
Leeches and Opium: De Quincey Replies to "Resolution and Independence" in "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater"

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Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Jul., 1994), pp. 572-580

Published by: Modern Humanities Research Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3735116>

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LEECHES AND OPIUM: DE QUINCEY REPLIES TO 'RESOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE' IN *CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER*

De Quincey recalled his first sight of Wordsworth, in 1807, as 'like a flash of lightning'.¹ By the time he left the Lake District, in 1821, his feelings towards the poet were less fervent; he later made unfavourable comparisons, 'in respect to pride', between his former idol and Lucifer.² The story of this hero-worship and subsequent disillusionment is well known, both from De Quincey's own accounts and from his correspondence with the Wordsworth family.³ What has not been generally recognized is the extent to which De Quincey's writing, as well as his personal life, was marked by the discovery that his god had clay feet. Several critics have rightly suggested that De Quincey's work shows significant debts to Wordsworth's.⁴ However, his allusions to the poetry are characteristically more subversive than subservient. Indeed, they form an Oedipal subtext to De Quincey's writing that works more creatively than the famous outbursts of open resentment against the poet.

De Quincey was, of course, one of the few to read *The Prelude* in manuscript, and his first book, the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, is both a homage and a riposte to that poem.⁵ The *Confessions*, like Wordsworth's poem, narrates the growth and thwarting of the poet's mind, but De Quincey emphasizes and even celebrates the latter process at the expense of the former. His autobiography is founded on a Wordsworthian model of memory, but it is also the story of a bodily constitution impervious to memory's 'renovating virtue': his physical sufferings as an adolescent have 'struck root' in him and grown 'into a noxious umbrage that has overshadowed and darkened' his later life.⁶ Most significantly, the *Confessions* subvert Wordsworth's privileging of the natural over the artificial by taking as its setting the city, and, as its theme, the artificial paradise of opium.

¹ 'The Lake Poets: William Wordsworth' (1839; rev. 1854), ed. by David Masson, *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 14 vols (London: Black, 1896-97), II, 235.

² 'Gradual Estrangement from Wordsworth' (1840), Masson, III, 204.

³ See especially the original, unrevised version of 'The Lake Poets: William Wordsworth', in Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of The Lakes and The Lake Poets*, ed. by David Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970; repr. 1988), pp. 119-206; 'Gradual Estrangement from Wordsworth', Masson, III, 197-206; 'On Wordsworth's Poetry' (1845), Masson, XI, 294-322. See also John E. Jordan, *De Quincey to Wordsworth: A Biography of a Relationship, with the Letters of Thomas De Quincey to the Wordsworth Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

⁴ For De Quincey's debts to *The Prelude*, see, for example, Jordan, pp. 358-64; V. A. De Luca, "'The Type of a Mighty Mind': Mutual Influence in Wordsworth and De Quincey", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 13, 2 (Summer 1971), 239-47; V. A. De Luca, *Thomas De Quincey: The Prose of Vision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 24, 34; D. D. Devlin, *De Quincey, Wordsworth, and the Art of Prose* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 65-74.

⁵ De Quincey read either MS A or MS B of the 1805 *Prelude* at some time between late 1808 and 1812, probably 1810 or 1811. For further details see my 'Thomas De Quincey and the Early History of Aestheticism and Decadence' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1990), pp. 316-18. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* was first serialized in the *London Magazine*, 4, 21-22 (September-October 1821), 293-312; 353-79. It was reprinted in book form by Taylor and Hessey in 1822.

⁶ *The Prelude* (1805), XI, 259; Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. by Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 67. All subsequent references to the *Confessions*, in parentheses in the text, are to this edition.

Robert Woof is closest to the mark when he describes the *Confessions* as 'a kind of eloquent parody of Wordsworth'.⁷ However, behind the broad parody noticed by Woof is a series of allusions which exploit and subvert the poet's work more pointedly.⁸ One of the most interesting of these parodic passages, and the one I want to focus on here, comes at the crucial moment when De Quincey first samples opium. The passage alludes to three Wordsworth poems, but most tellingly to 'Resolution and Independence'. De Quincey's response to this poem is a revealing act of self-assertion against the poet. It may also support the evidence that a concern with the effects of opium forms an important subtext in 'Resolution and Independence' itself.

The passage in question comes at the beginning of the section entitled 'The Pleasures of Opium', where De Quincey describes how he took the drug in London in 1804 as a remedy for toothache. At first, he dwells on the ironic disparity between the divine revelations of the drug and the sordid urban setting in which it is first encountered:

I feel a mystic importance attached to the minutest circumstances connected with the place and the time, and the man (if man he was) that first laid open to me the Paradise of Opium-eaters. It was a Sunday afternoon, wet and cheerless: and a duller spectacle this earth of ours has not to show than a rainy Sunday in London. (p. 70)

De Quincey's inflated rhetoric parodies Wordsworth's rhetorical sublimation of the urban landscape in his sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'. (There, of course, 'Earth has not anything to show more fair' than London 'all bright and glittering in the smokeless air'.) De Quincey goes on to describe how he walked along Oxford Street and found the druggist's shop 'near "the stately Pantheon"' (as Mr Wordsworth has obligingly called it)' (p. 70). Later, when he looked for the druggist, 'I sought him near the stately Pantheon, and found him not' (p. 71). These allusions are to Wordsworth's poem 'Power of Music', another account of the urban scene transfigured, this time by a street musician: 'Near the stately Pantheon you'll meet with the same | In the street that from Oxford hath borrowed its name' (ll. 3-4). The quoted phrase brings the grandeur of Wordsworth's London to De Quincey's urban scene, but its ironic recontextualizations work to undermine the poet's idealized view of the city, particularly his friendly account of Oxford Street, addressed by De Quincey, earlier in the *Confessions*, as his 'stony-hearted step-mother' (p. 67).

Both the sonnet 'Composed on Westminster Bridge' and 'Power of Music' stand as examples of special pleading for the city, rare assertions in Wordsworth's poetry that a sustaining imaginative power can be felt in the London streets. De Quincey's allusions suggest that 'fostered alike by beauty and by fear' in a natural environment, Wordsworth fails to understand the real education in suffering experienced by the city-dweller.⁹ His recontextualizations of Wordsworth's poems expose Wordsworth's view of the urban as superficial and assert an alternative, and genuine, city landscape. This subverts the Wordsworthian hierarchy of the natural (as genuine) over the urban (as artificial).

⁷ Robert Woof, *Thomas De Quincey: An English Opium-Eater* (Cumbria: Trustees of Dove Cottage, [1985]), p. 9. See also Jordan, p. 358.

⁸ For an extended discussion of De Quincey's parodies of Wordsworth in the *Confessions* see my thesis, pp. 240-92.

⁹ *The Prelude* (1805), 1, 306.

De Quincey's homage to and rejection of the Wordsworthian natural paradise is also suggested in the third and most significant parody contained in this passage. In his presentation of the druggist and his remedy De Quincey replies to 'Resolution and Independence'. Like the speaker in this poem, he describes himself out walking, stricken by a sickness which is cured by the mysterious intervention of a stranger. However, where Wordsworth's protagonist is suffering from the melancholy consequent on an overbalance of joy, De Quincey's ailment (toothache) is significantly more mundane, caused simply by his having plunged his head in cold water and gone to sleep 'with hair thus wetted' (p. 70). The burlesque is continued in his description of his therapist and the remedy he offers.

The speaker in 'Resolution and Independence' meets a leech-gatherer, who appears as if he were an emanation of the natural landscape which surrounds him.¹⁰ As the leech-gatherer speaks he takes on an otherworldly aspect in the poet's mind:

Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a Man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, and strong admonishment.
(l. 117)

In place of the leech-gatherer, De Quincey encounters on the London streets, 'the druggist, unconscious minister of celestial pleasures!', who despite, 'indications of humanity [...] has ever since existed in my mind as the beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself' (pp. 70-71). His suggestion that the 'dull and stupid' (p. 71) druggist of Oxford Street was actually heaven-sent 'on a special mission to myself' suggests that opium has a supernatural quality, but it also ironically undercuts that suggestion. By alluding to 'Resolution and Independence' here, De Quincey both exploits and undermines Wordsworth's account of a 'peculiar grace' (l. 50) which has enabled him to find, in nature, the cure for his despondency. He enjoys the resonances of Wordsworth's apotheosis of the homely leech-gatherer, but he also ridicules the fantasy.

De Quincey's druggist, like Wordsworth's leech-gatherer, hovers between worlds, and so does the cure he offers. The opium is described as 'celestial', but is, in fact, synthetic. Not only does De Quincey adopt a man-made environment, in preference to Wordsworth's natural one, he also chooses a man-made cure for his physical sufferings. Opium offers an artificial 'Paradise' (p. 70), an inner 'apocalypse' an 'abyss of divine enjoyment' (p. 71) but it is also, at this point in the *Confessions*, presented by De Quincey as a commodity to be bought for less than a shilling: 'portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint bottle' (p. 72). In Wordsworth's poem the cure for despondency springs from the natural landscape, and the leech-gatherer as part of it, who instruct the poet in resolution, independence, and trust in God.¹¹ Opium, as celestial commodity, at once duplicates and thoroughly undermines the leech-gatherer's therapy.

¹⁰ 'Resolution and Independence', in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807* by William Wordsworth, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 123-29, especially ll. 64-70.

¹¹ See M. Teichman, 'Wordsworth's Two Replies to Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode"', *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 982-89, for the view that 'Resolution and Independence' shows that comfort can come through faith in God alone, when consolation can no longer be found in nature. This does not take account of the leech-gatherer as himself an emanation of the natural world. The speaker of the poem rediscovers the 'joy' (l. 16) inscribed in the natural landscape at the beginning of the poem only through the mediation of the leech-gatherer: "'God," said I, "be my help and stay secure; | I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor"' (ll. 146-47).

This passage, then, reveals a critique of aspects of Wordsworth's work, and the assertion, by De Quincey, of a competing vision. Further than this, however, there is evidence that in parodying 'Resolution and Independence' in particular, at this junction in the *Confessions*, De Quincey may have been making a more knowing critique than at first appears.

Before he encounters the leech-gatherer, the speaker in 'Resolution and Independence' meditates on the cases of Chatterton and Burns, two poets who succumbed to melancholy:

I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
The sleepless Soul that perish'd in its pride;
Of Him who walk'd in glory and in joy
Behind his plough, upon the mountain-side:
By our own spirits are we deified;
We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.
(l. 43)

Robert Woof notes that 'Chatterton, in some newspaper accounts, was thought to have died through an overdose of opium'. He also argues that Wordsworth, influenced by James Currie's 'Life' of Burns, believed this poet to have been the victim of alcohol, which Currie characterizes at one point as the European equivalent of opium in the Orient. Woof implies that these allusions to Chatterton and Burns are part of the poem's response to Coleridge's opium addiction, and more specifically to his Verse Letter to Sara, later to become 'Dejection: An Ode'.¹²

A Wordsworth poem with a subtext directly commenting on the consequences of opium dependency might well have provoked a reaction from De Quincey. Woof's suggestions are particularly interesting in the light of the parody of 'Resolution and Independence' in *Confessions*, but his evidence needs to be examined and augmented.

There is, of course, nothing new in the view that 'Resolution and Independence' was written partly as a corrective to Coleridge's Verse Letter to Sara.¹³ That Coleridge himself regarded the two poems as related can be seen from his subsequent inclusion of them, together, in a letter to the Beaumonts.¹⁴ The question of whether Wordsworth meant his poem to contain a warning against Coleridge's incipient opium habit is less certain. Though the Wordsworths constantly bewailed Coleridge's illnesses at this period, there is no concrete evidence that they yet perceived his opium-taking as part of the problem.¹⁵

There are, however, suggestions that this may have been the case. The first phase of Coleridge's real dependency on the drug had begun during the winter of 1800–01 and was certainly known to some by 1802.¹⁶ There was also a broad hint regarding

¹² Woof, pp. 46–47.

¹³ See, for example, George Wilbur Meyer, 'Resolution and Independence: Wordsworth's Answer to Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*', *Tulane Studies in English*, 2 (1950), 49–74, and Teichman. Coleridge read his poem to the Wordsworths on 21 April 1802, causing Dorothy, at least, to be in 'miserable spirits'. The 'Leech Gatherer' was started on 3 May 1802 and a finished version was sent to Coleridge in July; see *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1941), I, 135–36, 142, 166–67.

¹⁴ Letter dated 13 August 1803, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by E. L. Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), II, 966–73.

¹⁵ Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*, between November 1800 and March 1802, are full of anxiety on behalf of Coleridge, with his boils, rheumatism, bowel troubles, and general melancholy.

¹⁶ Molly Lefebure, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* (London: Gollancz, 1974), p. 65; Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), pp. 297, 313, 337.

an earlier phase of Coleridge's opium habit in Charles Lloyd's novel, *Edmund Oliver* (1798), in which the eponymous hero, generally known to have been modelled on Coleridge, runs away to London and drowns his sorrows in laudanum.¹⁷ A suggestion that the Wordsworths might have begun to suspect that Coleridge was using Kendal Blackdrop in excess by early 1802 comes in Dorothy Wordsworth's entry in her journal: 'I was much affected with the sight of him — he seemed half stupefied.'¹⁸

Thus, 'Resolution and Independence' may have been written in the knowledge of Coleridge's opium habit, and intended, in part, as a specifically-directed response to this situation. Wordsworth's allusions to Chatterton and Burns support this reading of the poem.

At first sight, the connection between Chatterton and opium seems tenuous. There is relatively little evidence that the contemporary iconography of Chatterton included opium. Almost all the widely available later-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century accounts of Chatterton's suicide gave arsenic, not opium, as the means of death. Certainly the biographical record which most obviously forms the basis of Wordsworth's view of Chatterton did not mention opium.¹⁹ In support of Woof's claims I have been able to find only one (though memorably graphic) current account of Chatterton's suicide which mentioned opium as a cause of death. William Barrett, a surgeon who knew Chatterton, described, in 1789, how the poet had taken 'a large dose of opium, some of which was picked out from between his teeth after death [...] he was found the next morning a most horrid spectacle, with limbs and features distorted as after convulsions, a frightful and ghastly corpse'.²⁰ This account may or may not have influenced Wordsworth's view of Chatterton. The more important clue to Chatterton's significance for Wordsworth lies in the pairing with Burns.

Both Chatterton and Burns seem to have exemplified for Wordsworth the plight of the modern poet, deprived of financial 'independence' in a society where the supporting structures of patronage had collapsed. This was a theme much emphasized in the biographies of the two poets read by Wordsworth, and it recurs almost whenever they are mentioned in Wordsworth's later correspondence.²¹ The theme

¹⁷ *Edmund Oliver*, 2 vols (Bristol: Bulgin & Rosser for Joseph Cottle, 1798), I, 210, 218, 245.

¹⁸ 19 March 1802, *Journals*, I, 127.

¹⁹ The main account of Chatterton's life known to Wordsworth seems to have been that in *The Works of the British Poets*, ed. by Robert Anderson, 13 vols (London: J. and A. Arch; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute and J. Mundell, 1795), XI, 297–322. For Anderson's account of the suicide by 'arsenic in water', see page 307. 'Resolution and Independence' shows interesting verbal parallels with this 'Life' (which was in Wordsworth's possession by 1802). See Anderson, pp. 298, 302–08, for an emphasis on Chatterton's 'melancholy' and his striving for 'independence'. Anderson also ends by quoting Mr Dyer's reflections on blighted genius: "'O! Genius [...] art thou to be envied or pitied?'"

²⁰ William Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (Bristol: William Pine, 1789), p. 647. E. H. W. Meyerstein believes this to be the correct story, and bases this judgement partly on the evidence of modern forensic science. A deep stain on a pocket-book found in Chatterton's lodgings after his death was analysed in 1947 and found to contain opium alkaloids ('A Bristol Friendship: Thomas Chatterton and John Baker', *Essays in Divers Hands*, n.s. 25 (1950), 28–50 (pp. 46–49)).

²¹ See, for example, G. Gregory, *The Life of Chatterton* (London: G. Kearsley, 1789), pp. 48–56, describing Chatterton's failed application to Horace Walpole for patronage. The story is repeated by Anderson. See James Currie, *The Works of Robert Burns: With an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings*, 4 vols (Liverpool: J. McCreery for T. Cadell and W. Davies, London; W. Creech, Edinburgh, 1800), I, 141, 228–32, 246–47. See also *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), *The Middle Years*, II, 533–34; *The Later Years*, III, 500, and IV, 293–94, 324.

is clearly important in 'Resolution and Independence' where the speaker, just before alluding to Chatterton and Burns, agonizes over his dependency on the labours of others (ll. 36–42). Where Chatterton and Burns end in 'despondency and madness', he takes a lesson in self-sufficiency through work from the example of the leech-gatherer.

Interestingly, Currie's 'Life' of Burns culminates in a plea for the desirability of regular employment for poets, a plea which is directly linked to the disquisition, noted by Woof, on the susceptibility of Burns in particular, and of poets in general, to artificial stimulants.²² Currie sets up 'narcotics' (as he calls all artificial stimulants, including alcohol and opium) in opposition to the resolution and independence attendant on labour. The poet, he argues, will lean temperamentally towards indolence and the 'fictitious gaiety' of artificial stimulants, when he should purge his melancholy through work (p. 249).

Woof does not do justice to the extent to which this passage seems to have influenced Wordsworth's poem, both thematically and in specific verbal echoes. In the pages running up to his disquisition on alcohol and opium, Currie dwells on the enfeeblement of Burns's 'resolution' in his last days, when he was 'dejected in his spirits', and on Burns's poverty — Currie's edition is a fund-raising enterprise for Burns's widow and children (pp. 221–22, 232). Burns's plight and that of all poets is then linked specifically by Currie to the need for work: 'Better for him than sloth, toils the most painful, or adventures the most hazardous. Happier to him than idleness, were the condition of the peasant, earning with incessant labour his scanty food' (p. 247). The 'employment hazardous' (l. 108) of Wordsworth's peasant, gathering his dwindling stock of leeches, is the embodiment of the poet's best option as represented by Currie.

Thus in his allusions to Chatterton and Burns, Wordsworth would seem, like Currie, to be setting up an opposition in the poem between independence through labour as the right way for the poet and recourse to opium and alcohol as the road to ruin. This warning against artificial stimulants is for all poets but may have been directed at Coleridge in particular.

Woof argues further that in 'Resolution and Independence' 'Wordsworth slips, perhaps unconsciously, into opposing the world of melancholy associated with drink and opium with the figure of the leech-gatherer'. This, he claims, reflects a medical debate of the time between the virtues of leeches and opium.²³ Here, too, Woof's evidence is worth examining, since if we accept this argument, it casts an interesting new light on the poem, as well as on De Quincey's response to it.

The key source of this debate for Wordsworth was John Brown's *Elements of Medicine* (1788), which advocated the use of stimulants, principally alcohol and opium, where previously antiphlogistic cures, based on such practices as bleeding, had been favoured.²⁴ The Brunonian system, as it came to be known, divided diseases into the 'sthenic' (produced by excessive stimulation) and the 'asthenic' (due to deficient stimulation) (I, xv). Brown argued that for asthenic disorders bleeding was harmful, and should be abandoned in favour of a régime of stimulants (I, xiii). Such a régime, he said, had cured his own gout, for which he first drank

²² See Currie, I, 246–52.

²³ Woof, p. 47, and see pp. 53–55.

²⁴ [John Brown, M.D.], *The Elements of Medicine*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1788). This was Brown's own translation from his original edition in Latin (1780).

wine, then ate highly seasoned meat, and finally took opium (1, xi). Indeed, this drug, according to the Brunonian system, was the most powerful stimulant, and the cure for all asthenic disorders (1, 103–04, 235). Brown even recommends opium as a stimulus to intellectual effort and cites the case of a writer who was able to work for more than forty hours without rest by dosing himself with food, wine, and opium (1, 20–21). Opium, claims Brown,

banishes melancholy, begets confidence, converts fear into boldness, makes the silent eloquent, and dastards brave. Nobody, in desperate circumstances, and sinking under a disrelish for life, ever laid violent hands on himself after taking a *dose of opium*, or ever will. (1, 281–82)

If we accept that the implicit presence of Coleridge and the explicit presence of Chatterton and Burns in 'Resolution and Independence' represent, partly at least, the evils of opium and drink, Wordsworth's suggestions in the poem regarding the effects of these stimulants are the exact reverse of Brown's. Certainly we might expect Wordsworth to feel antipathetic to the Brunonian system. Günter Risse has pointed out that 'Brown denies the existence of a healing power of nature': as he says in the *Elements*, 'never lay by, nor trust to the supposed powers of nature, which have no real existence'.²⁵ However, in addition to the general dislike Wordsworth might have felt for Brown's system, he also had cause for particular disapproval. As Coleridge's notebooks show, Coleridge was deeply interested in Brunonian medicine.²⁶ He owned three copies of the *Elements* and was a friend and occasional patient of Dr Thomas Beddoes, who had written a preface to the 1795 edition of Brown's book.²⁷ Coleridge certainly seems to have been following a Brunonian régime from about 1800, in an attempt to cure his gout and other illnesses. It is likely that Coleridge and Wordsworth discussed Brown's *Elements*, since both owned copies.²⁸

Thus there may be an anti-Brunonian subtext in 'Resolution and Independence' and this may be partly directed at Coleridge. Where a Brunonian would have diagnosed Wordsworth's despondent protagonist as suffering from an asthenic condition, best cured by artificial stimulants, Wordsworth prescribes an old-fashioned, natural remedy. Instead of resorting to opium, the speaker of the poem has his melancholy humours symbolically leached away. The response within the poem to writers who use alcohol or opium is that the natural and God-given remedy is best. If the leech-gatherer is seen, as by some critics he has been, as a double for the poet by whom he is addressed, then leech-gatherer, and the leech cure, become metaphors for the proper action of the poetic imagination: a reciprocal relationship between the poet and the natural world.²⁹ Opium and other artificial stimulants, by contrast, betray that relationship and are accordingly disavowed.

²⁵ Günter B. Risse, 'The Brownian System of Medicine: Its Theoretical and Practical Implications', *Clio Medica*, 4, 1 (April 1970), 45–51 (p. 49); Brown, 1, 79.

²⁶ *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 1, *Text*, 388–89 (entry dated between January and May 1799). See also *Notebooks*, III, *Text*, 3827 (entry dated May 1810).

²⁷ Ralph J. Coffman, *Coleridge's Library: A Bibliography of Books Owned or Read by Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1987), p. 32, lists two English editions of the *Elements* in Coleridge's library (1788 and 1795), and the Latin edition (1780, 1784). Coleridge's 1795 edition of the *Elements* was amongst the books housed for him by Wordsworth: see Chester L. Shaver and Alice C. Shaver, *Wordsworth's Library: A Catalogue* (New York and London: Garland, 1979), p. 319. For Coleridge's friendship with Beddoes, from 1795, see Lefebure, pp. 61–63.

²⁸ For evidence that Wordsworth owned the 1788 edition of Brown's *Elements*, see Shaver, p. 34.

²⁹ See, for example, Robert N. Essick, 'Wordsworth and Leech-Lore', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 12. 2 (Spring 1981), 100–02.

Whether or not Wordsworth intended there to be an argument against the use of artificial stimulants, particularly opium, in 'Resolution and Independence', De Quincey seems to have read it in this way. Even if Wordsworth, in the poem, did not mean to reprove Coleridge for his use of opium, in retrospect this reading was certainly available to a reader such as De Quincey, who was in full knowledge of the subsequent years of Coleridge's addiction.³⁰ De Quincey's comments on Burns, Chatterton, and 'Resolution and Independence', other than in the *Confessions*, also suggest that he did indeed read an anti-opium subtext in the poem.

De Quincey viewed Burns and Chatterton, as Wordsworth did, as poets who had been ruined by lack of financial independence.³¹ When he mentions 'Resolution and Independence' in his 1839 essay on Wordsworth, it is as a prelude to a long and resentful account of that poet's singular good fortune, by contrast both with the unhappy specimens in his poem and, by implication, with De Quincey himself.³² He warns Wordsworth against enjoying his (financial) 'God-sends', and the 'Paradise' they have created for him, too complacently (pp. 192, 195). However, De Quincey's discussion of 'Resolution and Independence' here also suggests a grievance specifically directed against Wordsworth's disapproval of those who have used artificial stimulants.

Unlike Chatterton or Burns, De Quincey argues, Wordsworth had no need to fear poverty, on account of 'his great prudence, and the *temperance* of his daily life' (p. 189, my italics). This is no compliment: De Quincey casts that 'prudence' as mean and philistine (Wordsworth did not buy books; trees and shrubs served him instead of libraries) (p. 190). His reference to Wordsworth's 'temperance' is equally barbed, referring back to an earlier passage in the essay where De Quincey recounted the story of Wordsworth's only lapse into 'bouzy' behaviour, whilst an undergraduate at Cambridge: 'He was not too far gone to attend chapel decorously during the very acmé of his elevation' (pp. 167–68). When De Quincey grandiosely warns Wordsworth against forgetting 'the *human* tenure of [his] mighty blessings' and against insulting 'the less prosperous fortunes' of a 'frail' brother, he does so partly in reply to what he has suggested is Wordsworth's high-handed attack on the intemperance of others in 'Resolution and Independence' (pp. 195–96).

De Quincey's direct comments on the poem thus suggest a degree of irritation. However, it is his more covert response to 'Resolution and Independence' in the *Confessions* that resonates most powerfully in relation to the question of opium-eating. Despite rejecting all previous medical accounts of opium as 'Lies! lies! lies!' (p. 72), the *Confessions* is written under the influence of John Brown's *Elements*. De Quincey's book is based upon a Brunonian belief in the drug's stimulant effect rather than in its

³⁰ The reference to 'dejection' in 'Resolution and Independence' (l. 25) would by 1807 have made the poem seem a pointed response to Coleridge's Ode, published in 1802, though the word was not used by Coleridge in his original Verse Letter to Sara.

³¹ See De Quincey, 'A Manchester Swedenborgian and a Liverpool Coterie' (1837, first published as 'A Literary Noviciate'), *Masson*, II, 130–35. De Quincey knew Currie and had read his 'Life' of Burns in 1801. It is also perhaps significant that as a young man De Quincey had identified with Chatterton, as a melancholy victim figure; see *A Diary of Thomas De Quincey, 1803*, ed. by H. A. Eaton (London: Noel Douglas, [n.d.]), pp. 144, 156–57.

³² See 'William Wordsworth' (1839), Wright, pp. 189–96.

sedative properties.³³ Indeed, some of the cadences and vocabulary of De Quincey's famous apostrophe to opium, in the *Confessions*, beginning 'O! just, subtle, and mighty opium!' (p. 83), are strikingly similar to Brown's eulogy to the drug quoted above. When De Quincey alludes to 'Resolution and Independence' in the *Confessions*, therefore, it is as a Brunonian confronting an anti-Brunonian: an opium-eater asserting himself over a gatherer of leeches.

Opium, writes John Brown, 'makes the silent eloquent'.³⁴ De Quincey addresses the drug directly as 'eloquent opium! that with thy potent rhetoric stealest away the purposes of wrath' (p. 83). It is here, in the claims De Quincey makes for opium's power over the writer's art, that the importance of his reply to 'Resolution and Independence' in the *Confessions* lies. In Wordsworth's poem, arguably, the benefits of the natural way for the poet are pitted against the dangers of the way of artifice. The leeches bleed their victim, but they also cure him. Looking to God through the natural world will release the poet's creative energies from the palsy of melancholia. Opium and alcohol, on the other hand, may be read as a subtext in the poem representing the fool's paradise. In parodying Wordsworth's trust in a beneficent nature, De Quincey in the *Confessions* marks his loss of faith but also attempts to assert himself as urban 'Opium-Eater', against Wordsworth's 'happy Child of earth' (l. 31). Opium is De Quincey's man-made mental stimulus. It is also his symbol for the imagination which has no access to 'a peculiar grace, | A leading from above, a something given' (ll. 50–51).

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³³ Compare Brown, I, 235 with *Confessions*, p. 77. See also Nigel Leask, "'Murdering One's Double": De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" and S. T. Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria"', *Prose Studies*, 13, 3 (December 1990), 78–98 (p. 81).

³⁴ Brown, I, 282.