

Thomas De Quincey

New Theoretical and Critical Directions

**Edited by Robert Morrison
and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts**



Thomas De Quincey

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
270 Madison Ave,
New York, NY 10016

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
2 Park Square,
Milton Park, Abingdon,
Oxon, OX14 4RN

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Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business

Transferred to Digital Printing 2009

International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-39963-0 (Hardcover)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Thomas de Quincey : new theoretical and critical directions / edited by Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts.

p. cm. -- (Routledge studies in romanticism)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-415-39963-0 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. De Quincey, Thomas, 1785-1859--Criticism and interpretation. I. Morrison, Robert, 1961- II. Roberts, Daniel Sanjiv.

PR4537.T5 1995

828'.809--dc22

2007011497

ISBN10: 0-415-39963-7 (hbk)

ISBN10: 0-415-87668-0 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-39963-0 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-87668-1 (pbk)

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<http://www.routledge.com>

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
1 'I Was Worshipped; I Was Sacrificed': A Passage to Thomas De Quincey	1
ROBERT MORRISON AND DANIEL SANJIV ROBERTS	
2 'Mix(ing) a Little with Alien Natures': Biblical Orientalism in De Quincey	19
DANIEL SANJIV ROBERTS	
3 Brunonianism, Radicalism, and 'The Pleasures of Opium'	45
BARRY MILLIGAN	
4 'Earthquake and Eclipse': Radical Energies and De Quincey's 1821 <i>Confessions</i>	63
ROBERT MORRISON	
5 De Quincey and Men (of Letters)	81
JOHN WHALE	
6 Wooing the Reader: De Quincey, Wordsworth and Women in <i>Tait's Edinburgh Magazine</i>	99
JULIAN NORTH	
7 De Quincey and the Secret Life of Books	123
JOSEPHINE MCDONAGH	
8 National Bad Habits: Thomas De Quincey's Geography of Addiction	143
JOEL BLACK	

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
9	On the Language of the Sublime and the Sublime Nation in De Quincey: Toward a Reading of ‘The English Mail-Coach’ IAN BALFOUR	165
10	Chambers of Horror: De Quincey’s ‘Postscript’ to ‘On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts’ GREGORY DART	187
11	‘A Deafening Menace in Tempestuous Uproars’: De Quincey’s 1856 <i>Confessions</i> , the Indian Mutiny, and the Response of Collins and Dickens CHARLES RZEPKA	211
	<i>Contributors</i>	235
	<i>Index</i>	237

List of Illustrations

Frontispiece	Thomas De Quincey by Sir John Watson-Gordan	xiii
Figure 2.1	<i>The Protestant's Family Bible</i>	22
Figure 2.2	'A Scene of Sati'	25
Figure 2.3	'Juggernaut Procession'	26
Figure 2.4	'London from Greenwich Park'	30
Figure 4.1	John Leslie	71
Figure 4.2	David Ricardo	73
Figure 11.1	'Hindoo Thugs and Poisoners'	214
Figure 11.2	'The Massacre at Delhi'	220
Figure 11.3	'The Campbells are Coming'	221

Acknowledgments

All essays in this volume were stringently peer-reviewed by both the editors and detailed responses provided to each contributor. Several of our contributors have commented (we take it appreciatively!) that our procedure has been more rigorous than that of most collections. We would like to thank our contributors for their collective brilliance, good humour, hard work, and, not least, for sharing our sense of urgency—in some cases at very difficult periods in their lives—all in order to meet that devil at the door, the printer's devil. At Routledge, we acknowledge with gratitude Liz Thompson, Terry Clague, and Max Novick for their commitment to this publication. We thank Grevel Lindop and Barry Symonds for their helpful responses to our queries, and Averill Buchanan for her superb work on the index. Carole Morrison provided selfless assistance with proofing and referencing, while her unfailing support helped retain the sanity of at least one of the editors of this volume. Robert Morrison would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Office of Research Services, Queen's University, Kingston, for their continuing support of his research on Thomas De Quincey. Daniel Sanjiv Roberts thanks Florence Gray of Queen's University Library, Belfast, for help with inter-library loans, the Research and Regional Services of Queen's University Belfast for support with costs of illustrations and indexing, and the School of English, QUB, for supporting applications to the above, and, above all, providing space and time.

Abbreviations

- DQW, I *Writings, 1799–1820*. Ed. Barry Symonds. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000.
- DQW, II *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, 1821–1856*. Ed. Grevel Lindop. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000
- DQW, III *Articles and Translations from the London Magazine, Blackwood's Magazine and Others, 1821–24*. Ed. Frederick Burwick. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000.
- DQW, IV *Articles and Translations from the London Magazine; Walladmor, 1824–25*. Ed. Frederick Burwick. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000.
- DQW, V *Articles from the Edinburgh Saturday Post, 1827–28*. Ed. David Groves. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000.
- DQW, VI *Articles from the Edinburgh Evening Post, Blackwood's Magazine, and the Edinburgh Literary Gazette, 1826–29*. Ed. David Groves and Grevel Lindop. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000.
- DQW, VII *Articles from the Edinburgh Literary Gazette and Blackwood's Magazine, 1829–31*. Ed. Robert Morrison. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000.
- DQW, VIII *Articles from Blackwood's Magazine and the Gallery of Portraits; Klosterheim: or, The Masque, 1831–32*. Ed. Robert Morrison. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, IX *Articles from Blackwood's Magazine and Tait's Magazine, 1832–38*. Ed. Grevel Lindop, Robert Morrison, and Barry Symonds. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, X *Articles from Tait's Magazine, 1834–38*. Ed. Alina Clej. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.

xii *Abbreviations*

- DQW, XI *Articles from Tait's Magazine and Blackwood's Magazine, 1838–41.* Ed. Julian North. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.
- DQW, XII *Articles from Blackwood's Magazine, 1840–41.* Ed. Grevel Lindop. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, XIII *Articles from Blackwood's Magazine and the Encyclopedia Britannica, 1841–42.* Ed. Grevel Lindop and John Whale. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, XIV *Articles from Blackwood's Magazine, 1842–43.* Ed. John Whale. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, XV *Articles from Blackwood's Magazine and Tait's Magazine, 1844–46.* Ed. Frederick Burwick. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.
- DQW, XVI *Articles from Tait's Magazine, MacPhail's Edinburgh Ecclesiastical Journal, the Glasgow Athenaeum Album, the North British Review, and Blackwood's Magazine, 1847–49.* Ed. Robert Morrison. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.
- DQW, XVII *Articles from Hogg's Instructor and Tait's Magazine, 1850–52.* Ed. Edmund Baxter. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, XVIII *Articles from Hogg's Instructor and Titan, 1853–58.* Ed. Edmund Baxter. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001.
- DQW, XIX *Autobiographic Sketches,* Ed. Daniel Sanjiv Roberts. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.
- DQW, XX *Prefaces &c. to the Collected Editions; Published Addenda; Marginalia; Manuscript Addenda; Undatable Manuscripts.* Ed. Grevel Lindop, et al. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.
- DQW, XXI *Transcripts of Unlocated Manuscripts.* Ed. Grevel Lindop. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003.



Thomas De Quincey (c. 1845) by Sir John Watson-Gordan. National Portrait Gallery, London.

1 'I Was Worshipped; I Was Sacrificed'

A Passage to Thomas De Quincey

*Robert Morrison and
Daniel Sanjiv Roberts*

'I have [. . .] always intended of course that *poems* should form the cornerstones of my fame', wrote the seventeen-year-old Thomas De Quincey (*DQW*, I: 38). As it turned out, he wrote very little poetry, but he did achieve fame, and in several instances infamy. An essayist with the magazine press for nearly forty years, De Quincey wrote on a broad range of topics, from politics, science, philosophy, economics, and history to aesthetics, drugs, famous contemporaries, murder, and himself. When, near the end of his life, he brought his writings together in a fourteen-volume edition of *Selections Grave and Gay* (1853–60), critical opinion was sharply divided. Naysayers such as the *British Quarterly* declared that De Quincey had written 'not one great work, not a single essay, discussion, or treatise, or tale, on which a lasting literary reputation can be built' (Anon. 1863: 14). More than a century later, he was still being dismissed as a 'Manchester journalist whose enormous output contains, among much flatulent and pretentiously overwritten stuff, just a few essays thanks to which he deserves his small niche in the gallery of the minor English romantics' (Hemmings 1982: 157). But there have always been enthusiasts. The *Eclectic Review* was convinced that De Quincey had produced 'the most valuable and most enduring [. . .] papers, which had originally appeared in a periodical form, to be found in the entire world of literature' (Anon. 1854: 399). This view too has long had staunch support. De Quincey brought to 'the art of prose autobiography something entirely new, and his influence has been felt by every self-conscious English writer, whether of reminiscences or of autobiographical novels, ever since' (Hayter 1971: 24). In the last thirty years, De Quincey's status has risen dramatically as a result of several groundbreaking monographs and a new collected edition of his writings. In the 1980s the battle lines were sharply drawn between those who believed that 'the best contemporary critics of De Quincey' retained the 'more traditional forms of appreciation and analysis' and those who viewed him as an 'aesthete' and a 'pure stylist' who lent himself 'to deconstructive readings' (Thron 1985: 3; Leighton 1992: 164). In the 1990s the upsurge of historicist criticism 'produced yet another [. . .] De Quincey [. . .] this one more sensitive to the social and political context

2 *Thomas De Quincey*

of his life and work' (McDonagh 1994: 10). The present essay collection is a testimony to his vital place in nineteenth-century literature and culture, as well as to his enduring—indeed burgeoning—relevance in our own age.¹

Critics have approached De Quincey from many different angles. His style has been deplored for 'four evil qualities': 'Pedantry, Digression, Prolixity, and Facetiousness' (Sackville West 1936: 240). The demands of nineteenth-century popular journalism too often forced him to produce 'mere prose' that is characterized by 'discursiveness' and 'triviality' (De Luca 1980: 9–10). Even his signature style—the elaborate, impassioned periods of works such as 'The English Mail-Coach'—has conjured up 'irrepressible memories of, well, Walt Disney and *Fantasia*' (Amis and Rose 1989: 367). Yet De Quincey has also been greatly admired as a stylist. He marks the culmination of a '*digressive tradition*' that runs from Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne to Jean Paul Richter (Black 1985: 310). De Quincey proceeds obliquely and convolutedly, and 'yet the effect of his strange beetle-like activity is somehow to fill up a previously hollow void of experience' (Adams 1966: 37). All of his writings are part of one interrelated project. 'We can read his journalistic pieces on the Roman Empire just as we read "The English Mail-Coach", for the Opium-Eater's history and his dreams are only versions of one consistent kind of writing in which the pariah is saving himself' (Maniquis 1976: 88). Yet for all his consistency, De Quincey moved with great fluency between several different prose registers, from the humorous to the sentimental, the reportorial to the satiric, the conversational to the suspenseful, the rambunctious to the refined. 'It is difficult to think of another figure with so varied a stylistic repertoire as De Quincey' (McFarland 1987: 104). His impassioned prose is his most significant stylistic achievement. It evinces a 'painstaking mastery of assonance, alliteration, balance, swelling and falling rhythms, and haunting and evocative diction' (Jordan 1960: xv). With it, he shifted 'the values of familiar things [. . .] which makes us wonder whether, then, [prose] is quite so limited as the critics say, and ask further whether the prose writer, the novelist, might not capture fuller and finer truths than are now his aim if he ventured into those shadowy regions where De Quincey has been before him' (Woolf 1994: 367).

De Quincey wrote a good deal of literary criticism, much of which was informed by his readings of and conversations with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. He 'cannot be ranked among the very great critics because his work is too fragmentary and unreliable' (Jordan 1973: 46). In the most ungenerous light, De Quincey 'is disgracefully slack about verifying things, muddles his favourite authors, and is so often faulty in his quotations that one wonders if anything he quotes is right' (V. R. 1939: 417). He is a 'stupid or very ignorant critic' (V. R. 1940: 435). Viewed much more positively, De Quincey's 'reflections upon the theory of literature are penetrating and suggestive [. . .] He is the first of English critics to support consistently [. . .] the theory that in literature, as in all the arts, substance and form are inseparable' (Darbishire 1909: 31). He 'combines most of the characteristic

traits of the impressionistic temperament with a fine power of purely intellectual analysis' (Proctor 1943: 5). One of De Quincey's most well-known literary formulations is the difference between the 'literature of knowledge' and the 'literature of power'. For some, the 'distinction seems to amount to little more than the distinction between imaginative and applied literature'; and 'the vagueness and multiplicity of meaning which it is possible to assign to the term "power" and the fact that also "knowledge is power" have discredited De Quincey's terminology' (Wellek 1944: 268–69). But for others, the definition provides 'the best single example of what De Quincey expected of literature and of the persistent dualism in his thought' (Jordan 1952: 38). The concept is 'meaningful to him principally because it enables him to surmount a metaphysics of absence' (Snyder 1986: 692). Perhaps De Quincey's most famous critical essay is 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth', a 'characteristic performance' that 'tells us as much about its author' as about the play. 'De Quincey offers it as "psychological criticism", an attempt to explain the emotional impact of a particular moment in the play' (Lindop 1996: xiii). The essay 'brings the murderer and the writer into the same orbit, for both are interested in pleasure and power, and both seek freedom by outstripping or subverting the social institutions they feel thwart or confine them' (Morrison 2006: xi–xii).

As a scholar, De Quincey has frequently been maligned as a plagiarist, hack, charlatan, and bore who 'read extensively and thought acutely by fits, [ate] an enormous quantity of opium, wrote a few pages which revealed new capacities in the language, and provided a good deal of respectable padding for magazines' (Stephen 1871: 329). Nine decades later and the verdict was much the same. De Quincey's 'many works of a scholarly or intellectual nature are almost all derived in the most direct way from printed sources, and in almost every case from a single volume. In every article of this kind, De Quincey has produced a clever piece of hack work, writing with the source book in one hand and the pen in the other' (Goldman 1965: 9). Several commentators, however, have lauded De Quincey as an intellectual. He is 'a man of very considerable genius [. . .] a German, a Kantist; a Mystic also, I suppose', declared Thomas Carlyle in 1828 (Morrison 1995: 16). Guided by the philosophical writings of Immanuel Kant, De Quincey explored the workings of the unconscious mind, and the correspondence between the moral law in human nature and the natural law in the heavens. His explorations, like Coleridge's, 'both extend the scope and question the validity of Romantic conceptions as they were being severally set forth in the various European cultures of the time' (Beer 1985: 347). De Quincey took his engagement with Kant even further in his first two essays 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827 and 1839), where he pushes Kant's acknowledgement that natural violence was a potential source of the sublime to the logical conclusion that human violence might be regarded in the same light, and possibly to even greater effect. The result is a disorientating and exhilarating world of irony that represents murder as

4 Thomas De Quincey

a source of aesthetic satisfaction, and that points the way toward Friedrich Nietzsche's 'full-blown aesthetic critique of morality in general later in the century' (Black 1991: 16).

De Quincey translated several tales of terror, and wrote a number of others. His gothic romance *Klosterheim* (1832) produced a decidedly mixed reaction. On the one hand, it made 'no noise' (Robinson 1938: II. 482). It was 'a complete failure' (Gilfillan 1845: 156). 'The scenery and architecture were over-described; the historic and processional part of the affair completely overlaid the romantic element, and the characters had about as much vitality as the pasteboard "Miller and his Men" of a child's theatre' (Sotheby 1861: 66). In works 'of this kind De Quincey is doing no more than echo a defunct manner' (Praz 1956: 76). But on the other hand, *Klosterheim* reached 'in purity of style and idiom [. . .] an excellence to which Sir W. Scott [. . .] appears never to have aspired' (Coleridge 1971: 911). It is a text in which De Quincey 'constructs a heroized image of himself, sublimating fears of his own weakness and complicity through the fantasy of one who aggressively controls his fate' (Snyder 1981: 137). The town of *Klosterheim* 'strangely resembles the mind of the opium-eater, isolated from its surroundings, controlled in its waking consciousness, yet taking on by night an anarchic aspect at once threatening and creative' (Wordsworth 1993: 233). De Quincey's most successful tale of terror, 'The Avenger' (1838), explores a disturbing world of violence, vigilantism, and religious persecution. As events unravel, 'all lesser passions are swallowed up, and the empire of a blank, rayless revenge is triumphant; we are spellbound amid the successive stages of the demoniac tragedy; we start up convulsively, as from the horrors of nightmare, at its ghastly catastrophe' (Spring 1864: 662). 'The Avenger' shows the influence 'of the *Blackwood's*-type tale of terror in its explicit treatment of multiple murder, but at the same time it is one of De Quincey's most obviously Gothic and "German" [. . .] as well as being one of his most certainly personal texts' (Bridgwater 2004: 151). In its aestheticization and commodification of crime, as well as in its rhetoric, suspense, violence, reversals, and ingenuity, 'The Avenger' put in place 'salient features' of detective fiction as they were soon to manifest themselves in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Arthur Conan Doyle, and a host of others (Morrison 2001: 430). De Quincey capped his career as a terror writer with his 'Postscript' to 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1854), a text in which he returns again to the bloody scenes of the John Williams murders of 1811. 'I know of no writer but De Quincey who invests mysteries of this tragic order with their appropriate drapery, so that they shall, to our imaginations, unfold the full measure of their capacities for striking awe into our hearts' (Alden 1863: 362). The 'Postscript' lays bare De Quincey's 'oscillation between fascination with and repulsion at violent crime', leaving us 'with a sense of nausea like that induced by the Marquis de Sade's repetitive scenes of torture' (Plumtree 1985: 160). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick concludes that De Quincey was 'a great Gothic novelist'. The subjects he

approached 'with the most characteristic sympathy were certain heightened versions of privation and immobilization: dreams and trances, submergence under a massive space, the unspeakable. If we add to these themes, those of the pariah and of the loss of the past, and mention the sense of helplessness washing over everything else, we have a sketch of the most powerful part of De Quincey's . . . prose' (Sedgwick 1986: 37).

De Quincey's biographical essays on Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Robert Southey are magazine articles *par excellence*. Their combination of anecdote, criticism, and insider gossip drew the ire of many. 'All the persons I have met with who have read them, have risen from them with the same disgust' (Hare 1835: 25). The articles were 'an act of treachery scarcely paralleled, we hope, in the history of Literature' (Martineau 1869: 98). Wordsworth called De Quincey 'a pest in society, and one of the most worthless of mankind', while an enraged Southey urged Hartley Coleridge to 'take a strong cudgel, proceed straight to Edinburgh, and give De Quincey, publicly on the streets there, a sound beating—as a calumniator, cowardly spy, traitor, base betrayer of the social hearth, for one thing!' (Jordan 1963: 336, 347). Henry Crabb Robinson, however, spoke for the majority when he described the articles as 'scandalous, but painfully interesting' (Robinson 1938: I. 273). Coleridge's daughter Sara labeled them 'infamous' but gave De Quincey his due: 'of all the censors of Mr Coleridge, Mr De Quincey is the one whose remarks are the most worthy of attention [. . . He] had sufficient inward sympathy with the subject of his criticism to be capable in some degree of beholding his mind, as it actually existed, in all the intermingling shades of individual reality' (Wright 1970: 15). The essays are 'easily the most famous biographies of the Romantic era', and have left a deep mark on subsequent criticism (Cafarelli 1990: 151). More than one hundred years after they first appeared, De Quincey's articles on Wordsworth were still referred to as 'much the best biography' of the poet (Bateson 1954: 44). De Quincey's recollections of Coleridge have been seen as even more penetrating. In them he 'first broached the vexed problem of Coleridge's plagiarisms, and commented on the relation between Coleridge's opium habit and loss of poetic creativity. He also depicted Coleridge's unhappy marriage and raised the issue of his political "apostasy". At the same time, he drew attention to Coleridge's varied and original interest in psychology, German literature, metaphysics and classical philosophy, and defended his moral integrity'. He is Coleridge's 'first important critical biographer' (Roberts 2000: 12).

De Quincey as autobiographer has always attracted a great deal of attention. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821; revised 1856) made an immense impact when it first appeared. Not all the attention was favourable. 'The work is written throughout in the tone of apology for a secret, selfish, suicidal debauchery', declared the *Eclectic Review*: 'it is the physical suffering consequent upon it, that alone excites in the Writer a moment's regret' (Anon. 1823a: 371). But *The Album* praised the *Confessions* as a 'physical and metaphysical wonder [. . .] We thought it one of the

6 Thomas De Quincey

most interesting, and certainly the very most extraordinary, production that we had ever seen' (Anon. 1822: 177). Some avoided opium after reading De Quincey's account. 'Nobody in his senses is likely to be allured to the practice of eating this insane drug [. . .] by reading the *Confessions of an Opium Eater*' (Montgomery 1821: 3). Others, however, sought the drug as De Quincey had done to heighten their pleasure in music, solitude, books, and conversation. In the *Confessions* De Quincey 'invented the concept of recreational drug use' (Boon 2002: 37). Still others tried opium and were more fatally tempted. 'Many persons had greatly injured themselves by taking Opium experimentally, which trial they had been enticed to make by the fascinating description of the exquisite pleasure attendant on the taking of that drug, given in a recent publication on the subject' (Anon. 1823*b*: iv). Indeed, De Quincey is still being blamed for pushing experimentation and seducing people into addiction. 'In modern society the main cause of drug addiction, apart from the fact that many people have nothing to live for, is a literary tradition of romantic claptrap, started by Coleridge and De Quincey, and continued without serious interruption ever since [. . .] This claptrap is the main source of popular and medical misconceptions on the subject' (Dalrymple 2006: 61).

The *Confessions* were originally published in the *London Magazine* in September and October 1821. They derived much of their complexity 'from an unresolved combination of extreme experiential concerns and a politeness which is in keeping with their periodical magazine context' (Whale 1985: 35). Wordsworth played an enormous role in shaping De Quincey's account of his teenage sufferings and the growth of his imaginative mind. 'The influence of *The Prelude* is everywhere in the *Confessions*; in the structure, in the areas of experience explored in both works and in the techniques of exploration' (Devlin 1983: 67). Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is equally significant, for the 'structural fabric and thematic development' of De Quincey's text are 'parasitic' upon Coleridge's book (Leask 1992: 187). The evident theme of the *Confessions* is the power of the dreaming mind in interaction with the agencies of opium. 'De Quincey was the first writer, and he is perhaps still the only one, to study deliberately, from within his personal experience, the way in which dreams and visions are formed, how opium helps to form them and intensifies them, and how they are then re-composed and used in conscious art' (Hayter 1968: 103). The 'implicit and more important themes' of the *Confessions* 'include the disembodied nature of textual self-representation, the sublating of material relations between writer and reader in the act of reading, and the mystification of the origin of the work of art as a commodity' (Rzepka 1995: 4). For some, the *Confessions* are a unified narrative in which De Quincey's brings coherence and depth to his experience. 'The fear of unconnectedness and isolation compels De Quincey to make a meaningful order out of his autobiography' (Porter 1980: 593). For others, De Quincey inevitably erases what he seeks to delineate. 'What is named "De Quincey" is effacement, metaphorization,

and metamorphosis without beginning, without centre, and without end' (Spector 1979: 520).

Suspiria de Profundis (1845), De Quincey's belated sequel to the original *Confessions*, is a haunting account of the tragically early death of his sister Elizabeth. It has been the subject of intense and provocative critical scrutiny. In his highly influential reading, J. Hillis Miller argues that Elizabeth's death brings the destruction of a previously indissoluble unity that De Quincey bridges only when he realizes at the last that we know God through the absence of God. 'At the moment of death, we shall experience a fathomless solitude, but through it we shall also experience, by anticipation, our reconciliation with God and with all we lost when we were exiled from the Paradise of childhood' (Miller 1963: 79). In John Barrell's view, the complex set of images De Quincey associates with Elizabeth's death expand outward to inform his speculations on a broad range of political and historical issues, including British imperialism, the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and much else. 'It seems best [. . .] to think of the relation between childhood and the oriental in De Quincey's writings as a relation between two forms of guilt, personal and political, in which each can be a displaced version of the other, and in which each aggravates the other in an ascending spiral of fear and of violence' (Barrell 1991: 21). To Alina Clej, the Miltonic and Wordsworthian echoes that pervade De Quincey's account of Elizabeth's death make it 'not primarily a fantasy of incestuous transgression, but the "secret" of modern literary production—the secret that the modern authorial subject, even in its high Romantic mode, is a rhetorical construct fashioned out of echoes, a "self" opened up to and by others and thoroughly penetrated by them'. De Quincey is 'one of the first writers, if not the very first, to experience and work out the symptoms of modernity' (Clej 1995: 249, 8).

'The English Mail-Coach' follows the narrative pattern first established by De Quincey in the *Confessions*, where autobiographical episodes and engaging conversational banter gradually give way to nightmare worlds of personal tragedy and apocalypse played out with horrifying repetitiveness in the tortured mind of the dreamer. Critics have often seen it as De Quincey's most powerful work. It is 'a case study in ekphrastic paralysis', for it reveals 'how De Quincey's experience of heightened perception accompanied by bodily torpor gave rise to images of action and stasis' (Burwick 2001: 127). Though 'firmly set in memory, in the past, in specific lost events', 'The Mail-Coach' voices the aspirations 'of one who has been stranded by political history. The result is curious, because it means that hope and hopelessness occupy the same mental space' (Baxter 1990: 126). In the opening section of the work, the race between the English mail-coach and the Birmingham commercial coach 'is figured as one between England and an enemy [. . .] The mail-coach rather than the commercial conveyance embodies the version of Englishness that matters most in De Quincey's system' (Milligan 1995: 50). In 'The Vision of Sudden Death', De Quincey assumes 'unapologetically what is intimated in Rousseau and implicit in Wordsworth: that

social contract and *convention* [. . .] always carries a trace of coercion that figures, in extremity, as violence' (Russett 1997: 74). The section demonstrates too the ways in which De Quincey's 'own lost potency, his own imminent death, can be the subject of his best prose' (McDonagh 1994: 152). The 'Dream-Fugue' with which 'The Mail-Coach' concludes emphasizes 'the endless resurrection of De Quincey's own love for his sister even as it celebrates the endless resurrection of divine love' (McFarland 1987: 121). At the same time, it is the most 'mind-boggling fantasy of patriotism [. . .] written in the nineteenth century. The self, the nation, the world, Christendom are gathered into one historical light cast against the darkness' (Maniquis 1976: 75).

De Quincey's influence on his fellow writers has been profound. His enormous impact on nineteenth-century French literature can be felt in the works of Nerval, Balzac, Gautier, and especially Baudelaire, whose reading of De Quincey 'affected his whole emotional and aesthetic orientation' (Lyon 1969: 181–82). De Quincey's 'vein of fantasy, introspection and unease' tinges the work of 'Poe, Stevenson, Dickens, Baudelaire, Proust, Dostoevsky, Borges and many others' (Lindop 1981: 392). James Joyce 'knew by heart whole pages of [. . .] De Quincey' (Budgen 1934: 181). D. H. Lawrence liked De Quincey 'because he [. . .] dislikes such people as Plato and Goethe, whom I dislike' (Lawrence 1984: 407). 'It is to De Quincey that Virginia Woolf may owe much of her perceptual method, especially the sense of the contraction and expansion of time, space, and matter, and the projection of internal emotions, notably certain fears, on the external visual field' (Richter 1970: 91). Jorge Luis Borges declared that his 'debt' to De Quincey was 'so vast that to specify one part seems to repudiate or to silence the others' (Christ 1969: 152). 'I abhor the star-system fashions and all the novelists who play at that', Stevie Smith asserted in a 1963 interview, '. . . I read De Quincey. I like Evelyn Waugh' (Williams 1991: 45). In W. S. Burroughs's *The Place of Dead Roads*, the lead character Kim Carson 'opens the door to go out of the druggist's shop' just as 'someone comes in with a puff of fog and cold air. Boy about eighteen, angular English face, blue eyes, red scarf. Rather like the younger De Quincey [. . .] The boy's eyes widened in startled recognition' (Burroughs 1983: 49). 'Few writers had so keen and horrified a sense of place' as De Quincey, Peter Ackroyd observes in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. 'He evokes a sinister, crepuscular London, a haven for strange powers, a city of footsteps and flaring lights, of houses packed close together, of lachrymose alleys and false doors' (Ackroyd 1994: 38). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Kamalakanta*—first published in Bengali in 1875—was seen as 'a Bengali version of De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*' (Chatterjee 1997: xv), and Rushdie's 'Mail Coach' section (a postcolonial Indian version of 'The English Mail-Coach') of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* provides yet another case of the empire writing back in a way that ironically fulfills De Quincey's predictions regarding the spread of English through colonialism. De Quincey has haunted, entertained, and

influenced some of the most significant names in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature.

The flurry of scholarship in recent years has culminated in the publication of the new, twenty-one volume *Works of Thomas De Quincey* (2000–03), under Grevel Lindop's magisterial general editorship. All scholarship is shaped by its moment and so, no doubt, it is with this collection of essays on De Quincey. Its merits, we believe, will speak out clearly and immediately; its limitations will inevitably become more evident with time. Yet, we believe this is a singularly propitious moment to engage in such an effort. Twentieth-century professional endeavour and technology have achieved what Gabriel and his multipotent adversary—in De Quincey's view—were deemed incapable of. One may quibble with some of the explanatory notes and wish ardently for a more detailed index to the volumes, but certainly the texts are out there, and much new material is available to scholarship. This much was evident to the reviewers who hailed the edition as a major editorial success, and the basis for all future work on De Quincey.²

Yet, while the De Quincey editors were digging in archives, in the more rarefied theoretical atmosphere above them, other developments were taking place. (Such a stark separation between archival and theoretical work is of course merely a rhetorical device: many of the De Quincey editors were also specialists in theory, and De Quincey himself was notably theoretical in his critical thinking, rivalled in his lifetime perhaps only by Coleridge). During the years that the De Quincey edition took shape (commencing in 1989), the linguistic and rhetorical excesses of deconstruction had given way to the more grounded theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. De Quincey's identity as an autobiographer was now linked to his political thought on the one hand (ideationally), and to his drug-addicted and penurious circumstances on the other (materially). De Quincey's magazine-context, and his imbrication in Romantic-period cultures of imperialism, gender, sexuality, race, religion, language and medical theory, and aesthetics emerged in significant studies from the nineties. This spate of books was clearly the consequence of a conjunction of theory and praxis, part of their work in progress for many of the editors who were involved in the project, though others not on the team were also influenced by the climate of industry. Many of the above-mentioned scholars, inspired by the winds of change blown in by contemporary theory, and the new material posed by the De Quincey edition, have seen fit to re-enter the critical arena in the following collection. Other voices reflect the interests of newer scholars who have been drawn by the thinking that has emerged and is emerging in this area. Critical work on De Quincey continues to appear with ever-greater frequency, and from a position of peripheral and eccentric significance to Romantic literature, he is now deeply embedded in our notions of Romanticism, and increasingly of Victorianism too. Inevitably it has not been possible to include every active critic of De Quincey here; the field of his scholarship is clearly too large to be held within the bounds of a single volume.

It seemed appropriate to organize the collection in a roughly chronological fashion following De Quincey's career, and to open with a reading of De Quincey's religious thought (an area of scholarship treated memorably by Hillis Miller) in the light of postcolonial theory. Postcolonialist critiques of Romanticism have been among the most vigorous of recent times, and De Quincey's imperialistic attitudes have been the focus of much critical attention (most notably by John Barrell). So much so that De Quincey's presence on the undergraduate literature syllabus is often predicated on his orientalism: the opium nightmares and the encounter with the Malay in the 1821 *Confessions* being the most obvious sites of his colonialist anxieties. Rather than relegating De Quincey's orientalism to the realms of pathology however, Daniel Sanjiv Roberts shows how De Quincey's colonialist fantasies are deeply imbued by his English evangelical upbringing and increasingly conservative Protestantism, during a period when imperial expansion was usually understood in providential terms by Christian thinkers. By linking De Quincey's orientalism to biblical scholarship, Roberts incidentally points to a lacuna in much postcolonial scholarship which has largely ignored the enormous importance of the Bible in the arena of orientalism. Ranging over De Quincey's career, from his early discussions with his East India Company uncle through his anxious opium dreams and Christian apologetical essays of the 1840s to his later nostalgic descriptions of his nursery readings of the Bible in the *Autobiographic Sketches* of the 1850s, Roberts's essay opens a panoramic view of De Quincey's career within a discursive framework of evangelical imperialism. Politics, of course, was never far from De Quincey's mind even in his most religious essays—or perhaps, as we have just seen, *especially* in his most religious essays—and his reputation as a magazine writer was forged in the crucible of political journalism. The bulk of his political journalism was however excluded in the nineteenth-century editions, including his own *Selections Grave and Gay*, that were standard until recently. Consequently much ink has been spilt by historicist critics of De Quincey on the issue of his politics and the ways in which these inform his visionary writings. If nineteenth-century disciples of De Quincey tended to be reverential to the point of protecting his reputation by excising his texts—as Masson and Japp did—to augment his reputation of piety, it was perhaps inevitable that the twentieth century should proceed in the opposite direction and denounce him for his unacceptable political views—his 1821 *Confessions* have often been read in this way as endorsing a deep-seated conservatism.

This view is challenged in two separate and robustly argumentative essays by Barry Milligan and Robert Morrison respectively, concentrating on medical professionalism and extracting a radical subtext in the *Confessions*. As Morrison argues, in the *Confessions*, De Quincey enjoys an elitist education and preens himself on being thought a gentleman and a scholar. He fraternizes with aristocrats and Etonians, quotes Edmund Burke and the older Wordsworth, and comments rather glibly on the pleasures of wandering

among London's working classes. He experiences terrifying nightmares in which his identity is threatened by the tyranny of urban masses and the terror of revolutionary battle and strife. His fear of the East is brought vividly to life in the frantic xenophobia of the Malay dream, where he fantasizes about racial superiority and the genocidal exercise of imperial power. Yet as Morrison points out the *Confessions* also contain a radicalized subtext that complicates and destabilizes De Quincey's often truculent Toryism. His narrative celebrates both power and defiance. De Quincey bolts from educational and parental authority and lives outside traditional social structures, an exile who befriends waifs and prostitutes, a thinker who is immersed in recondite German philosophy, and a hedonist who swallows opiates at an unprecedented rate. The text is packed with references to liberal and radical writers, including Thomas Clarkson, Thomas Erskine, William Hazlitt, John Keats, John Leslie, David Ricardo, William Roscoe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Wilberforce, all of whom energize and betray the breadth of De Quincey's political, social, and intellectual sympathies. In the *Confessions*, his aristocratic and colonial preoccupations collide with his delight in disobedience and over-indulgence.

In a parallel argument, Barry Milligan indicates the polemical nature of De Quincey's engagement with medical orthodoxy on the subject of opium, aligning the opium-eater's views with the Brunonian school of medical thought—following the work of the medical authority John Brown (1735–88) and his disciples. However, as Neil Vickers has argued in *Coleridge and the Doctors*, the Brunonian system had become 'inextricably linked with social and political radicalism' by the 1790s. Milligan argues consequently that opium works with respect to De Quincey's sense of class much as it acts upon his sense of national identity, unearthing a quasi-primordial unity with 'the Other' that is both liberating and disturbing. Opium's destabilization of De Quincey's otherwise notoriously conservative political views is reflected not only in his advocacy of Brunonianism, but also in his solidarity with workers and prostitutes in his Saturday night rambles. As both Milligan and Morrison show in different ways, far from promoting hard-line conservatism in any direct fashion, the *Confessions* reveal the paradoxes and strains at the centre of De Quincey's attitude toward race, class, slavery, imperialism, and political violence.

Gender and sexuality—yet other areas in which traditional literary studies have been shaken by recent theory—are next in line for treatment in three distinct and complementary essays by John Whale, Julian North and Josephine McDonagh respectively. In her essay on 'De Quincey, Wordsworth and Women in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*', North questions recent accounts of De Quincey's 'anxiety of reception' (in Newlyn's presentation of him) by looking at his writing for *Tait's* in relation to his construction of audience. 'The Lake Reminiscences' show De Quincey 'wooing the reader'—especially the female reader—in a way that offers a critique of what is represented as Wordsworth's unchivalrous disregard for his audience. The influence of

Christian Johnstone, *Tait's* female editor, is evident in De Quincey's enthusiastic references to women writers which intersect with his writings on the male Lakers. De Quincey's respect for female literary achievement contrasts with what he represents as Wordsworth's contempt for contemporary women's fiction, thus identifying the opium-eater with the poet's female relatives, particularly Dorothy Wordsworth. Together, he and Dorothy become emblematic of Wordsworth's readers, upon whom the poet depends without sufficiently acknowledging his debt.

Another essay interrogating the familiar ground of De Quincey's relationship with Wordsworth in a newly critical way is John Whale's 'De Quincey and Men (of Letters)' which complements recent feminist critiques of De Quincey by the likes of Leighton, Fulford and McFarland, by drawing attention to De Quincey's engagement with different forms of nineteenth-century masculinity in their connection with literary culture. Whale reassesses De Quincey's complex relationship to Wordsworth in this new light, and explores his long-standing and embattled relationship to John Wilson, aka Christopher North of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The connections between privacy, reputation, professional integrity, and the gendered activity of literature for the professional man of letters, form the basis for Whale's enquiry, rather than canonical concerns with poetic genius which have dominated such discussions. The production of a new form of masculinity out of a combination of conduct, sexuality, and writing in the magazine culture of the first three decades of the century are measured against conflicting and more pervasive forms of corporeal masculine culture which also, in turn, formed competing ideas of national identity.

An essay on De Quincey's much-vaunted interest in books is long overdue, and Josephine McDonagh obliges by productively contextualizing this interest in terms of the cultural politics and discourses of 'bibliomania', the strange affliction conceived of in the early decades of the nineteenth century as a medical condition. Bibliomania formed the basis of male homosociality among book connoisseurs and collectors who met at the Roxburghe Club (which included the famous book collector Richard Heber, who in the 1820s allegedly engaged in a homosexual relationship with an aspiring young male bibliographer, Charles Hartshorne). While De Quincey was not a member of the club, he had attended the famous Roxburghe sale of 1812 (which inaugurated the Club's anniversary meetings), and his keen interests would have drawn him into proximity with these homosocial and book-loving circles. Yet another scandal involving homosexual propensities within a bibliophilic context which McDonagh speculatively invokes involved a fellow of All Souls College in Oxford, Charles Shipley, who intriguingly may have met and pressed a guinea on De Quincey's brother, Richard (otherwise known as 'Pink' on account of his exceeding prettiness), while De Quincey was in Oxford. This background regarding the homosocial and homosexual aspects of bibliomania may help to explain the particular anxieties that De Quincey expresses regarding books, especially his grotesque fantasy about

a potentially unlimited order for books that is elaborated in the *Suspiria de Profundis*, and also more generally, his discussions of his own library, and those of friends and associates.

Two essays focus on texts of the 1840s, Joel Black's 'Temperance and Temperament: De Quincey's Politics of Global Addiction' which looks at a relatively overlooked essay on 'National Temperance Movements', and Ian Balfour's reading of 'The English Mail-Coach' in relation to 'the Sublime of the Nation'. While De Quincey's journalistic writings dealing with the opium trade have been the subject of some recent studies, Black rewardingly follows a supplementary line by focussing on alcoholism as the subject of 'National Temperance Movements'. Why was De Quincey so enthusiastic about temperance movements in Britain and America while he vigorously opposed the contemporaneous political campaign to eliminate opium addiction in China? Rather than ascribing such contradictions to nationalism, Black sees them as stemming from De Quincey's imagined affinity with the temperate Asiatics whom he perceived as being susceptible to opium while he saw the northern nations as being susceptible to alcohol. While De Quincey sees Europeans as creating an unnatural craving and dependency on alcohol in the temperate regions they colonize, he fails to acknowledge the West's far more flagrant exploitation of the East in the case of Britain's opium trade with China. Instead he portrays himself as a victim of the global opium exchange who has been implanted with insatiable desires originating in the East.

Yet another structure of global politics—this time seen in terms of aesthetics—underpins Balfour's analysis of the discourses of sublimity and nationality in 'The English Mail-Coach', which he links most interestingly with De Quincey's seminal translation of Kant's *Observations on our Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. Kant's characterization of various nations of the world on the basis of a graduated discrimination between their propensities to the polar aesthetic categories of beauty and sublimity supplies the framework for Balfour's analysis of 'The English Mail-Coach'. In Balfour's analysis, the titular mail-coach becomes a vehicle of national sublimity in more ways than one, so much so that the message is inherent in the medium: the mail-coach is the medium of the sublime news regarding the great Napoleonic victories and traumas, but at the same time its own unstoppable velocity (and the consequent associations with sudden death) render it an object of sublimity in itself.

Both of the preceding essays as well as those by Gregory Dart and Charles Rzepka draw our attention to the *Victorian* De Quincey, an aspect of his literary career which ought to be very apparent from his publishing dates, but is often overlooked in favour of the opium-eater's (also undoubtedly) imbrication in *Romantic* literary culture and theory. The problem is clearly one of our own construction (of period categories) rather than of De Quincey's making. The essays by Dart and Rzepka address this fallacy of period-categorization head-on by reading De Quincey in symbiotic relation to his

Victorian contemporaries. As Dart suggests in his exemplary reading of the 1854 ‘Postscript’ to the celebrated essays on murder, De Quincey’s life-long obsession with murder is inflected by the 1830s and 40s phenomenon of the ‘Newgate Novel’ and responds to criticisms of this low form of literature by elevating murder into high art with distinctively Tory overtones. De Quincey emerges in this analysis as an early theorist and dramatist of the metropole: as issues of individuality and community, virtue and vice, are represented in spatial, almost geometrical terms in his text, mapped onto the ambivalent landscape of early nineteenth-century Wapping. Also turning to mid-Victorian contexts for his readings, Rzepka reconsiders the 1856 *Confessions* which have tended to fall out of favour with critics in recent years, drawing attention to the new meanings generated by the 1856 version which Masson’s edition standardized for over a century. Appearing only a year before the Indian ‘mutiny’ (or first war of independence) of 1857, De Quincey’s work fed into mid-Victorian anxieties regarding orientalism and addiction, intertwining them in the popular imagination. Such an influence can be traced through works such as Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1867–8), Charles Dickens’s *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), and the early Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle. Interestingly, both Dart and Rzepka relate De Quincey to popular and sensational forms of literature during the Victorian period, though his reputation remains that of a High Romantic.

If not God’s plenty, then certainly this volume has De Quincey’s plenty. His works are viewed in relation to politics, religion, medical and orientalist discourses, gender and sexuality, high aesthetics, theory, literary history, philosophy and popular culture among other contexts; the list of his works examined include familiar and unfamiliar material, the 1803 *Diary*, writings for the *London Magazine*, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, and *Tait’s Magazine*, as well as the 1821 *Confessions*, ‘The English Mail-Coach’, the *Suspiria de Profundis*, the ‘Murder’ essays, the *Autobiographic Sketches* and the 1856 *Confessions*, not to mention manuscript correspondence and newly published material from the Pickering and Chatto *Works*; new evidences are unearthed and speculative ventures launched in the following pages; materialist and historicist approaches, global and contemporary politics, orientalism and aesthetics, gender theory, queer theory, and postcolonial theory, have all been pressed into service; his political colours seem to shift from a Tory blue to a colonial pink to a radical red depending on which way one reads him; he is Romantic and Victorian, compassionate and snobbish; a reader and a writer; a patient and a doctor; a literary giant and a wretched journalist; an addict and an agent. We have not attempted any schematization of De Quincey, beyond what the contributors have achieved in their own differing ways. The introduction above orders and groups together articles in ways that we hope will be illuminating and productive, but at the same time we recognize that the essays will speak to each other across the volume in ways we have not fully anticipated or cannot now hear. This