

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

**NCLC**

**198**

Volume 198

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other  
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800  
and 1899, from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations



**Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism,  
Vol. 198**

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## Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)* has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, *NCLC* has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 500 authors representing 38 nationalities and over 28,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *NCLC*.

### Scope of the Series

*NCLC* is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, *NCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *NCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *NCLC* is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

*NCLC* continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*.

### Organization of the Book

An *NCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.



- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

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Frank, Joseph. "The Gambler: A Study in Ethnopsychology." In *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, edited by Elizabeth Cheresh Allen and Gary Saul Morson, 69-85. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 75-84. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>Thomas De Quincey 1785-1859</b> .....	1
<i>English essayist, critic, and novelist</i>	
<b>George Lippard 1822-1854</b> .....	114
<i>American novelist, journalist, editor, and critic</i>	
<b>Adalbert Stifter 1805-1868</b> .....	252
<i>Austrian novelist and author of short fiction</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 331

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 443

*NCLC* Cumulative Nationality Index 459

*NCLC*-198 Title Index 463

# Thomas De Quincey

## 1785-1859

English essayist, critic, and novelist.

The following entry presents criticism on De Quincey's works from 1999 to 2005. For additional information on De Quincey's life and works, see *NCLC*, Volumes 4 and 87.

### INTRODUCTION

Regarded as a versatile essayist and accomplished critic, De Quincey used his own life as the subject of his most acclaimed work, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), in which he chronicles his fascinating and horrifying addiction to opium. *Confessions* has been widely hailed as an insightful depiction of drug dependency and an evocative portrait of an altered psychological state. De Quincey is recognized as one of the foremost prose writers of his day; his ornate style, while strongly influenced by the Romantic authors he knew and emulated, is ascribed by critics to the author's vivid imagination and desire to recreate his own intense personal experiences.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

De Quincey's life as a child figures prominently in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. He was a frail, sensitive boy who was tyrannized by an older brother. When he was seven, his beloved older sister, Elizabeth, died. In his later writings, De Quincey maintained that her death shaped his destiny because his grief caused him to seek solace in an imaginary world. This tendency to escape into reverie foreshadowed the importance of dreams and introspection to his work. At ten, he was sent to grammar school where he fared well academically but, according to his autobiographical writings, was deeply unhappy. At seventeen, he ran away from school with a copy of William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and a collection of Greek plays. For several months he wandered throughout the country, and then traveled to London, where he hoped to study the English Romantic poets. His life during this period was one of self-imposed deprivation, and he eventually returned home. His mother, in an effort to tame her son, enrolled him at Oxford. At the university, he excelled academically but was socially isolated. De Quincey experimented with opium for the first time at Oxford: a

classmate prescribed the drug for a toothache and De Quincey found that he enjoyed its effects. By 1813 De Quincey was addicted to opium. At Oxford, he abandoned poetry and, inspired by his studies of German thought, decided instead to establish himself as the author of a "true philosophy." After submitting what was regarded as a brilliant paper, De Quincey failed to appear for his final oral examination and left Oxford without completing his degree. While still at Oxford, De Quincey had written Wordsworth a glowing letter, and the poet, in turn, invited him to visit. The offer both thrilled and terrified the young man, and he chose to meet Samuel Taylor Coleridge first. Coleridge shared De Quincey's interest in metaphysics and opium but warned him about the dangers of addiction. When De Quincey met Wordsworth, the poet invited him to join the Lake District's literary circle. De Quincey moved nearby, and became a frequent visitor to the Wordsworth household.

De Quincey married and seemed content with family life until his opium addiction became debilitating. Rather than enhancing De Quincey's reasoning or writing abilities, opium eventually rendered him unable to think or move, and he remained listless and bedridden. His wife devoted herself to his recovery and, with her support, he gradually became able to function sufficiently to serve as editor of the *Westmoreland Gazette*. The local newspaper soon featured De Quincey's vivid accounts of grisly murder trials, as well as essays on philology, politics, and German philosophy. De Quincey's subject matter and erratic work habits angered his employers and he was asked to resign. De Quincey agreed to leave, firmly believing that a regular routine was incompatible with the habits of a philosopher. However, because his financial situation was dire and he had a large family to support, he sought out Charles Lamb, who introduced De Quincey to London's journalistic circles, and De Quincey was invited to write for *London Magazine*. The publisher encouraged De Quincey to write about the subject he knew most intimately, his opium addiction. In September, 1821, the first half of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* appeared anonymously in *London Magazine*, and the complete *Confessions* was published as a single volume in 1822. With the publication of *Confessions*, De Quincey was immediately established as a major Romantic prose author. Following his stay in London, De Quincey moved to Edinburgh, where he wrote for several journals. De Quincey disliked writing for periodi-

cals and often stated that he contributed to them solely for financial gain. Nevertheless, De Quincey's contemporaries and later critics have asserted that the essays that were published during this period display his virtuosity as a prose writer and his interest in a wide array of subjects. De Quincey died in 1859.

## MAJOR WORKS

*Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and what is often referred to as its sequel, *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), are intensely personal chronicles of De Quincey's experiences with opium, including the drug's physical and psychological effects. In these autobiographical writings, De Quincey attributes to his opium reveries a visionary power that informs his understanding of creativity and literary style. De Quincey published an expanded version of *Confessions* in 1856, but this version is considered obscure and stylized. His numerous essays, which initially appeared in periodicals in the Lake District, London, and Edinburgh, treat a large variety of issues, both parochial and international: Britain's imperial conflicts in Asia and northern Africa, criminal violence, theological history, Enlightenment philosophy, as well as numerous more explicitly literary reviews. Among these literary essays, De Quincey's essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*" (1823) has received acclaim as an outstanding piece of psychological criticism. In addition, De Quincey's essays "The English Mail-Coach" (1849) and "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827) have been praised by scholars as not only stylistically innovative but as providing invaluable and unparalleled insights into the major social, economic, political, and moral concerns of his time. According to scholars, De Quincey's attention to the psychological aspects of literary, political, and domestic life stands as an important precursor to twentieth-century inheritors of the Romantic tradition. In addition, De Quincey published essays that sketched personal portraits of other Romantic authors; his reminiscences of his interactions with Coleridge and Wordsworth offer largely sympathetic insights into their literary circle. De Quincey believed that dreams chronicle the soul's development and provide insight into the conscious mind, and so he sought to address explicitly the role of visionary experience in the creative process. In so doing, critics have noted, he forged a new kind of prose that rivaled Romantic poetry in terms of both its intensity and idealism.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Some critics consider De Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis* the supreme prose fantasy of English literature. Initially, the public believed that *Confessions* were fic-

tional, but De Quincey asserted their authenticity and basis in reality. Critics often point to the diffuse nature of De Quincey's style, which some commentators have attributed to the author's carelessness rather than to a conscious artistic decision. Prior to De Quincey's death, his expertise as a literary critic was not considered but his talents as an essayist were widely acknowledged. De Quincey's critical works sometimes reveal more prejudice and narrow-mindedness than insight: maintaining, for example, that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was immoral or citing evidence of plagiarism in the works of Coleridge. Many modern-day critics have emphasized De Quincey's complex relationship with British imperialism; his horror and anxiety about the depravity and chaos that he associated with the Orient and his staunchly conservative political views seem to contrast sharply with his Romantic sensibilities. Although many critics find fault with the ornateness of De Quincey's writing and its digressive tendencies, others maintain that his essays display an acute psychological awareness. Commentators note that the impassioned prose of De Quincey's autobiographical works vividly recalls both his youthful dreams and later drug-induced meditations. According to numerous scholars, the literary strengths and the tensions that mark De Quincey's work situate him within the realm of modernity. As a result, De Quincey is viewed as exemplifying the Romantic prose writer and at the same time heralding the emergence of a new understanding of literature and subjectivity.

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## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- \**Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (autobiography) 1822
- "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*" (essay) 1823; published in the journal *London Magazine*
- "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (essay) 1827; published in the journal *Blackwood's Klosterheim; or, The Masque* (novel) 1832
- The Logic of Political Economy* (essay) 1844
- Suspiria de Profundis* (autobiography) 1845
- "The English Mail-Coach, or the Glory of Motion" (essay) 1849; published in the journal *Blackwood's*
- De Quincey's Writings*. 22 vols. [edited by J. T. Fields] (autobiography, criticism, and essays) 1851-59
- †*Selections Grave and Gay from Writings, Published and Unpublished, of Thomas De Quincey, Revised and Arranged by Himself*. 14 vols. (autobiography, criticism, essays, and letters) 1853-60
- The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*. 14 vols. [edited by David Masson] (autobiography, criticism, and essays) 1889-90

*The Uncollected Writings of Thomas De Quincey.* 2 vols. [edited by James Hogg] (essays) 1890

*The Posthumous Works of Thomas De Quincey.* 2 vols. [edited by Alexander H. Japp] (criticism and essays) 1891-93

*New Essays by De Quincey: His Contributions to the Edinburgh Saturday Post and the Edinburgh Evening Post, 1827-8* [edited by Stuart M. Tave] (essays) 1966

\*The first half of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* was published anonymously in *London Magazine* in September, 1821.

†This collection includes a revision of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.

## CRITICISM

**Karen Karbiener (essay date October 1999)**

SOURCE: Karbiener, Karen. "Cross-Cultural Confessions: America Passes Judgement on Thomas De Quincey." *Symbiosis* 3, no. 2 (October 1999): 119-30.

[In the following essay, Karbiener discusses possible explanations for De Quincey's popularity in America during his lifetime.]

Why were the writings of a decidedly British opium addict so popular in an America just emerging from its Puritan past? Grevel Lindop suggests that nineteenth century Americans

eagerly read and looked upon [British writings] as models of literary excellence. Suspecting that their own literature lacked polish, the more discriminating American readers placed a particularly high value upon style, and now that *Suspiria de Profundis* had crossed the Atlantic there were few American writers of any calibre who did not regard De Quincey as a master.<sup>1</sup>

Yet in the 1850s, when Thomas De Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis* as well as his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* became widely available to American readers, 'the spirit of nationalism was peaking in the United States', 'a national literature of considerable value had flowered', and 'the growing literate public had acquired an appreciation of novels and poems that celebrated American settings and American ideals'.<sup>2</sup> De Quincey's American contemporaries were determined to speak in and to listen to new and different voices; their goal was as much the establishment of an original American literary heritage as a distinctively un-British one.

Recognizing the ageing Tory as a 'master' was thus not the intent of a large part of the American reading public. Instead, what may account for De Quincey's im-

mense popularity overseas was America's curiosity and feelings of superiority over this particularly needy though nevertheless representative Englishman. American reviewers consistently emphasised De Quincey's status as a dependent, which was as much truth as it was wish fulfilment for many Americans still bearing ill will towards their former oppressors. Not only was the opium addict at the mercy of one of the tools of his beloved British imperialism; he was also dependent upon the American publishing industry and the American public at large for the establishment of his long-term popularity on either side of the Atlantic. Largely unsympathetic towards Britain's 'wayward child',<sup>3</sup> De Quincey nevertheless helped a culturally immature America come of age.

'We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,' Ralph Waldo Emerson declared in his 1837 lecture, 'The American Scholar.' 'The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame [. . .] We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.'<sup>4</sup> Alarmed by the lack of original American art forms, the abundance of works clearly derivative from established British forms, and the complacent attitude of the American reading public, Emerson found himself at the forefront of another American revolution—this one, for cultural independence. Once again, pioneers would fight difficult battles in order to ascertain and establish what it meant to be 'American.' 'We want no American Goldsmiths; nay, we want no American Miltons [. . .] let us boldly condemn all imitation, though it comes to us graceful and fragrant as the morning; and foster all originality, though, at first, it be crabbed and ugly as our own pine knots,' wrote Herman Melville in 'Hawthorne and His Mosses' in 1850, denouncing the safe, well-charted directions taken by writers like Washington Irving and challenging others to cut and clear new paths.<sup>5</sup> Among the unsung heroes responding to such calls to consciousness was the Boston businessman and sometime poet, James T. Fields—a literary light barely detected next to the radiant stars he helped to shine.<sup>6</sup> In addition to writing several volumes of poetry and essays, Fields was partner with William D. Ticknor in the prominent Boston publishing house of Ticknor, Reed, and Fields. The firm published the important periodical, the *North American Review* (1854-1864), as well as the *Atlantic Monthly* (1859 ff.); most importantly, perhaps, it produced the works of their friends and distinguished contemporaries, including Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Ticknor, Reed, and Fields' 1853 list of 'New Books and New Editions,' for example, includes twelve volumes of Longfellow's writings, eight volumes of Hawthorne's work, four volumes of John Whittier's writing, selections from James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Grace Greenwood, and an array of other American writers—while England's current



Poet Laureate is represented by three thin volumes, and Robert Browning's two volumes is listed under 'Miscellaneous'.<sup>7</sup>

Strangely, however, the first and perhaps the most well-represented author on Ticknor, Reed, and Fields' list—indeed, one of the most popular writers in mid-nineteenth century America—was not an American literary pioneer, but an English opium addict by the name of Thomas De Quincey. The ten volumes listed of *Writings of Thomas De Quincey* expanded to 22 volumes within six years, and inspired the fifteen volume *Works of Thomas De Quincey*, produced by James Hogg and the author himself.<sup>8</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, first published in book form in England in 1822, was available in America the following year. By 1860, there were eight British editions and eleven American editions of the book; between 1862 and 1899, fourteen English editions and twenty seven American editions were published.

Not surprisingly, Ticknor, Reed, and Fields' own *North American Review* applauded the quality of the new American edition of De Quincey's writings, citing the writer's 'present high rank and intellectual proportions'.<sup>9</sup> But even journals put out by competing presses had high praise for the Boston publisher's effort; in 1853, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, for example, declared De Quincey as 'now admitted to be the foremost living writer in English'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, De Quincey had been positively received by American readers since his first state-side appearance. 'There are few books of this size, which bear so deeply and distinctly the impress of genius,' wrote one of the first American reviewers of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*;<sup>11</sup> in 1850, De Quincey's *Biographical Essays* was hailed by a *Harp-er's New Monthly* writer as 'a work of extraordinary interest' by a 'bold and vigorous thinker'.<sup>12</sup> Such praise brought De Quincey international fame, as well as visits from 'numerous pilgrims from America'.<sup>13</sup> Listing De Quincey as one of the men he most wanted to meet on his British tour of 1848 (Emerson 141), Emerson made the note 'to my lecture! De Q at my lecture!' in his journal, though the addict would fall fast asleep during his talk (Lindop 368). De Quincey seemed to be no more attentive to his American fan mail, which poured into the De Quincey household and according to James Hogg 'entailed no small amount of labour on the part of De Quincey's daughters in their courteous attention to such epistles' (Hogg 198).

It should come as no surprise that De Quincey rarely bothered writing to his American admirers, or even writing about America at all.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, his popularity overseas is surprising at this moment in American literary history because of his well-publicised and profound 'Englishness';<sup>15</sup> at this point, even some of his most enthusiastic British reviewers recognised his infamous

'High Church and Tory tone' as a 'grievous fault'.<sup>16</sup> Openly professing his High Toryism in his published works, De Quincey even helped determine the political line of such Tory newspapers as the *Edinburgh Saturday Post* (Lindop 285). He was 'bewildered and hurt at hearing opinions avowed most hostile to the reigning family and to monarchy in general' (Lindop 154). For De Quincey, 'parliamentary reformers, Whigs, radical artisans, Irish Catholic leaders, campaigners against slavery or the corn-laws were all lumped together as "Jacobins" and they and their ideas rejected on principle without much serious consideration' (Lindop 285). Even if American readers came to know De Quincey through his most popular work, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, they needed to look no further than the title for a confirmation of his nationality and allegiances. From the first paragraph with its allusions to 'our' English feelings, to the last sentence, in which he made clear that his Bible was written by a fellow countryman, De Quincey detailed his position as the keeper of the flame of English culture. 'My life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher: from my birth I was made an intellectual creature: and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been,' De Quincey states,<sup>17</sup> prompting his American reviewers to recognize him as the newest among the intellectual 'landmarks, the colossi of English literature'.<sup>18</sup>

Considering that De Quincey was a representative of the very same English influence from which Americans were trying to break, how may one account for his undeniable popularity on Columbia's shores in the nineteenth century? Since many early reviews focused on De Quincey's relationship with opium, one may infer that the Englishman's addiction was one of his strongest selling points. Indeed, the hedonistic, pagan implications of the use of opium as a luxury rather than as a medicine were dangerously seductive to a people with a Puritan heritage. Though in England, 'the more we look over the records of the early nineteenth century, the more addicts we discover',<sup>19</sup> in America the drug was still considered suspiciously exotic at that time. Walter Cotton wrote of his opium experiments in the *Knickerbocker*, describing images of 'a ruined world' and 'a peasant in his field calling aloud to his forgotten God': 'Let no one test like me, the dreaming ecstasies and terror of opium; it is only scaling the battlements of heaven, to sink into the burning tombs of hell!'<sup>20</sup> Upon reading De Quincey's *Confessions*, Carlyle had called opium the 'Devil's own drug' (Lindop 402); many Americans held similar views, comparing opium addiction with eternal punishment, enslavement to dark forces, or a bartering of one's soul.

In his 1868 book entitled *The Opium Habit, with Suggestions as to the Remedy*, Horace Day credits De Quincey with first acquainting the public outside of the medical profession with the pains and pleasures of

opium.<sup>21</sup> Introducing his hope of 'indicating to the beginner in opium-eating the hazardous path he is treading, and of awakening in the confirmed victim of the habit the hope that he may be released from the frightful thralldom which has so long held him' (8-9), Day quotes extensively from *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. But De Quincey's nightmares and suffering had done far more to satisfy the growing American penchant for tabloid-style entertainment than to cure its addicts; in 1859, for example, a *North American Review* writer gushed on about the 'sublime punishment' of De Quincey's opium use, 'which words cannot picture, under the immensity of whose grandeur even an archangel might stagger.'<sup>22</sup> British reviewers, not picking up on America's fascination with De Quincey's drug use, were often apologetic to his overseas fans concerning his prose style. A writer for the *London Examiner* noted that, though it was 'our pleasure at the introduction of the works of an author of great ability to the world of American readers,' De Quincey's lack of prudence and control was 'attributable to the false medium through which his strangely-blended powers and weaknesses have led him to contemplate his own claims and obligations'.<sup>23</sup>

America's fascination with opium was particularly strong in the mid-nineteenth century because of the drug's significant role in international politics. Arguments concerning Britain and the role of opium in her colonial government became heated; as a former British colony, Americans took sides ideologically, even if they were not directly involved in the politics. In 1839, the First Opium War broke out in China in an attempt to suppress the British importation of the addictive drug from India into China. When the dust settled, China was forced to recognize and legalize the traffic. For many years afterward, Americans continued to express hostility towards the forces of British imperialism:

Well may the Chinese compare the English with that race of white men whom their traditions assert to have introduced opium among some neighboring islanders, for the purpose of subduing them. When the natives had contracted the fatal habit, they lost their manliness and were unable to resist their invaders or to live without them, since they supplied them with opium [. . .] much of the misery of the opium-smoking Chinese is traceable to English avarice, which derives an annual income of some six millions pounds sterling from the labors of the East India Company, in raising opium in India, and smuggling it into China for sale.<sup>24</sup>

Opium was clearly the devil's tool—and in America's eyes, the fallen angel still carried a scepter instead of a pitchfork. In the nineteenth century, the drug became a symbol of Britain's oppressive, enslaving powers, much as tea had been during the years of the American Revolution. And Americans held on to their symbols just as they held onto grudges; after all, coffee has remained

most Americans' substitution for England's hot beverage of choice, since the days of the Boston tea party (Johnson 756). This brings one back to De Quincey: the self-declared figurehead of imperialistic Britain and her traditions; a conservative journalist who exposed his anti-Chinese biases in *Blackwood's* magazine through the 1840s;<sup>25</sup> indeed, a man 'with a family connection with the most prosperous and highly organized opium industry in the world', involved with Britain's illegal smuggling of opium into China (Lindop 123). Yet this man was as much a defender as he was a victim of his country's powers of enslavement! The man who so willingly and so well represented the powers of subjugating forces had been rendered a 'powerless corpse' by opium and had been declared 'lethargic' and even 'impotent'.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in laying bare his own soul, De Quincey had begun to rip asunder what he referred to as the 'decent drapery' of English society. According to De Quincey, his fall from grace pointed to a much larger problem; there were 'scores of cases' of opium addiction even in 'the class of [English]men distinguished for talents, or of eminent station' (*Confessions* 3).

Could former victims of other apparati of British imperialism read on without some feelings of satisfaction? Indeed, Americans seem to have enjoyed the opportunity to judge those who had so severely judged them: De Quincey's weakness and dependence gave Americans a chance to exult in their strength, to celebrate their hard-won independence. His unconsciously satirical portrayal of a representative Englishman was as satisfying to Americans as would be Oscar Wilde's mockery of his countrymen in his stateside lectures.

*Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* also provided Americans with materials with which to rework their relationship with Britain. Whereas Americans had been more likely to point out similarities between representative Englishmen and American personalities in the past, writers now more eagerly emphasized differences; indeed, Americans could feel proud of their alleged coltish roughness next to the corrupt, decrepit sickliness of De Quincey. Readers were supplied with exaggerated figures concerning the English opium eating population: 'It is certainly true of England, that the importation of opium has tripled in the last fifteen years,' warned one alarmist writer in the *North American Review*.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Americans were applauded for their moral strength and values: 'We believe that very few persons, if any, in this country, abandon themselves to the use of opium as a luxury; nor does there appear to be any great danger of the introduction of this species of intemperance', De Quincey's earliest American reviewer noted smugly.<sup>28</sup> Even British reviewers recognized America as blissfully removed 'from the jealousies and fashions of the English world of letters'.<sup>29</sup>

As his popularity in the United States increased, De Quincey had unwittingly become dependent on some-

thing besides opium: American support. Asked by British publishers and readers to collect his works, De Quincey had long complained of the futility of this task. 'The thing is absolutely, insuperably, and for ever impossible,' De Quincey wrote to George Gilfillan (Lindop 371). Thus when J. T. Fields of the Ticknor, Reed, and Fields publishing house put together twenty two volumes with no help or encouragement from De Quincey, even Hogg was struck by the monumental nature and importance of Fields's undertaking. 'The edition of his works collected and published by Mr. J. T. Fields . . . had done much for his reputation in America, and strongly recalled attention to him in this country,' Hogg noted (63). Furthermore, Fields attracted not only De Quincey's but the rest of the world's attention with what was considered an extraordinary display of generosity and business ethics. The absence of transatlantic copyright law allowed American publishers to reprint foreign books without paying or even notifying the original publishers or writers.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, after waiting in vain to hear from De Quincey concerning his project, Fields journeyed to Lasswade in 1852 to present the writer with his share of the payment for the first seven volumes. The 'very unexpected and handsome liberality' of 50 pounds delighted the entire family—and completely surprised De Quincey, whose relationship with the British press had been a source of anguish and economic troubles to him.<sup>31</sup>

De Quincey was obviously caught off guard by Fields's show of fairness and generosity; after all, he had and would continue to maintain a condescending attitude towards all things American—including Fields's *Writings of Thomas De Quincey*. For years before the first volume was produced in 1851, De Quincey did not respond to any of Fields's attempts to contact him about the project; and when he finally held the impressive volumes in hand, he used them as drafts from which to construct the British edition.<sup>32</sup> Making notes in the margins, De Quincey complained that his markings seemed blurry. 'The American paper runs like blotting paper,' he grumbled in 1856, citing the 'vile Yankee fraud of the papermakers' (Bonner 70-71). A year later, De Quincey made light of Fields's accomplishment in an essay included in Volume Seven of Hogg's edition:

Boston, meantime, it is, wheresoever that Boston may ultimately be found, which (or more civilly, perhaps who) keeps all my accounts of papers and 'paperasses' (to borrow a very useful French word), all my manuscripts, finished books—past, present, or to come—tried at the public bar, or to be tried; condemned, or only condemnable. It is astonishing how much more Boston knows of my literary acts and purposes than I do myself.<sup>33</sup>

In 1858, 15 volumes of Fields's edition would disappear into the 'hideous confusion' of De Quincey's study, a victim of his extreme solvency as much as his

carelessness (Bonner 93). Such complaints, written to Hogg as part of their steady stream of communication, were never heard by Fields, simply because De Quincey never corresponded with him. Throughout the gathering and editing of *The Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, Fields relied on De Quincey's daughters for all needed information and any encouragement. He was not even granted an autograph without some trouble. 'It is a work of fearful magnitude to get him to write one,' Emily replied to Fields' request in 1858. 'I will try however and do what I can when I see him' (Bonner 35).

The sisters knew well of the excruciating efforts needed to get their father to write to Fields. When De Quincey received Fields's remuneration in the summer of 1852, he had promised the publisher to write an introductory essay for the next volume; in spite of his vow and strong encouragements from his daughters, De Quincey delayed the project until the next year. On January 8, 1853, Fields received his first and only letter from De Quincey, a short epistle that had been 'fought for with an energy little short of despair,' according to Margaret's accompanying note (Bonner 19). Fields proudly displayed the 'Extract of a Letter Written by Mr. De Quincey to the American Editor of His Works' on the first pages of Volume Ten, which he had just completed. The brief note openly acknowledged the Englishman's debt to America:

first, in having brought together so widely scattered a collection—a difficulty which in my own hands by too painful an experience I have found from nervous depression to be absolutely insurmountable; secondly, in having made me a participator in the pecuniary profits of the American edition, without solicitation or the shadow of any expectation on my part, without any legal claim that I could plead, or equitable warrant in established usage, solely and merely upon your own spontaneous motion.

(*Autobiographic Sketches* 7)

Despite his prevailing attitude towards all things American, De Quincey's thanks on these two points were certainly sincere; he even reiterated his remarks in the 'Preface' to Hogg's edition, commending the Boston publisher for assembling 'a great majority of my fugitive papers' and making him 'a sharer in the profits of publication, called upon to do so by no law whatever, and assuredly by no expectation of that sort upon my part'.<sup>34</sup> De Quincey, along with his readers on either side of the Atlantic, could not deny the enormous contribution that Fields had made towards the writer's international fame and fortune.

The immediate significance of De Quincey's sweeping bow to Fields was not lost on American readers. 'Mr. Fields, his American editor, receives, as he deserves, a grateful acknowledgement from his illustrious friend,'



noted a reviewer of *Autobiographic Sketches* in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*.<sup>35</sup> Stateside journalists were quick to praise the 'good taste and enterprise of an American publisher'.<sup>36</sup> If De Quincey was indeed a representative Englishman, Fields had shown just how much more fair-minded, forward-thinking, and resourceful a 'representative American' could be. And like De Quincey, Fields was interested in preserving and enlarging his country's sense of cultural heritage. True, America did not have England's cultural legacies, but Fields had shown his compatriots that they had the ability to build their own. Indeed, the American public's role in the continuation of the legacy of a great writer made De Quincey as American as he was British—at least to American readers.

Americans had not forgotten the sting of such criticisms as those of Sydney Smith, who in 1820 had proposed his famous query, 'In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?' At last, they had an answer to this question. 'It is probable that no collection of [De Quincey's works] would have been undertaken in England, if Messrs. Ticknor and Fields of Boston, had not ventured on the somewhat hazardous task,' wrote Shelton Mackenzie in his 1855 'Preface' to *Klosterheim*. 'Thus, from this country, the very existence of whose literature was challenged by an Edinburgh reviewer, within the memory of men not yet aged, has sped across the wide Atlantic a hearty and cheering recognition, in his later years, of the genius of Thomas De Quincey'.<sup>37</sup> Fans of De Quincey, whether they were enjoying the Boston or the Edinburgh edition, had a determined, independent-minded Yankee to thank for the availability of his writings. It is to our 'everlasting credit', claimed a *New York Quarterly* review, that America was where 'he was first recognized, and shall be last forgotten [. . . Fields] has performed a service that the American public has received with unqualified applause; which action the English people have begun to echo'.<sup>38</sup>

For Americans, then, Fields' gesture seems to have marked a significant moment in the changing relations between Britain and America; Americans had made an important contribution to literary history, anticipating an intellectual and economic reception for De Quincey's work earlier and more thoroughly than the author's own country. British reviewers were mindful of this fact, but were less optimistic about proclaiming America's cultural independence. De Quincey was, and would continue to be considered as profoundly English, and his new popularity only confirmed the superiority of British literary productions. British reviewers would continue to recognise the lack of an original American literature well into the nineteenth century; as a writer for the *Westminster Review* wrote years after *Leaves of Grass*, *Walden*, and 'The Raven' were published, 'for almost every work of note which has been produced there, the

mother nation can show a better counterpart'.<sup>39</sup> But Americans, especially in the publishing industry, had demonstrated their savvy in another way. 'Times have changed,' noted one British journalist. 'Now, even Sydney Smith would be fain to admit that among the many tests of the permanent merit of an English work, none, perhaps, is sounder than the judgement of an American public'.<sup>40</sup> Though it was still doubtful whether Americans could produce their own literature, they knew how to support Britain's literary heritage better than the British themselves. In his 'General Preface' to the new edition of *The Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, David Masson criticized his countrymen as late as 1889: 'It is time that De Quincey's countrymen of the British Islands should be able to possess, if they choose, an edition of De Quincey even more perfect in point of completeness than this American edition'.<sup>41</sup>

The 1850s were the most prosperous decade thus far in both De Quincey's career and the development of an independent American culture. Although a fascinating drug habit had helped, what accounted even more strongly for the perpetuation of both was the enterprising nature of a Boston publisher. Fields helped bring the imagination and spirit of his fellow Americans to life by bringing De Quincey to life. And yet Fields remains a footnote in most accounts of nineteenth century literary history—though Grevel Lindop does give Fields the last word in *The Opium Eater*. The quotation does as much to memorialize De Quincey as it does to remind readers of the debt he owes to his unassuming American patron:

In my whole life I have never met a man who won upon my affectionate interest more. He was so great a man, and yet so gentle and kind! As I walked with him to Roslin he talked with an eloquence I had not heard surpassed . . . till it seemed as if it were sinful not to take down his wonderful sentences.<sup>42</sup>

#### Notes

1. Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: J. M. Dent, 1981), 367.
2. Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale, 1988), xi-xii.
3. William Hallam Bonner, ed., *De Quincey at Work* (Buffalo: Airport, 1936), 15.
4. William H. Gilman, ed., *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Signet, 1983), 240.
5. Washington Irving was called the 'American Goldsmith'. Herman Melville, 'Hawthorne and His Mosses', *Norton Anthology of American Literature* 3rd edn (New York: Norton, 1989), I: 238.
6. Among the volumes of poetry written by James T. Fields (1817-1881) was *A Few Verses For a Few*