the urbanite and generating a new counter-culture in its place. As stated in "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth's project asks humanity to find "repose" from a harsh social world and discover "tranquil restoration" in the natural world (9, 31). Jonathan Arac notes in "Romanticism, the Self, and the City: *The Secret Agent in Literary History*" that Wordsworth "turns from the city to the country as a counterstatement, a contrast. The very word "country" derives etymologically from *contra*, 'against'" (77-78). Wordsworth's embittered response to industrialization can be better understood as a coping process called rebellion as outlined in strain theory. Strain theory posits "when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain *common* symbols of success *for the population at large* while its social structure rigorously restricts or completely eliminates access to approved methods of acquiring these symbols" an individual becomes socially strained and can only function unhappily (Merton 680). Social strain, as Robert Agnew adds in "Strain, Personality Traits, and Delinquency: Extending General Strain Theory," does not only occur through a failure to achieve culturally desired goals but rather,

there are three major types of strain or negative relationships: others may

(1) prevent individuals from achieving their positively valued goals, including monetary, status, and autonomy goals; (2) remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli. . .(3) present or threaten to present individuals with noxious or negatively valued stimuli. (44)



Wordsworth's social strain, as defined by Agnew, stems from category two and three. He—much like De Quincey—viewed industry and moneymaking as negative stimuli threatening his romantic vision concerning the individual's ability to tap into his/her intrinsic nature. Robert K. Merton, in "Social Structure and Anomie," demonstrates five coping strategies individuals utilize to combat social strain. Individuals that rebel, such as Wordsworth, reject the socialized ideal for success and substitute new goals and standards in its place.

Disgusted by the metropolis, Wordsworth fashions an attractive surrogate lifestyle for strained individuals living within the city by eradicating the previously held aspirational reference (i.e. socialized goals) and replacing it with a new end for both people and poets;

like most visions of authenticity, Wordsworth's requires a state of debasement as its foil. When Wordsworth asserts that poetry's highest calling is to bring 'man' face to face with 'men,' he sets poetry the task of purifying various corrupt communities where men are not their proper selves and speaking has lost its immediacy. (Rieder 14)

Wordsworth presents Nature, tranquility, and community as goals for mankind in a response to the system of individuality, opulence, propriety, and dominance encompassed by commerce. Thus, Wordsworth's poetry is essentially sociological in its construction. He observed the passions dwelling in the lives of the rural poor and composed a new understanding of social coherence derived from the generality of humankind (Hewitt 81). In creating new success-symbols within *Lyrical Ballads* and the theory of poetics from which it was produced, Wordsworth coped with the "evil time" generated by industrialization and capitalism with a form of Merton's rebellion. In order to find freedom from the social strain generated by the "stately

hall[s]” of a commercialized society, the individual must rediscover his/her nature by either fleeing or fighting its destructive grasp.

De Quincey, as a young man in Manchester and London, certainly indentified with the anomic condition portrayed in *Lyrical Ballads* and would have yearned for the possibility of salvation evident in Wordsworth’s poetry. A young De Quincey would have venerated the radical lifestyle Wordsworth embraced as an antagonistic reaction to the world of strife that surrounded him. Wordsworth became De Quincey’s romantic hero; a figure that could aid De Quincey in eliminating the pain of life by helping the young man recover the romantic aspirations he lost in Manchester and London: a poet that could reclaim the lost ink on England’s social palimpsest. Wordsworth’s poem, “Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree, Which Stands Near the Lake of Esthwaite, on a Desolate Part of the Shore, Yet Commanding a Beautiful Prospect,” wonderfully recapitulates De Quincey’s idealization of Wordsworth’s poetic process; the title suggests as much. Wordsworth juxtaposes the word “desolate” with several words his audience would not expect to see in a barren wasteland: “commanding,” beautiful,” and “prospect.”

The arrangement of words produces an oxymoronic effect that implicates the experimental nature of Wordsworth’s poetry while simultaneously advocating its necessity. By using the word “prospect,” Wordsworth relocates hope to an arena previously perceived as “desolate,” or forlorn. John Rieder argues in his book, *Wordsworth’s Counterrevolutionary Turn: Community, Virtue, and Vision in the 1790’s*, that Wordsworth substitutes “each mode of corruption [with] a purified counterpart in rural life” (15). Thus, Wordsworth rejects the common cultural view and replaces it with new aspirations. Rather than looking to the metropolis and

money as the means to acquiring success, Wordsworth's title suggests mankind can discover hope simply by looking at a few "Lines Left Upon the Seat of a Yew-Tree."

Wordsworth opens the poem by calling out to the weary traveler:

Nay, traveler! rest. This lonely yew-tree stands

Far from all human dwelling: what if here. . .

the wind breathe soft, the curling waves,

That break against the shore, shall lull thy mind. (1-2, 4-5)

The lines request the tired and broken traveler to "rest" in order to become soothed by a soft wind produced in tranquility. Only by pacifying the relentless stimuli of city life, can art and nature become "purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects...[i.e.] being less under the influence of social vanity" (Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* 61).

The desire for glory and wealth imbued within the metropolitan society forces humanity to only look at the present in order to evaluate personal success; as urbanites they only consume art for money and entertainment. Likewise, "Lines Left Upon the Seat of a Yew-Tree" uses the language of consumption in order to derive its meaning. The speaker states

the world, for so it thought,

Owed him no service: wherefore at once

With indignation, turned himself away,

And with the food of pride sustained his soul

In solitude (19-23).

Wordsworth's speaker relates the tale of a man who maintained "lofty hopes" for what the world of science and industry could provide him but rather discovered a place of "dissolute tongues, and jealousy, and hate, / and scorn (14, 17-18). During a period of anomie and social strain, the

man rebels from city life and embraces the power of Nature. As a result, the man ultimately consumes his pride and discovers his soul. Wordsworth's "Lines Left Upon the Seat of a Yew-Tree," as a product of Wordsworth's poetic theory, provides a new direction for English citizens and poets; the lines serve as the antithesis of a popularized poetry that consumes art to sustain pride. For Wordsworth, a poet desiring to uncover the heart of man should look "rather to nature than to manners" (*Lyrical Ballads* 63). Only in rejecting the attitudes constructing the anomic conditions in society can humanity recover its "nature...in such connection with each other" (63). De Quincey, viewing himself as an insignificant agent in the Manchester school system, would have recognized his own strained existence while reading the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*. He would have likely compared himself to the weary traveler in Wordsworth's "Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" and as a result perceived the traveler's withdrawal from society as an acceptable method for obtaining tranquility. As a result, Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* introduced an alternative means for expressing masculinity and success that a seventeen-year-old De Quincey wholeheartedly embraced; in 1802 he quit his books and adopted the rebellious spirit he perceived as the defining characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry.

## SECTION TWO

The Transfiguration of Dreams Into Nightmares: Thomas De Quincey, Euripides, and the

### Tragedy of Expectation

De Quincey's 1803 diary provides a considerable amount of insight into the young man's hopes and expectations for the future. In fact, it is from this text that most of the evidence concerning De Quincey's early hero-worship of Wordsworth emerges. In De Quincey's eyes, Wordsworth was a superb poet presenting a divergent model of masculinity that could deliver the naïve child from a "world of strife" into a Romantic utopia. Grevel Lindop notes in his

Biography of De Quincey, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey*, that De Quincey “consistently attached to his dreams” the thought “of becoming a famous writer at a period long before he had written anything” (137). In particular, it was the aspiration of producing a “Poetical Tragical Drama” that predominated the thoughts of De Quincey in 1803 (23).

De Quincey’s references to Wordsworth and Euripides’ influence early in *Confessions* perfectly attest to his adolescent ambition and—more importantly—structures *Confessions* in such a manner that the text actualizes his goal of creating a Romantic tragedy. By utilizing allusions to two great poets, De Quincey creates two distinct directions for his life when leaving Manchester Grammar School. Albeit De Quincey compared Euripides and Wordsworth because of their use of demotic diction, he believed each poet employed the device for drastically different reasons (Jordan 188). In one pocket De Quincey has Wordsworth, representing a Romantic ideal that presents both an alternative means for success and the possibility of finding tranquility and solidarity amongst men in a world plagued by afflictions. In the other pocket De Quincey has Euripides, a dramatist whose work to the nineteenth-century audience was perceived as being violent, squalid, and divided against itself (Michelini 702). The imagery of chaos evident in the work of Euripides parallels the life of the opium-eater—himself—and serves as a constant reminder that although an individual may run from his/her strife, the universe’s furies will always be nearby. De Quincey’s references to Wordsworth and Euripides thus construct a dichotomy of conflicting forces: Wordsworth signifying hope and Euripides the dismal reality of fate. It is when reality superimposes itself upon the Wordsworthian desire for social harmony that De Quincey’s tragedy ensues. Appropriately recapitulating the tragedy of expectation in his 1803 diary, De Quincey states: “Every excellence draws with {after} it its kindred defects” (27).

Excellence, as instructed by the public school system, signifies one individual's supremacy over another. In "I Am Introduced to the Warfare of a Public School," De Quincey recalls the many competitions, concerning who could produce the most eloquent verses in Greek, he and his fellow classmates were forced to have. De Quincey demonstrates the competition's importance by including a brief anecdote about a confrontation with a older and stronger boy. Angry with De Quincey for writing the best verse in class, the older student demands that De Quincey write worse or be physically "annihilate[d]" (91). The public schools of the nineteenth century believed the classics to be a course of study necessary for demonstrating prestige and exuding one's social status (Waters 18). Therefore, the battle between De Quincey and the "annihilator" represents much more than the facility to write in Greek: it is warfare for an individual's hierarchal conservation.

De Quincey portrays the public school system as a Hobbesian dystopia in which students war for reputation. Hobbes argues in *Leviathan* that the "natural condition of mankind" produces three causes for quarrel: "First, competition, second, diffidence, and third, glory" (82). The public school fosters this natural condition rather than restraining it—as Hobbes believed education could—by forcing students to conform to a standard of aggressive manliness and continual compete for rank (De Quincey 90). De Quincey states that because the school system was ridden with contention, he desired to flee and discover a "freedom from strife": "I detested distinctions that were connected with mortification to others; and even if I could have got over *that*, the eternal feud fretted and tormented my nature" (91 emphasis De Quincey). Matthew Schneider states in *Original Ambivalence: Autobiography and Violence in Thomas De Quincey* that "Hobbes's proto-Enlightenment, and therefore mechanistic theories of the operations of human consciousness and society clashed with De Quincey's more Romantic, and therefore

organic views on the same subjects” (29). Thus, because the school system symbolized—for De Quincey—a Hobbesian war zone where student battled student, it was necessary for him to abjure the school system completely and adopt a Wordsworthian Romanticism that rebelled against a hostile industrial society through the equalization of mankind.

The many descriptions of social solidarity evident in the poetry of Wordsworth most likely attracted a young and diffident De Quincey. Margret Russett in *De Quincey's Romanticism: Canonical Minority and the Forms of Transmission* states De Quincey indentified with *Lyrical Ballads*, “found himself. . . in reading ‘We Are Seven,’” and was extremely fond of “Tintern Abbey”(16). Interestingly, the poems De Quincey found most alluring deal with the issues of friendship among equals and the maintenance of fellowship amongst men. In Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven,” the speaker bewildered by an eight year old girl’s lack of knowledge concerning death, cries

‘But they are dead—those two are dead!

Their spirits are in heaven!’

‘Twas throwing words away, for still

The little maid would have her will

And said, ‘Nay, we are seven!’ (Lines 65-69)

De Quincey would have indubitably indentified with “We Are Seven” and situated his own family into the poem itself. The little cottage girl, who De Quincey would most likely have associated with his favorite sister, Elizabeth, finds familial solidarity in the presence of complete chaos. The mathematical truth of the subtraction problem Wordsworth presents suggests that “ye are only five” (35). However, the little girl resists a dismal reality and finds comfort in remembering her deceased siblings by maintaining an imaginary community regardless of what a

higher authority suggests. De Quincey would have found comfort in reading “We Are Seven” because he “believed that [his sister,]Elizabeth’s[,] death gave his mind a permanent tinge of melancholy” (Lindop 10). “We Are Seven” thus presented De Quincey with a method for dealing with the depression and strife life generated by providing a solution in the form of imaginary solidarity.

“Tintern Abbey” also relies on a sense of familial fellowship to achieve its desired affect. Like “We Are Seven,” “Tintern Abbey” expresses the necessity for solidarity and portrays friendship as a vital organ for future growth. The speaker, Wordsworth, following a description of the natural scenery, desires to guide the poem’s protagonist, Dorothy, into the transitional rite of passage from an orgiastic love of nature to a deeper and more profound “sober pleasure, when thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms” (142-3). De Quincey desired a similar relationship with Wordsworth in which the great poet could usher him into the realm of the truly sublime. De Quincey believed that by quitting his books and living a life amongst the common man that he could ultimately discover the secret to obtaining transcendence. However, as Alina Clej argues in *A Genealogy of the Modern Self: Thomas De Quincey and the Intoxication of Writing*, De Quincey’s hopes and expectations ultimately stem from “a lofty, almost inaccessible ego ideal represented by Wordsworth” (149).

Wordsworth, simply put, is a phenomena: a poet who discovers tranquility by rejecting the economic world because he had the means to do so. De Quincey, on the other hand, by rejecting his role as an insignificant agent in an industrialized society discovers—as Schneider puts it—“not a marriage of mind and nature, but the necessity of human exchange. Even the philosopher needs food” (70). The Romantic utopia De Quincey fabricates around his idealization of Wordsworth thus remains in constant contention with a reality that cannot be



escaped: i.e. the conflicting truth that strife is unavoidable. As the product of pastoral conventions much of *Lyrical Ballads*, especially the poems De Quincey found most alluring, rely on a larger design that rivals a chimerical vision of society with grim verisimilitude and expresses mankind's need for escape into the fanciful (Lawall 10). Thus, De Quincey's understanding of Wordsworth fabricates a semblance that social strain can be eclipsed by tranquility while the mechanized society that produces strife proves otherwise.

In 1803 De Quincey, believing he had discovered "the source of happiness," created a list that ranked the objects and feelings that granted mankind the most pleasure: "1. Poetry; -2. Pathos; -3. Glory" (20). De Quincey's top two choices obviously derive from his love of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and conform to his childhood aspirations of becoming a Romantic artist. Yet, uncharacteristically, De Quincey assigns "Glory" as the third source of happiness. The word "glory," as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, signifies "the disposition to claim honour for oneself; boastful spirit" (*Glory OED*). De Quincey absconded Manchester Grammar School for the purpose of escaping constant battles for distinction. Why then would De Quincey include the word "glory" in his list concerning the sources of happiness? The socialized pursuit for glory—representing a real world norm—naturally conflicts with the solidarity evident in Wordsworth's poetics. Gabriella Slomp in "Hobbes on Glory and Civil Strife" argues that "for Hobbes the desire for glory and superiority is the fundamental cause of discord in the state of nature, as well as the primary source of dissolution of political states" (190). For De Quincey, poetry serves the purpose of producing unity and initiating the advancement of society (Schneider 8). The natural desire for glory, on the other hand, demonstrates an inescapability of strife as it continually frustrates the tranquility generated by art. Therefore, De Quincey's sources of happiness are constructed as a paradox in order to portray the vulnerability of the sublime due

to unavoidable socializing agents. While Wordsworth's poetics argue for the suppression of glory, civil society forces individuals to vie for prestige in a world maintaining harsh class distinctions. Even the great advocate of Romantic harmony, Wordsworth himself, struggled to practice his own philosophy and regularly disappointed De Quincey with his egotism, a trait that contradicted the egalitarianism promoted in *Lyrical Ballads* (Schneider 46).

De Quincey's reference to Euripides, like his 1803 journal entry, delineates the incessant threat to his idealization of Wordsworth through allusion. Unlike the poetry of Wordsworth that aims to generate a sense of order and solidarity, the "poetry of Euripides," as Charles Segal notes in *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' "Bacchae,"* utilizes "the myths of the gods, more often than not, [as] a source of disorder" (339). Euripides' *Orestes*, for example, delineates human nature as a curse that afflicts all unfortunate men (125-126). The protagonists within Euripidean tragedies, such as *Orestes* and *Bacchae*, must struggle to find harmony within a world threatened by utter chaos. The plays present a balancing act in which the flawed hero must stabilize paradoxical forces while not becoming overcome by either. Segal argues that it is this "mixture and coexistence of beauty and horror, gentleness and terror, serenity and violence" that grant Euripides' plays their effectiveness (342).

Euripides' aesthetic of tragedy stems from the dramatic convention of disruption by utilizing the play's "coinciding oppositions and tautly maintained paradoxes," or *palintonos harmonia* in Greek, to instigate the protagonist's tragic fall (Segal 342). Because the paradox was "one of De Quincey's favorite mental constructions," he identified with Euripides' aesthetic and employed *palintonos harmonia* within his own works of art (Schneider 7). Lindop argues in "De Quincey and the Cursed Crocodile" that this "well-known exploitation of rhetorical contrast, tension, and antagonism" signifies "an inner tension of 'mighty discords; and 'antagonistic

forces' within the mind, from which there is no escape" (139). Structuring *Confessions* as a Euripidean tragedy, De Quincey leaves Manchester with two opposing paths—two opposing forces (pleasure and pain)—that when imbalanced lead to his final entrapment in the “Nilotic mud” (De Quincey 74).

De Quincey's states in *Confessions* that “it had been [his] intention to proceed to Westmorland, both for the love [he] bore to that country, and on other personal accounts” (11). By fleeing to Westmorland, De Quincey believed he would meet Wordsworth and discover a love of nature that could sooth his troubled soul. However, as De Quincey suggests, “accident,” or fate, “gave a different direction to his wandering” (11). Fate hinders his Romantic aspirations and De Quincey is forced into accepting a mechanistic view of life—the possible pun on “wandering” suggests as much. This fatalistic assessment of life evokes the work of Euripides' *Orestes* due to the play's paradoxical view of fate versus choice and its Hobbesian-like questioning of man's ability to be more than a mere animal (524-525).

De Quincey's rebellion, closer to a Euripidean tragedy than his romantic aprirations represented by Wordsworth, produces a situation where pain begets pains and life's marginal figures, represented as the “unhappy class,” struggle to survive in a world which mistreats them (20). Rather than discovering a utopia where high class citizens consort with the lowly bucolic, De Quincey finds a world in which men do not maintain “a powerful understanding, or unusual goodness of nature” but rather embrace the general truth that “pride. . . appears, at least, more upon the surface of their manners” (12). De Quincey discovers that the common man is “poor” and “friendless,” transfiguring Wordsworth's model to tranquility into an untouchable pariah whose “plain human nature” exposes “wretchedness” rather the grandiosity of human life (20-21). De Quincey's *Confessions* mimics a Euripidean tragedy in that it maintains a pessimistic

view of social relationships by exposing the holes in social unity due to the individual's desire for glory. Valdis Leinieks argues in *The City of Dionysus: A Study of Euripides' Bakchai* that Euripides' plays often center around the destruction of *Philia*, or family affection and fellowship, due to mankind's desire for social prominence: "What is worse, [within the play's] there is no mechanism present that could possibly improve things. *Philia*, traditionally the underlying principle of social harmony, has been completely discredited" (35). Much like a Euripidean tragedy, De Quincey's hopes for obtaining *Philia*—represented by Wordsworth's depictions of solidarity—have been perverted by socializing agents that train men to mistreat each other.

De Quincey's retreat from Manchester Grammar School validates a Hobbesian view concerning mankind rather than affirming the possibility of escaping strife as the journey's purpose intended. De Quincey's understanding of Romanticism thus becomes ambivalent—as Schneider's thesis points out; he desires to follow the ideology presented by Wordsworth yet discovers discord instead of tranquility: "As a result, De Quincey's visionary autobiographies both invoke and react against the Romantic concepts of universality, originality, and authenticity which are their basis (ix). The failure of Romanticism in adequately eradicating De Quincey's social strain greatly increases his understanding of pain, as his hopes and dreams are ultimately dashed. Euripides' dramatic process of "transmuting suffering and sorrow into the paradoxical beauty of tragedy," thus becomes reversed throughout *Confessions* as De Quincey transfigures his dashed hopes for a romantic paradise into a secondary cause of his strained existence and the primary cause of his opium addiction (Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow* 4). De Quincey aggrandizes Wordsworth's poetics only to ironically demonstrate the inaccessibility of *Lyrical Ballads* aim.

De Quincey's wanderings produce similar feelings of the "tranquil restoration—feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure" expressed in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," although corrupted (31-32). Julian North notes in "Leeches and Opium: De Quincey Replies to 'Resolution and Independence' in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*" that *Confessions* "is founded on a Wordsworthian model of memory" however it is not the transcendent power of nature but rather the "physical sufferings as an adolescent [that] have 'struck root' in him and grown 'into a noxious umbrage that has overshadowed and darkened' his later life" (572). Wordsworthian rebellion, rather than eliding strife through solidarity, intensifies De Quincey's social strain as even his alternative aspirational reference is consumed by the violence and egotism of a commercialized society. Unable to discover the tranquility evident within the works of Wordsworth, De Quincey must search for another method for assuaging his pain. As Stephen Spector nicely states in "Thomas De Quincey: Self-Effacing Autobiographer," due to De Quincey's inability to achieve Wordsworthian transcendence

De Quincey finds himself constructing an intricate Chinese box of substitutions: substituting himself for Wordsworth by living in Wordsworth's house, playing lover-father to Wordsworth's daughter, and substituting himself for Wordsworth's daughter so that he can be loved by Wordsworth. (504)

Opium, likewise, acts as a manufactured imitation of the implicit transcendence described in Wordsworth's poetry as the anodyne alleviates suffering and produces the sublime through physical intoxication.

Beginning the "Pleasures of Opium" section of *Confessions*, De Quincey states he discovered the "Paradise of Opium-eaters" on Oxford-street "near 'the *stately* Pantheon,' (as Mr Wordsworth has obligingly called it)" (38 Emphasis De Quincey). By opening "Pleasures of

Opium” with an allusion to Wordsworth, De Quincey strengthens the dichotomous relationship he constructed earlier in *Confessions* and directly connects the nature poet to his induction into the realm of opium addiction. De Quincey suggests Wordsworth, specifically his poem “The Power of Music,” can illustrate the celestial power of opium. Similar to the *Lyrical Ballads* that attracted a young De Quincey, the “Power of Music” presents a scene of undivided social solidarity providing solace for the weak. Wordsworth writes

What an eager assembly! What an empire is this!  
 The weary have life, the hungry have bliss;  
 The mourner is cheered, and the anxious have rest;  
 And the guilt-burthened soul is no longer oppress. (9-12)

Wordsworth’s poem utilizes the ideology of the Orphic mysteries, a creed that stressed the necessity of mankind to purify itself from social ills for the purpose of transmigration, in order to achieve its desired effect (*Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*). Wordsworth argues that through music mankind can find a release from the cacophony of city life and be reborn in transcendent delight.

Much like the musical power Wordsworth presents in his poem, De Quincey presents opium as an overwhelming power that has the ability to heal all wounds. Opium allows De Quincey to forget his struggles as they vanish and become a mere “trifle in [his] eyes” (39). Furthermore, opium has the capability to usher the user into the realm of the truly sublime. De Quincey states the opium-eater “feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount; that is, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity; and all is the great light of majestic intellect” (42). Because Wordsworth’s ideology failed to eliminate socialized strain and effectuate tranquility in De Quincey’s life, the opium-eater must find solace through the oblivion of

intoxication and elevate his sense of self-worth and poetic capability through drug-induced delusions. Opium allows the opium-eater to become fully integrated into English society by expunging all social barriers through the drug's "exquisite order, legislation, and harmony" (De Quincey, *Confessions* 40).

De Quincey's opium revelries mimic liminal ritualism, a key component to the rites of Dionysus. The primary purpose of liminal ritual is to construct solidarity and *communitas* through the obfuscation of social barriers (Csapo 254). De Quincey states he "had no labours that [he] rested from; no wages to receive" and essentially no need "to care for Saturday night," yet because opium consoles the spirit similarly to a Saturday night for the working class, the opium-eater finds kinship with the unfortunate drudge of commercialized society (46). Josephine McDonagh argues in *De Quincey's Disciplines*, "opium ensures the elision of difference, so that opposite events provoke the same response" (160). Albeit De Quincey cannot truly understand the labors of the working poor, opium allows the eater to find comfort in attending an opera and obtaining a "common link of brotherhood" with those of a less fortunate status (De Quincey 46). De Quincey states following opium use "on a Saturday night, [he feels] as though [he] also were released from the yoke of labour, had some wages to receive, and some luxury of repose to enjoy" (47).

Simply put, opium gives a previously worthless De Quincey purpose. Opium allows De Quincey to feel as if he were one of the individuals in Wordsworth's "Power of Music" who acquire freedom and friendship through the beautiful songs of Orpheus. Yet, in De Quincey's case, solidarity derives from the voices of a working class England who also struggle with socialized strain and require "reposes from bodily toil" (De Quincey 46). While Wordsworth's poetry depicts the bucolic as naturally purified, De Quincey's experiences at the opera portray

the lower class as a socially hindered by “their ways and means” (47). Therefore, De Quincey employs the instruments of Dionysiac ritual to “bolster a sense of community when its social divisions threaten to tear it apart” (Csapo 254). Rather than striving to be reborn through Orphic poetry and Wordsworth’s natural method to transcendence, De Quincey embraces the rites of a Dionysiac *orgia*, a ritual that traditionally allowed the marginal figures of society to express hostility through the temporary rejection of responsibility due to the transient solace of intoxication (Kraemer 80). Like the individuals of Wordsworth’s poem, De Quincey becomes one of many mesmerized by “a centre of light” that eradicates all class structure and privilege allowing mankind to avoid continual pursuits (Wordsworth 14). However, De Quincey’s reiteration expresses a pessimistic worldview that all men inevitably suffer “irremediable evils, or irreparable losses” constructed by mechanized society to which they must submit and medicate (47). The only means for escaping strife, as De Quincey suggests, is to “overrule all feelings into a compliance with the master key,” a statement that greatly contrasts Wordsworth’s Romantic philosophy (47).

Wordsworth argues, by using the “Power of Music,” even the poor “one-pennied Boy” can find happiness and solidarity within the songs of Orpheus (28). Yet, by directly comparing opium with Wordsworth’s illustrations of solidarity and replacing music with a new “happiness [that] might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket: portable ecstasies might now be had corked up in a pint bottle; and peace of mind could be sent down by gallons by the mail coach,” De Quincey implies that he has replaced the power of poetics with the orgiastic pleasure of opium (39). De Quincey, acting as Wordsworth’s “one-pennied Boy,” finds harmony through opium and as a result replaces the works of his favorite English poet with a newly acquired man-made cure for sorrow. However, De Quincey’s Dionysiac ritualism comes with a



cost as the rites of the god traditionally involve the revelers in complete subjugation by an external bestial power (Csapo 264). Furthermore, by replacing Wordsworth's poetry Euripides depiction of the Dionysiac rites, De Quincey disrupts the *palintonos harmonia* between the two poets and inadvertently induces his own tragic demise.

De Quincey's early opium experiences provided him with an avenue for integration into English society and achieve the feelings of *communitas* he greatly desired. Yet, once De Quincey began excessively indulging in his opium intake he discovered that the "markets and theaters are not the appropriate haunts of the opium-eater, when in the divinest state incident enjoyment. In that state crowds become an oppression to him; music even, to sensual and gross" (48). Albeit De Quincey utilized opium to find a bond between men, the intensity and demand for the drugs intoxicating agents adversely instigate the opium-eater's retreat from society. Because social strain provided the common link between the poor and the opium-eater, De Quincey states that he would regularly draw from opium as a "means of consoling himself" from the working classes troubles (47). In order to avoid becoming "hypochondriacally melancholy" and avoid his "tendencies in [his] own thoughts to do all he could to counteract [it]," De Quincey leaves London in order to stand at a distance from the cacophony of human suffering (48-49).

De Quincey begins his "Introduction to the Pains of Opium" by setting the scene "250 miles away" from the uproar of the metropolis in a cottage "buried in the depth of mountains" (De Quincey 50-51). The opium-eater has successfully freed himself from the "persecutions of the chapel-bell," i.e. he has no responsibilities to wake up for, and may write his "Greek epigrams" without hindrance or the threat of annihilation. De Quincey informs his audience that the year 1812 was one of the healthiest periods of his life and in 1816 his opium use decreased

drastically due to his elevated spirits (51, 55). Striving to relate the source of his joy to his audience, De Quincey briefly “lay[s] down an analysis of happiness” (58).

De Quincey begins this examination by developing an image of a small cottage that stands far away from any town and contains an occupant with a solitary lifestyle. Following a description of the quaint cottage, De Quincey implores that the audience imagine that a harsh winter with “snow, hail [and] frost” overhangs the household as the foreboding threat acts as the “most important point to the science of happiness” (59). He writes, “surely everybody is aware of the divine pleasures which attend a winter fire-side: candles at four o’clock, warm hearth-rugs, tea, a fair tea-maker, shutters closed, curtains flowing in ample draperies on the floor, whilst the wind an rain are raging audibly without” (59). De Quincey’s analysis serves a an attempt to make the conciliatory power of opium accessible to his audience. The cottage, providing physical comfort from the tumultuous elements outside, mirrors opium’s celestial agency to produce emotional repose from psychological torment. Happiness therefore—as De Quincey argues—derives from the comfort of security, i.e. the elimination of pain.

Throughout 1816 De Quincey found happiness because he had successfully shut out the strife of the world and was comfortable within the safety of his cottage. However, as De Quincey’s 1803 diary attests the sources of happiness are constantly under attack. The arrival of the Malay in the “Introduction to the Pains of Opium,” depicted as a reversal of De Quincey’s understanding of the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*, signifies the intrusion of the outside world into the security of the home, or the intrusion of emotional agony into the mind of the opium-eater. The many refuges depicted throughout De Quincey’s texts generally collapse at the hands of a greater and stronger societal force. As John Wale notes in “De Quincey, Landscape, and Spiritual History,” even the iconic Dove Cottage and the presence of tranquility it embodies in

*Confessions* falls victim to the outside world due to its feeble barriers (7). The Malay, for De Quincey, represents the corruption of Wordsworthian primitivism and functions as a “Dark Interpreter,” a figure that exposes hidden truths in *Suspiria de Profundis*. Symbolizing this, the Malay acts a “Greek chorus” that albeit reveals nothing new ultimately forces the audience “to recall [their] own lurking thoughts—hidden for the moment or imperfectly developed;” emotions that develop morals, decode mysteries, and “justif[y] Providence” (157).

The Malay, as a Greek chorus, strengthens *Confessions* connection with Euripidean tragedy and draws De Quincey closer to recognition. De Quincey’s description of the Malay’s entrance into the cottage produces an interesting scene in which a young girl “who had never seen an Asiatic dress of any sort” becomes unwillingly forced to stand beside the dark stranger: “he had placed himself nearer to the girl than she seemed to relish; though her native spirit of the mountain intrepidity contended with the feeling of simple awe which her countenance expressed as she gazed upon the tiger-cat before her” (56). Like a Greek tragedy, De Quincey employs the convention of the statuesque in order to conjure feelings about action rather than portraying action itself (Jordan 191). De Quincey’s vivid but immobile imagery relies on juxtaposition and antithesis to achieve its desired effect: “the beautiful English face of the girl, and its exquisite fairness, together with her erect and independent attitude, contrasted with the sallow and bilious skin of the Malay” (56). The very presence of the Malay forces the spirit of the mountain to escalate within the young girl and her beautiful English face becomes enveloped by the dark Asiatic descriptions of stranger. Mimicking Wordsworthian transcendence, the young girls and De Quincey’s inner passions are stimulated by the primitivism of the Malay however, as Angela Leighton argues in “De Quincey and Women,” the truth he evokes “can only be unlocked in a movement of violent expropriation, which has ringing sexual overtones to it” (168). The Malay

enters De Quincey's repose and by disrupting its security forces the opium-eater outdoors into "Asiatic scenes" (De Quincey 72).

The entrance of the Malay presents De Quincey with the understanding that other cultures also suffer from the "pains of wandering" and likewise seek a "solitary life" to escape the turmoil of social strain (57). The Malay thus demonstrates unity with De Quincey by eating opium, an act that connects the two through the rite of *orgia*. The Malay, as a the "Dark Interpreter," takes on a similar role to Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae* by attempting to elide difference between De Quincey and himself. Segal argues it is Dionysus's task to reveal hidden truths "by converting him into his apparent opposite, reveling the concealed sameness of identity beneath apparent polarity" (29). De Quincey strengthens the connection between himself and the ancient revelers of Euripides' *Bacchae* who find "joy in eating raw flesh," by equating opium and the consumption of meat (138). De Quincey suggests that Dryden and Fuseli "thought it proper to eat raw meat for the sake of obtaining splendid dreams" and argues that opium produces a similar effect (72). Although the Malay transports De Quincey to "Asiatic scenes," the nightmares, like Wordsworth's bucolic passions, derive from "the cradle of the human race" and expose the generality of mankind (73).

De Quincey's dreams interestingly begin within the comfort of the Lake District but abruptly aggrandize into ominous oceans depicting the "tyranny of the human face": the "rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to appear: the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens: faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing, surged upwards by the thousands, by myriads, by generations, by centuries" (72). The tranquility of Grasmere's lakes morph, due to De Quincey's traumatic London life, into a Styx-like sea of woe. The image presented in the ocean exposes the infiniteness of strife as centuries of individuals

look to De Quincey with countenances of pain and suffering. Appropriately, De Quincey's image of the tyrannical ocean seemingly emulates the visual strategies of Hobbes *Leviathan* and the work of Abraham Bosse that acted as the works frontispiece: a sovereign body constructed from countless human faces all looking towards the heavens and relinquishing their power to a far superior being (Bredenkamp 30). Thus, De Quincey's opium nightmares recall his initial flight from glory and demonstrate the opium-eater's inability to escape a world of strife. De Quincey states in *Confessions* that in his dreams "brooded a sense of eternity and infinity that drove [him] into an oppression as of madness" (74). Within the opium-eater's nightmares, Malays beget Malays and De Quincey soon lives amongst beasts and reptiles, the crocodile being the most abhorrent, and must "shudder at the mystic sublimity of *castes*" (73). Interestingly, the caste system instigates fear in De Quincey and "from kindred feelings, [he] soon brought Egypt and all her gods under the same law" (73). Through hierarchal distinctions De Quincey discovers the strain and strife of the world and through human suffering the opium-eater finds the commonalty of mankind.

Departing from Egypt, De Quincey enters Jerusalem and under the "Judean palms" sees poor Ann the prostitute with no name (76). The opium-induced dream transfigures Ann into the tearful Mary Magdalene and exposes a history of outcast women desperately awaiting redemption. From Jerusalem, De Quincey returns full-circle to London and finds himself "far away from mountains, and by lamp-light in Oxford-street, walking again with Ann—"once again one amongst the pariahs (76). De Quincey's opium nightmares, like much of his life, provide a dismal recognition: mankind will always be a war with strain and every time a "final hope for human nature" was produced in De Quincey's eyes,

somewhere, [he] knew not where—somehow, [he] knew not how—by some beings, I knew not whom—a battle, a strife, an agony, was conducting,—was evolving like a great drama, or a piece of music; with which the sympathy was the more insupportable from confusion as to its place, its cause, its nature, and its possible issue.” (De Quincey 77)

De Quincey’s indistinguishable war was residing in his coat-pockets all along; a war between hope and fate, pleasure and pain, transcendence and intoxication. In the end, as De Quincey famously stated, it was opium that ultimately won the contest: “opium, is the true hero of the tale; and the legitimate centre on which the interest revolves” (78).

## CHAPTER TWO

## Thomas De Quincey's Retreat Into the "Nilotic Mud": Orientalism as a Response to Social Strain

Much of the recent criticism concerning De Quincey's *Confessions* has focused on De Quincey's loss of agency over opium use—primarily, his ultimate orientalization realized as a consequence of his addiction. In fact, as Daniel Sanjiv Roberts notes in "Mix(ing) a Little with Alien Natures': Biblical Orientalism in De Quincey," "Thomas De Quincey's opium nightmares...have become a touchstone of Romantic orientalism in the wake of Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*" (19). The self-enslavement depicted in the writings of De Quincey has justifiably given right to many critics to label him a pariah figure within their works and has produced a scholarly desire to understand the orientalizing processes of opium on the opium-eater. Josephine McDonagh, for example, argues "as the source of his impoverishment, the cause of his ill health, the agent of his lost will, the origin of his dreams, the material of his best work, and the genesis of his identity, opium was surely the single most important factor in De Quincey's life" (184). Opium addiction indubitably aided in De Quincey's ultimate pariahdom. However, suggesting that opium serves as the only explanation for De Quincey's alienation from English society seems rather unsound. Accepting a premise that suggests an oriental drug accrues orientalization often creates important and logical conclusions concerning De Quincey's work but also simultaneously ignores other social factors that explicate the cause of De Quincey's alienation. Therefore, I would like to ignore (to some extent) the concept of opium as an orientalizing agent and focus the argument around a pre-orientalized De Quincey and the idea of opium as a coping mechanism.

Within his essay, “The English Mail-Coach,” De Quincey presents an eloquent argument concerning the elements required for producing an English identity through a collective nationality. De Quincey states that the mail-coach—as a symbol of that nationality—produces a “mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and so far in danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *baton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony like that of heart, veins, and arteries, in a healthy animal organisation” (183). De Quincey’s initial attraction to the Post-office service stems from his desire for national solidarity. However, De Quincey’s inclusion of the word “slave” also provides a negative aspect of that nationality; it creates a rigid socializing force that individuals must negotiate in order to be considered truly English. Anne Frey notes in her essay, “De Quincey’s Imperial Systems,” that De Quincey depicts “nationalism [as] descend[ing] onto English people rather than rising from them. De Quincey’s portrayal of the mail’s agency suggests that [Linda] Colley’s model of national identification as a moment of spectacular exchange neglects the role that organizations play in determining the very categories with which people identify” (42). In unifying the country, the mail-coach grants every individual a certain function, like that of a physical organ or instrument, to create both a larger and stronger “national organ” that embodies the essence of British identity and fabricates the symbols of success for every English citizen (184).

Throughout the “English Mail-Coach,” De Quincey portrays speed, power and progress as the foremost traits that define the Englishmen and his mail-coach. De Quincey achieves this representation of England by utilizing images of kings, emperors, chariot-like races, war, and man’s power exude over the animal kingdom: images that all demonstrate Briton’s imperial ascendancy. In a passage that could easily be deemed the most lavishly bizarre of the essay, De Quincey describes Mr. Waterton’s domination of the crocodile to portray England’s ascendancy:



Mr. Waterton changed the relations between the animals. The mode of escaping from the reptile he showed to be, not by running away, but by leaping on its back, booted and spurred. The two animals had misunderstood each other. The use of the crocodile has now been cleared up—it is to be ridden; and the use of man is, that he may improve the health of the crocodile by riding him a fox-hunting before breakfast. (198)

Mr. Waterton, as described in this passage, represents the ideal Englishman as he assumes all three traits constituting the British identity symbolized by the English mail-coach. Mr. Waterton demonstrates power by becoming master of the crocodile, and demonstrates speed and progress by “leaping on its back” transforming “a slow coach” into one that will “take a six-barred gate” (De Quincey 198). Mr. Waterton’s supremacy over the crocodile raises him to the status of an alpha-male that exhibits hegemonic masculinity, or cultural dominance, that was so important to nineteenth-century English imperialism. Furthermore, De Quincey states that Mr. Waterton utilizes the crocodile for hunting foxes. The image of fox-hunting is of importance, for it also elevates Mr. Waterton in the realm of social status. De Quincey’s use of fox-hunting, a sport that Linda Colley argues in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* was an “expression of the new patriotic, patrician machismo,” grants Mr. Waterton an aristocratic grandeur to complement the previous depiction of his masculine prowess (172).

De Quincey’s amalgamation of the gentlemen and alpha-male creates an unrealistic ideal for what constitutes the essence of Englishness. Therefore, De Quincey’s idealization of the mail-coach and Mr. Waterton, as the human representation of English nationalism, creates an unachievable goal for becoming a true Englishman in his own terms. Frey argues that De Quincey’s portrayal of British nationality ultimately adulterates nation with empire:

Nation...is created by a figurative plebiscite: people are a nation when they imagine themselves to be one. Empire, on the other hand, offers subjects no choice over affiliation: empires take populations by force or coercion...A nation such as nineteenth-century Britain that defines itself as imperial must therefore combine two contradictory understandings of its purpose. De Quincey undoes this contradiction by insisting that even national identity is imperial because nationality imposes upon a citizen's other identities. (42)

For De Quincey, nationality constitutes a socializing agent that drives its population into accepting certain beliefs, aspirations, and norms that possibly conflict with individual desire and, even worse, provides a reference of British identity that cannot be successfully achieved by a majority of the population at large. De Quincey's portrayal of English identity delineates an alienating social construct that forces many individuals into a strained existence as they cannot match the criteria required by the national reference. Robert K. Merton in his influential work, "Social Structure and Anomie," provides a method for understanding the process of social strain stating

some social structures *exert a definite pressure* upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct...The first [structure] consists of culturally defined goals, purposes, and interests. It comprises a frame of aspirational reference...The second phase of the social structure defines, regulates, and controls the acceptable modes of achieving these goals. Every social group invariably couples its scale of desired ends with moral or institutional regulation of permissible and required procedures for attaining these ends. (672-673, emphasis Merton)

An imbalance of the two social structures creates a sense of strain, or anomie, within an individual because “no living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means. In other words, if his needs require more than granted...they will be under continual friction and can only function painfully” (Durkheim 246). The unrealistic ideal of English identity produced by the mail-coach pressures De Quincey into a situation where the cultural goals and interests defined by his nationality exceed his physical means to achieve them. Thus, De Quincey’s nationalism literally generates his world of strife, and ultimately leads to his continual state of anomie. De Quincey’s unachievable sense of Englishness, as presented in “The English Mail-Coach,” placed him in a constant state of social strain that he in turn combated with a combination of retreatism and self-pariahdom.

Merton argues that when an individual finds discord between societal goals and the available means for their acquisition he/she copes by adjusting or adapting into one of five distinct class types: conformity, innovation, ritualism, rebellion, and retreatism. The adaptation type most pertinent to De Quincey’s life, retreatism, occurs when an individual realizes that the cultural ideal cannot be obtained and, in turn, rejects both the nation’s aspirational reference and the institutionalized means for obtaining it. Merton argues that,

persons who “adjust” (or maladjust) in this fashion are, strictly speaking, *in* the society but not *of* it. Sociologically, these constitute the true “aliens.” Not sharing the common frame orientation, they can be included within the societal population merely in a fictional sense. In this category are *some* of the activities of psychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts.

(677, emphasis Merton)

Merton's detailed sketch of the retreatist's mentality closely resembles many of the critical descriptions of De Quincey that have accumulated over the last few decades. All of these works identify an important characteristic of De Quincey. However, they also simultaneously fail to situate his pariahdom within a proper theoretical framework. By applying strain theory to the writing and life of De Quincey, his audience can better understand his alienation from English society. De Quincey adapted to the overall strain produced by an unachievable ideal of Englishness by rejecting the ideal completely and often embracing its antithesis. Indeed, De Quincey understood and desired the values, goals, and beliefs of nineteenth-century England but was not equipped with the necessary tools to obtain them. Thus De Quincey, as a frustrated and handicapped individual, could not cope with his lot and simply dropped out (Merton, 677).

De Quincey's description of Mr. Waterton serves the role of defining quintessential Englishness but also performs the crucial function of illustrating De Quincey's personal failures and retreat. De Quincey, within the paragraph prior to his description of Mr. Waterton, presents an intriguing image of Fanny's (De Quincey's love interest) grandfather:

But, in spite of his blooming face, some infirmities he had; and one particularly, (I am very sure, no *more* than one,) in which he much resembled the crocodile. This lay in a monstrous inaptitude for turning around. The crocodile, I presume, owes that inaptitude to the absurd *length* of his back; but in our grandpapa it arose rather from the absurd *breadth* of his back, combined probably, with some growing stiffness in his legs. (196)

De Quincey's description of the coachman seems far from flattering however it successfully paints Fanny's grandfather as an extremely beastly and masculine male. The coachman has stiff

legs and a back that prohibits him from turning around. As an immobile statuesque like object, the coachman serves as a wall-like structure standing between De Quincey and his beloved Fanny. The only opportune time that De Quincey has for demonstrating his affection occurs when the coachman turns around and displays his “Jovian back” (196). With this adjective, De Quincey grants the coachman godlike status by stating that his opposition has the muscularity of Jove. Thus, Fanny’s grandfather becomes both a god and a king presiding over the weaker De Quincey. As the more vulnerable species, De Quincey must seduce Fanny behind the back of the greater crocodile rather than on top of it like the true Englishman defined by Mr. Waterton. Furthermore, the coachman’s back has an “absurd *breadth*” and thus becomes inadequate for riding upon, as an individual’s legs could not successfully wrap around it (196).

Conspicuously, the coachman presents his back to De Quincey “whilst inspecting professionally the buckles, the straps, and the silver turrets of his harness” (196-7). This sentence creates two distinct but tolerably similar readings. The coachman inspects his equipment, notably all tools for riding an animal, “professionally” suggesting that he, and not De Quincey, emanates the equestrian spirit of Mr. Waterton. Thus, the crocodile dominates the man and Englishness perishes due to De Quincey’s incompetence. However, the passage could be read by placing emphasis on the word “his.” In this reading the harness, straps, and buckles all belong to the coachman for he serves as the animal to be ridden. De Quincey does indeed display a sense of domination over the crocodilian coachman by kissing the hand of his granddaughter. Yet, De Quincey’s confidence quickly dissipates and he retracts his superiority by questioning his self worth. De Quincey, believing that he lacks ideal characteristics of Mr. Waterton, allows the internalized pressure of his perceived inadequacy to cause his retreat from the aspirational reference construed by the English mail-coach. Because De Quincey’s relationship with Fanny

was based “entirely on mail-coach allowance,” he settles on being “No. 10 or 12” in Fanny’s list of suitors, hoping that accidental or judicial deaths increase his rank (197). However, capital punishment ultimately fails to win De Quincey the heart of Fanny and he ends up as suitor “No. 199 + 1,” an enormous distance from the initial goal (197). Unable to overpower the crocodilian grandfather and match the speed of the fast-paced coach with his seductive overtures, De Quincey inevitably fails to meet the English ideal by winning the heart of Fanny. Strained by his failed nationalism, De Quincey adjusts and copes by rejecting the goal entirely and retreating in his own self-pariahdom.

The crocodile serves as a salient image throughout De Quincey’s work and quickly becomes evident that it symbolizes his failures, retreats, and overall alienation from British society. De Quincey’s choice in utilizing the crocodile to represent his pariahdom is appropriate because of the animal’s symbolic meaning during the nineteenth century. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge argue in their essay, “The Empire Bites Back: The Racialized Crocodile of the Nineteenth Century,” that throughout the period “the beast function[ed] culturally as a sign of excessive appetite, hypocrisy, violence, and, most predominantly, alterity” (249). De Quincey’s audience, and many of his critics, can easily correlate his opium abuse as the product of an excessive appetite that generated his divergence from English norms. As Canon Schmitt notes in *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality*, “the drug could call the integrity of one’s national and racial identity into question. The very title *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* declares as much” (56). Schmitt’s claim recapitulates a critical approach that predominates much scholarship of De Quincey’s work. In this sense, De Quincey’s opium use transforms him into the crocodile—namely, a symbolic representation of the degenerate nature of the drug addict. The crocodile, in this sense, reflects the horrific

understanding that all people are linked by socially unacceptable desires (Lindop, “De Quincey and the Cursed Crocodile” 138-139). Indeed, the crocodile stems, as De Quincey states himself, from “the horrid inoculation upon each other of incompatible natures” that ultimately demonstrates an individual’s own “horrid alien nature” (200-201). Such antithetical natures abide in such concepts as, enslavement and freedom or pleasure and pain. However, as shall become evident, De Quincey’s use of the crocodile represents much more than his sobriety succumbing to intoxication; it signifies a discord between an aspirational reference produced by English nationalism and ascribed means for obtaining that ideal.

De Quincey utilizes images of crocodiles, and their symbolic meanings, throughout his work to demonstrate both his desire for an English identity and his failure to successfully acquire it. Mr. Waterton’s dominance of the crocodile diminishes the power of the archaic beast by deromanticizing its mythology. In his *Essays on Natural History, Chiefly Ornithology*, Charles Waterton (Mr. Waterton) demands that his audience

reject the many fabulous accounts of the crocodile. Their shedding tears, and their devouring the young ones soon as hatched, are inventions only for the nursery fire-side...it is an ancient fable, which, like Don Quixote’s library of romances, ought to be thrown to the fire in a court yard, and there burnt with the rest of the trash. (49, 51)

De Quincey’s portrayal of the crocodile elucidates his personal distance from Mr. Waterton’s idyllic masculinity as he creates an image of a “venerable crocodile, in royal livery of scarlet and gold” (199). Although Mr. Waterton “changed the relations between the animals,” by demonstrating man’s dominion over the animal kingdom, De Quincey’s work reverts to an earlier time when man feared the serpent and always ran away from it (198). De Quincey is

unable to achieve his desires as he feels constantly watched by a domineering crocodile that is identified by its royal attire and position in society (Jagoe 29).

De Quincey, in continually retreating from the crocodile, falls farther and farther away from the English nationalism portrayed in the “English Mail-Coach.” By Romanticizing the crocodile, against Mr. Waterton’s recommendation, De Quincey successfully portrays his own subjugation to another species. In doing so, De Quincey forms a direct connection with the dominated reptile and expresses his personal feelings of inadequacy in a safe environment. De Quincey projects his strained existence onto a beast that is then ridden by a more powerful man who adheres to the aspirations of English society. Realizing that he cannot achieve the ideal that Mr. Waterton presents, De Quincey further copes with his social strain by not battling the crocodile but by identifying with the weaker imperialized species. In doing so, De Quincey falls victim to the images of dominance and inescapable nationalism that the crocodile represents and accepts his fate. Controlled by Mr. Waterton’s embodiment of English values, De Quincey becomes like the crocodile and must impart upon himself the contemptible characteristics of the reptilian beast. Leighton and Surridge suggest that “given the crocodile’s potency as a sign of otherness, it is not surprising that in the nineteenth century the battle between white man and crocodile became a potent sign of masculine and imperial power” (255). By associating with the crocodile, De Quincey ultimately relinquishes his masculinity by allowing himself to be imperialized by his own English nationalism. Understandably, “the cursed crocodile became to [De Quincey] the object of more horror than almost all the rest”—for it represented the English identity he craved and the grim fate he was ascribed (De Quincey, *Confessions* 74).

Much like “The English Mail-Coach,” De Quincey’s *Autobiographic Sketches* provide insight into his self-pariahdom. In the “Introduction to the World of Strife,” a six-year old De



Quincey becomes socially strained by his inability to live up to the demands of his older brother, William. De Quincey bemoans that he “groaned under the weight of his expectations; and, if I laid but the first round of such a staircase, why, then, I saw in a vision a vast Jacob’s ladder tower upwards to the clouds” (25). De Quincey’s Biblical allusion serves as an important feature of the passage as it holds two primary significances: First, the ladder suggests an impossible feat; an absurd climb towards heaven. William, De Quincey’s primary socializing agent after Elizabeth (the young Thomas’ maternal sister) dies, has produced an unachievable aspirational reference for the young Thomas to acquire: to be glorified in the eyes of his brother he must ascend into the heavens. However, by being a ladder to heaven an initiated climb suggests some possibility of salvation from social strain if able to meet his brother’s expectations. De Quincey presents William as the representation of an idyllic goal that he must strive for in order to find peace. However, much like the crocodilian coachman, De Quincey elevates William to a godlike status and depicts his older brother as a structural force that prohibits his progress to goal obtainment.

Rather than striving to recognize the aspirational reference provided by William, De Quincey retreats from his older brother by rejecting all masculinity. De Quincey states that he has “horrid pugilistic brothers” and that William acts as “the stormiest of his class” (23). Notably, De Quincey visualizes his brother by juxtaposing the word “pugilism” with “class.” Like Mr. Waterton, De Quincey utilizes William to represent English nationalism effectuated by imperialistic ideology conjoined with an aristocratic grandeur. William’s pugilistic qualities demonstrate his hegemonic masculinity while a possible pun on the word “class” signifies his high social status. In fact, De Quincey states later in the essay that William holds a higher rank than himself, “as an attribute inalienable from primogeniture” (44). William functions in the

*Autobiographic Sketches*—much like Mr. Waterton—as a tool to measure ideal Englishness and expose De Quincey’s own personal failure in its achievement.

De Quincey’s most recognizable failure as an imperialist occurs during a game played with William. During the inception of the game, both William and Thomas create imaginary worlds to govern as kings; De Quincey gives his kingdom the name Gombroon while William labels his Tigrosylvania. The two drastically different names bestowed to the kingdoms provide insight into the psychology occurring during the game itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word “Gombroon” as “a kind of Persian pottery, imitated in Chelsea ware” (Gombroon *OED*). Furthermore, De Quincey derived the word “Gombroon” from a wealthy Persian port that was taken and controlled by the East India Company and seen by sailors as an uninteresting and mundane place (Keay 105, 253). By utilizing the name Gombroon for his imaginary kingdom, De Quincey has granted William the right to imperialize him. De Quincey’s choice of the name Gombroon, as represented by Chelsea ware, demonstrates his clay-like malleability and as a trading post provides nations like Tigrosylvania with both the need and desire to overpower it. William, truly understanding English imperialism, realized that whoever controlled the straits and ports maintained a stranglehold on global exchange (Krishnan 211).

William’s name, Tigrosylvania, on the other hand, compliments his strong English identification. Heather Schell states within her essay, “Tiger Tales,” that a “hunter’s sense of kinship with tigers was infused with a nascent conviction that masculinity itself was essentially predatory” (230). By utilizing the word Tigrosylvania, William displays hegemonic masculinity and the prowess of the imperial hunter. Furthermore, Schell suggests that the tiger was one of the rare exotic beasts viewed as equivalent on the evolutionary scale with the Englishman during the nineteenth century, due to its respectability as both the hunter and hunted (239-240). It is

important to note that both children choose names that suggest the imperialistic nature of their game. However, while De Quincey devalues his nation by choosing the word Gombroon to define his kingdom, William preserves his honor by becoming a beast equivocal to British identity as the idea of “tiger primogeniture recognizably accommodate[ed] British values” (Schell 242). Therefore, even at the very inception of the game De Quincey allows William to overpower his nation by regressing while his brother’s progresses through its application of English values.

De Quincey’s Gombroon has been set up for failure from the time of the game’s commencement. By allowing his internalized inadequacies to generate his recoil from conflict, De Quincey essentially hands William his kingdom and allows the metaphorical crocodile to conquer his strained spirit. De Quincey’s English values demand that he imperialize but by being the weaker boy his reality fails to allow it. Thus, in order to adapt, De Quincey retreats and alienates himself from English identity entirely. De Quincey renders Gombroon poor, barbaric, isolated, and nearly vegetarian in order to prevent William from attacking. However, William with an English spirit and hundreds of soldiers who never “condescended to anything worse than sirloins of beef” advances and ultimately destroys the weaker Gombroon (47). William embraces English nationalism as beef was viewed as ideal food for the Englishman (Schell 243). Thus, by once again embracing and utilizing his Englishness, William can dominate the weaker nation. De Quincey apparently understands what values constitute the English ideal but simply fails in their overall application. Rather than embracing his English identity, De Quincey retreats and ultimately subsumes the opposite: vegetarianism. De Quincey’s kingdom greatly contrasts Colley’s portrayal of nineteenth-century English nationalism that cherished its great wealth and lack of famine (37).

Because of both De Quincey's inability to exert English masculinity and his retreatist spirit, Gombroon's citizens ultimately regress on the evolutionary scale. De Quincey's failed kingdom forces him to accept the truth that he "was king of a people that had tails" (De Quincey 53). All in all, De Quincey's fall to William ultimately aped (or crocodiled) him. De Quincey, as the king of people holding low evolutionary status, demonstrates one of the perceived characteristics of the crocodile. Due to English perceptions that the crocodile was lagging in terms of evolutionary status it was commonly presented as a symbol of primitivism and weakness (Leighton and Surridge 250). As in "The English Mail-Coach," De Quincey connects his own retreatist mentality with imperialized beasts. Rather than evolving and striving for the English ideal, De Quincey simply drops out of the competition by allowing himself to be symbolically ridden by his older brother, William.

To cope with his lack of hegemonic masculinity, De Quincey retreats from the ideal completely and sequentially embraces antipodal characteristics. In other words, De Quincey ultimately feminizes himself. In comparison with the much stronger William, De Quincey presents himself not as masculine at all but rather an effeminate daughter (Barrell 58). De Quincey embraces femininity and welcomes his "girlish tears" because "a girl was the sweetest thing which, [he], in [his] short life, had known" (De Quincey 15). Because of his retreat from William, De Quincey not only regresses on the evolutionary scale but must also embrace the alien nature the crocodile signifies; the young boy cannot identify as male but rather female. As an amalgam of two different genders, De Quincey undertakes another attribute of the crocodile's symbolism: Early Modern English writers found trouble in classifying the crocodile for it belonged to multiple categories of distinction; the animal walks on land and can survive long periods of time in water (Edwards 268).

Retreating from William's aggression, De Quincey states that he was both "moulded by the gentlest of sisters" and "had always been tied to the apron-string of women or girls" (6, 26). De Quincey, unable to identify with the imperial man, joins those who share his inaptitude for dominance. Therefore, De Quincey must use a much different diction to describe himself in opposition to the phrases "horrid, pugilistic" and "booted and spurred" utilized to describe William and Mr. Waterton (De Quincey 75, 198). Catherine Robson argues in *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* that "De Quincey's autobiographical writings, then, present us with a life with a marked bipartite structure: an initial period of feminine happiness comes to an abrupt and definite end and is succeeded by a harsh and competitive masculine world" (40). De Quincey thus materializes feminine qualities as a form of retreat; he avoids a world he views as overtly antagonistic simply by abjuring all masculinity.

One aspect of De Quincey's self-feminization stems from his longing to be rescued from all his torments. Throughout De Quincey's works he demonstrates sympathy for unfortunate and powerless women that often formulates into an identification with them so complete that he takes their place as a lost pariah (Schmidt 53-54). Lacking the masculine ideal, De Quincey fails to protect himself and must therefore be rescued finding salvation in femininity. In what can be perceived as a deviant role reversal, for nineteenth-century England, De Quincey finds a deliverance from death through Ann, in *Confessions*, and avoids a pelting with rocks due to the Jacobean factory girls, in "Introduction to the World of Strife." In the first scenario, De Quincey finds liberation from hunger due to Ann and in the latter he escapes the battlefield finding serenity in women. Schmitt states "there are many... moments in *Confessions* in which the autobiographer dwells on his own status as victim, emplotting (sic) his life as if it were a Gothic

novel and he the novel's heroine" (55). For De Quincey, self-feminization serves as a method for remaining in a constant state of idleness and impunity. Unable to achieve the masculinity demonstrated by his brothers, De Quincey retreats from all competition desiring salvation from strain through outside providence.

Unable to will the characteristics necessary to achieve the aspirational reference produced by English nationalism, De Quincey retreats from all physical attempts of its acquisition and attempts to alleviate his negative feelings with external forces.

Throughout many of the *Autobiographic Sketches*, De Quincey presents himself as chronically ill and holds a profound fear of obtaining hydrocephalus—the disease that killed his favorite sister, Elizabeth. Grevel Lindop in his biography of De Quincey, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey*, suggests that De Quincey's hypochondria "tried to prolong as far as possible the physical and emotional security of babyhood" and that "like many children who experience prolonged illness early in life, he may have learned the dangerous lesson that illness can be used to win sympathy and attention" (4). John Barrell adds within *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey* that De Quincey's hypochondria stemmed from his belief "to have been somehow indirectly responsible for his sister's death" (26). Much recent criticism follows Barrell's groundbreaking criticism and perceives De Quincey's self-induced illnesses and feminization as a tribute to his long lost sister, Elizabeth.

Accepting Lindop and Barrell's foundation, Judith Plotz in "Little Mr. De Quincey and the Affliction of Childhood" furthers the discussion by providing compelling evidence that De Quincey suffered from anorexia nervosa (184). No definitive account of De Quincey's height has become available however the most authoritative sources suggest that he hardly cleared five feet. Therefore, playing the role of a child, female, or imperialistically weak pariah would have come

naturally to De Quincey due to his limited size. Plotz insists that “by self-induced malnutrition, Thomas De Quincey may have been the architect of his own size. De Quincey’s small childlike stature may thus evince a hidden will to remain in the world of childhood” (189). Barrell, Lindop, and Plotz all create interesting ideas concerning De Quincey’s feminine qualities that slightly differ in approach. Yet, all present De Quincey’s self-feminization as an attempt to avoid a competitive masculine realm and thus evince the fact De Quincey felt dislocated for English society prior to his drug use.

Through an analysis of both William and Mr. Waterton, it becomes evident that De Quincey perceived his own inaptitude concerning the qualities necessary for imperialism. However, De Quincey’s socialized strain includes more than just a failure to achieve Englishness represented by a masculine ideal. Note that both of De Quincey’s images of William and Mr. Waterton include a juxtaposition of masculine power and aristocratic status. De Quincey’s synthesized ideal is appropriate given the fact that during the nineteenth century members of the aristocracy were encouraged to develop new unquestionably British modes of cultural expression; taking form in superiority on the battlefield and in the classroom (Colley 167-8). An elevation in social ranking serves as yet another unachievable dream for De Quincey that, in turn, must be combated through adaptation and retreatism. De Quincey’s fictitious surname provides evidence of his strained identity. De Quincey, in many of his works, suggests that he failed to derive from an aristocratic family and often implores the reader to reject all assumptions of his aristocratic nature. For example, in “The Affliction of Childhood” De Quincey strives to “prevent the reader from receiving an impression as of some higher rank than did really belong to [De Quincey’s] family” (4).

In both instances, De Quincey spends several passages of his essays assuring his audience that he does not hold an aristocratic title. Yet, as Robert Morrison notes in his essay, “De Quincey and the Opium-Eater’s Other Selves,”

Thomas, however, preferred to keep what he called ‘the aristocratic De,’ and so at seventeen [he] embraced a fictive genealogy that enabled him to present himself as a descendant of an ancient family, and that was more in keeping with his notions of himself as a gentleman scholar. (88)

With this action De Quincey demonstrates his desire for an aristocratic status his family did not provide. De Quincey acknowledges that an individual’s worth is directly connected with his/her rank and understands he must strive for a gentlemanly grandeur. As the son of a “plain and unpretending man,” however, De Quincey’s family occupies a liminal space on the social hierarchy: his family exemplifies the “absolute *ideal* of a dangerous inheritance; just too, little...to promise comfort or *real* independence, and yet large enough to operate as a temptation to indolence” (De Quincey 39). Realizing his strained existence, De Quincey retreats from the ideal completely and embraces its antithesis: poverty.

De Quincey’s rejection and hatred of the English school system provides evidence for his retreatism from an aristocratic, or gentlemanly, desire. Karen Volland Waters states within her book, *The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men’s Fiction 1870-1901*, that “education became the hallmark of gentleman during the Renaissance. During this period, education was necessary for two reasons: to allow gentleman to become a model of superiority and to allow him to keep his place in society” (15). De Quincey’s retreat from school in *Confessions* signifies both a rejection of becoming the English ideal and his repudiation from aristocratic society. Colley argues in *Britons* that education was an important socializing agent



during the nineteenth century for producing nationalism: “Patriotic duty was stressed in practical ways, as when public-school masters encouraged boys to participate in national subscriptions and to celebrate British military and naval victories” (167). For De Quincey, the Manchester Grammar School presents itself as yet another socializing agent that creates an aspirational reference of masculinity that cannot be successfully acquired. De Quincey ridicules the public school system in “I Am Introduced to the Warfare of a Public School,” stating “even the selfish are *there* forced into accommodating themselves to a public standard of generosity; and the effeminate into conforming to a rule of manliness” (90). De Quincey’s negative feelings concerning the public school system cause his retreat as he attempts to escape the painful strain generated by his socialization. By rupturing the social bond of an English education, De Quincey essentially abjures patriotism as he forgets a curriculum that consistently reiterated the English duty to serve and fight (Colley 168). In order to escape the social strain of a nationalism that demanded its male citizens to demonstrate speed, power, and progress, De Quincey renounced the goal entirely by dropping out of society—and as he states in *Confessions*—this initial retreat “laid the foundation of the writer’s habit” (4).

De Quincey’s struggle with strain placed his desire and faith concerning the achievement of goals in continual dissonance. Durkheim, in *Suicide*, states that “the passions first must be limited. Only then can they be harmonized with the faculties and satisfied. But the individual has no way of limiting them, this must be done by some force exterior to him” (248). Ideally, society itself serves as the external force necessary in controlling the passions of mankind. For Durkheim, anomie derives from “society’s inability to regulate the natural appetites of its members” but De Quincey’s aspirations have been “culturally induced” (Jones 121). Therefore, De Quincey’s nationalism has demanded goals he cannot achieve and thus he must cope outside

of that society. As a result, De Quincey retreats from English society and discovers opium as a coping agent. In describing the opium experience in *Confessions*, De Quincey states that opium “introduces among [him] the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony [;]” the three benefits being key principles for social solidarity (40). Opium grants De Quincey a function and acts as the “true hero of [his] tale; and the legitimate centre on which the interest resolves” (78). De Quincey’s early opium experiences serve as the gothic hero Schmitt suggests De Quincey desires; through opium the opium-eater finds a brief salvation.

However, the drug ultimately betrays the opium-eater and De Quincey finds himself once again being imperialized. McDonagh in her book, *De Quincey’s Disciplines*, discusses the imperialistic characteristics of opium De Quincey discovers while frantically roaming the Labyrinth-like streets of London:

Rather than elide difference, in this case opium has uncovered difference, not only in a familiar city, but also in his unknown self. The alien landscape represents his own mind, and De Quincey stands as an intrepid explorer, on the brink of colonizing himself. The interiority of the experience, in which both the alien land and the colonizer, crucially fractures his subjectivity. Opium has not found harmony, but disrupted selfhood and his relation with the world. (160)

The opium that first granted De Quincey solidarity and a sense of Englishness has transformed and with it brought further strain. De Quincey attempts, through retreatism, to destroy both his ideals and aspirations of becoming the ideal Englishman, yet ultimately he discovers he cannot escape the cultural ideal. De Quincey bemoans that the “opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities, or aspirations: he wishes and longs, as earnestly as ever, to realize what he believes

possible, and feels to be exacted by duty; but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power” (De Quincey 67).

De Quincey realizes that opium serves as a vain attempt for retreatism as both Piranesi and the crocodile expose his plan’s weakness. De Quincey desires to eliminate all goals from his life, yet Piranesi serves as a constant reminder that human kind will remain “busy of his aspiring labours” (71). There can be no escape from aspiration. Durkheim states, in *Suicide*, that “it has been claimed, indeed, that human activity naturally aspires beyond assignable limits and sets itself unattainable goals” and that “it would be a miracle if no insurmountable obstacle were never encountered” (247-8). De Quincey, indeed, serves as an excellent example of Durkheim’s statement in that he attempts to bring about this miracle but fails; ultimately creating more horror in his life. De Quincey learns he must eventually repent from his retreatism and he achieves this through his *Confessions*. De Quincey finally recognizes the demons that plague his soul and he symbolizes them as the horrific crocodile; “symbolizing this, the crocodile may be given some credit as representing the moral problem from which De Quincey’s finest and most original insights come” (Lindop, “De Quincey and the Cursed Crocodile,” 139).

The crocodile can represent both the failed dreams of De Quincey and opium itself, as both ultimately stem from retreatism. De Quincey’s inability to imperialize the crocodile creates strain and acts as a catalyst for his necessary adaptation; De Quincey’s adaptation leads to the imperialism of his own mind. De Quincey eventually becomes trapped within a vicious cycle and by trying to assume power in his own life finds himself trapped in a mechanical prison like Piranesi (Fulford 212). De Quincey states, in *Confessions*, that his unachievable dreams continue in an “endless growth and self-reproduction” and that the “splendours of [his] dreams were indeed chiefly architectural” (71). The opium-eater’s dreams are inescapable, like Piranesi’s

prison, and his attempted retreat is overpowered by the cultural reference. De Quincey states that his dreams are full of “all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, &c. &c. expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome” (70).

Opium cannot assuage De Quincey’s perceived inadequacy for even in an opium-induced state his dreams maintain the mail-coach’s representative nationalism. Machinery representative of the speed, power, and progress of English society enters the mind of the opium-eater and places De Quincey in a prison within his own mind; destroying the opium-eater with the accouterments of war. The unending staircases of Piranesi’s prison recall De Quincey’s “Introduction to the World of Strife” and the impossible and humiliating climb he was forced to undertake under the demands of William (Rzepka 129). The mail-coach, crocodile, and poor Piranesi all serve as a constant reminder of De Quincey’s attempt to both understand and explain the misery of social strain. In doing so, De Quincey conclusively realizes that the social structure that generates mankind’s aspirations cannot be evaded. By the end of *Confessions*, De Quincey’s final enlightenment suggests that his ideals derive from his societies constructions; in other words, English nationalism serves as their primary designer. However, rather than ascending Jacob’s ladder he retreated into the dark “Nilotic mud” (De Quincey 74).

## CONCLUSION

Fossilized in Cancerous Clay: The Moral of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English  
Opium-Eater*

De Quincey's work, as I have been arguing, is fundamentally circular in its arrangement: De Quincey, strained by a harsh competitive society, discovers temporary relief through an external agent and is ultimately overpowered and reintroduced to the world of strife from which he fled. For this reason, I find it only appropriate—in the spirit of the opium-eater—to conclude this thesis where it began. Much like *Suspiria*, De Quincey closes his *Confessions* by relating his belief “that it may be as painful to be born as to die” (79). The reason he argues is not the dreadful anticipation of life's cessation but rather the painful experience of “passing out of one mode of existence into another. The issue [is] not death, but a sort of physical regeneration” (79-80). De Quincey's use of the term “physical” is interesting as it compels his audience to visualize the torment of restoration, as the word seemingly replaces the emotional/spiritual aspect of regeneration with the biological. The agonizing image, in this sense, presents mankind as naturally amputated by the society from which he/she stems; a mutilated creature that must struggle to reformulate the damaged areas of its life. Therefore, the arduous dilemma of life derives from the incessant exigency to redeem that which was has been lost or not provided at birth.

Fittingly, the final line of *Confessions* recalls John Milton's portrayal of Adam and Eve's exile from Eden in *Paradise Lost*: De Quincey quotes, “With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms” (80). Using Milton's biblical imagery, De Quincey revisits mankind's earliest observation of strain in order to make his past decisions and coping mechanics assessable to all. The allusion denotes the moment in Milton's epic in which Adam and Eve, having been just thrust out of

Eden, look back remorsefully at the paradise they have lost. Because Adam and Eve's sinful action has generated a fissure between humanity and God, humankind's reentrance into the mystical garden and the perfection it symbolizes becomes the initial aspirational reference that must be acquired in order to achieve a sense peace and tranquility. However, God—as Milton states—obstructs mankind from their return to paradise by placing “the brandish'd sword” that “blazed / Fierce as a comet” directly in front of Eden's gates (xii 632-633). Thus, Adam and Eve's actions have forced God to place mankind into a strained existence by first granting humanity the knowledge of paradise and subsequently retracting and blocking mankind from that divine felicity.

In order to alleviate strain, humanity must search for an alternative route to salvation by obeying God's commandments and embracing the coming Messiah. De Quincey's reference to Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve's banishment is a perfect conclusion for *Confessions* because it simultaneously reiterates and renews the journey that instigated the opium-eater's addiction. As Adam and Eve left the garden of paradise they were forced to find their new place of rest with only “Providence their guide;” a journey De Quincey, and all of mankind, would find themselves taking much later in life (Milton xii, 647). De Quincey's *Confessions* thus concludes by compelling the audience to both consider and answer a final question: What direction will you take when you see the flaming sword that separates you from paradise; how will you survive the world of strife?

Notwithstanding that the life and works of De Quincey present the audience with a pessimistic perspective on socialization, by alleging mankind's inability to avoid a world laden with conflict, De Quincey closes *Confessions* by replenishing hope and providing his reader with an indicated moral:

If he is taught to fear and tremble, enough has been effected. But he may say, that the issue of my case is at least proof that opium, after seventeen years' use, and an eight years' abuse of its powers, may still be renounced: and that *he* may chance to bring to the task greater energy than I did, or that with a stronger constitution than mine he may obtain the same results with less. This may be true: I would not presume to measure the efforts of other men by my own: I heartily wish him more energy: I wish him the same success. (79)

De Quincey's message is simple and straightforward: the opium-eater pleads that individuals using, or appraising, the mysterious power of opium be taught to fear its horrific repercussions. Yet, even in his didacticism, De Quincey's despondency indicates his anxiety that mankind's desire for glory will ultimately cause many individuals to avoid his advice due to their presumptions of holding greater agency than the author. His uncertainty was quickly confirmed as scores of individuals began abusing opium to obtain the pleasures outlined in *Confessions* and several men even came forward declaring they were—in fact—the opium-eater in an attempt to capitalize on the anonymous author's surging popularity (Morrison 90-91). As De Quincey penned his *Confessions*, he understood that the universes' socializing agents will always fix impossible demands on humanity effectuating an incessant longing for escape. However, following a lifetime of drug addiction and poverty De Quincey realized that mankind, rather than retreating from society, should continue to expel energy forward regardless of how painful each step is. De Quincey's works, frozen in time by his legacy, are constant reminder that when confronted by the constraining world of strife all men and women should rise out of the cancerous "Nilotic mud" (74).

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