

KEVIN McCARRON

‘Memories of Old Sins’: Opium Addiction in Narratives of Nineteenth-Century London

While Nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones. The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon, every slate on the roof is as educational a document as if it were a slate covered with addition and subtraction sums.

G. K. Chesterton

London is the only real place in the world. The cities turn toward London as young partridges turn to their mothers. The cities know that they are not real. They are only houses and wharves, and bricks and stucco; only outside. The minds of all men in them, merchants, artists, thinkers, are bent on London. Thither they go as soon as they can. San Francisco thinks London; so does St Petersburg.

Richard Jefferies

And one thing is clear, that amidst such bitter self-reproaches as are now extorted from me by the anguish of my recollections, it cannot be with any purpose of weaving plausible excuses, or of evading blame, that I trace the origin of my confirmed opium-eating to a necessity growing out of my early sufferings in the streets of London.

Thomas De Quincey

This paper will suggest that throughout a number of English texts written in the nineteenth century, particularly during the second half of the century, the city is represented as a labyrinth at the centre of which lie dark secrets. It is also, connectedly, portrayed as both initiator and metaphor of addiction. Disguise, dissimulation, and deception are at the centre of numerous

English and American texts of the nineteenth century which feature addiction and the city. The article will focus on Thomas De Quincey's, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1856), Charles Dickens', *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Oscar Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Man With the Twisted Lip' (1892), with some comparative reference to two nineteenth-century American novels: Walt Whitman's *Franklin Evans* (1842), and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1896).

Wyn Kelley writes:

"Town" is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning, in its first, now obsolete sense, simply "an enclosed place or piece of ground, an enclosure: a field, garden, yard, court" (OED)... "City", deriving from the Latin *civitas*, owes its primary meaning to the root *civas* or citizen; hence it first signified the people who make up a community, only later acquiring the meaning of *urbs*, the place "occupied by the community".¹

However, certainly by the nineteenth century the city of London had emphatically lost this sense of 'community'. Monroe Spears, in *Dionysus And The City: Modernism In Twentieth-Century Poetry*, offers a similar etymology, but notes an important, modern shift in understanding:

The word *city* derives from *civitas*, city-state, which is properly an aggregation of *cives*, citizens; *civilization* has the same derivation. The city, then, even in its etymology, is internal as well as external: the city is a society of individuals who subscribe to an ideal or rational order... In earlier times, *Civitas Terrena*, the Earthly City, was seen as striving toward a Heavenly City, *Civitas Dei*; not expecting to embody on earth its perfection, but not without hope of achieving the Good Society. For the moderns, however, the City is seen as falling (things fall apart; falling towers) or as fallen (towers upside down in air; *la tour abolie*) and therefore moving in the other direction, toward the Infernal City.²

From this perspective, all the texts being discussed are 'modern' - they all represent the city as 'Infernal': a place of secrets and mysteries, enchantment and ruin, allure and entrapment. Julian Wolfreys, in *Writing London*, notes of nineteenth-century literary representations of London: 'London as both a real city and a place of the imagination, a symbolic construct always already something other than that which its mere presence indicated, needed a writing necessary to its

paradoxes and contradictions.’³ Spears further notes: ‘for the great modern writers, the line between literal and symbolic City is...tenuous.’⁴

The city is perceived as both external to humanity and created by human agency. It combines with alcoholism and opium addiction, both creators of obfuscation, to produce a landscape which is labyrinthine and secretive, duplicitous and deceitful. In *Franklin Evans*, Demaine informs Evans: “‘The place in which you are about to fix your abode, is very wicked, and as deceitful as it is wicked.’”⁵ Images of deceit and duplicity are pervasive in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and extend to every aspect of the protagonist’s lives: Lord Henry says to Basil Hallward “‘You seem to forget that I am married, and the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties.’”⁶ Comparably, the East End opium den in London is always associated with images of disguise and deceit. Wilde writes of Dorian Gray: ‘There were moments, indeed, at night, when, lying sleepless in his own delicately-scented chamber, or in the sordid room of the little ill-famed tavern near the Docks, which, under an assumed name, and in disguise, it was his habit to frequent, he would think of the ruin he had brought upon his soul.’⁷

Charles Dickens, the exemplary ‘London’ novelist, begins by writing about London with cheerfulness and curiosity:

What inexhaustible food for speculation do the streets of London afford? We never were able to agree with Sterne in pitying the man who could travel from Dan to Beersheba and say that it was all barren; we have not the slightest commiseration for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent Garden to St Paul’s Churchyard and back into the bargain, without deriving some amusement – we had almost said instruction, from his perambulations.⁸

However this jovial attitude to London does not last. In *The City in Literature*, Richard Lehan writes: ‘In *Bleak House*, the city is a tragic setting – a lonely place where the family is often left

behind on the estate, a physically gigantic realm in which space is now manipulated by machines like the new locomotives, an amoral world that turns on money and intrigue as personal knowledge gives way to anonymity.’⁹ In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens writes of London: ‘Such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky; such a beleaguered city, invested by the great Marsh Forces of Essex and Kent.’¹⁰ It is in *Bleak House*, in the figure of the wretched Captain Hawdon, who frequents London’s opium dens, where Dickens first makes reference to opium, but in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* opium becomes central to the plot of his last, unfinished novel.

The connection between the city and addiction, both to alcohol and drugs, is made by a number of authors. In *Writing London*, Wolfreys writes: ‘London consumes, leaving absence, desire and anxiety in the trace of writing as the signs of its topography, and as its imprint on the anxious self. The city traces itself in the veins of the text as the signature of addiction and anxiety.’¹¹ In *Shopping in Space*, Elizabeth Young suggests: ‘The relationship of junkie to city is not merely that of inhabitant to environment: it is the relationship of addiction itself.’¹² Edmund B. O’Reilly argues: ‘Intemperance is not merely grafted onto the enigmatic city as a symptom, but likewise unfolds as a trope: city and disease act metaphorically for one another. The quality they share is dissimulation. In drunkenness as in the experience of the city, nothing is what it appears to be.’¹³ The transformation and transcendence attained through opium and alcohol are represented by all the writers under discussion here as being as deceitful and treacherous as the urban landscapes within which the protagonists undergo the joys and horrors of addiction. In *The City in Literature*, Lehan writes ‘The city becomes a place of mystery and intrigue, hiding secrets of life itself.’¹⁴ O’Reilly writes specifically of *Franklin Evans* that one of the most potent

images controlling the dynamics of the novel is ‘the pervasive figure of the city of secrets...The city in *Franklin Evans*...is unconditionally the malevolent city of secrets.’¹⁵ The city, secrets, and addiction, to either alcohol or opium, are all subsumed within the most pervasive of the tropes that dominate these texts. The most ubiquitous image used in the literature of the period, in both England and America, to conflate secrecy, the city and addiction, is that of the city as labyrinth. Charles Dickens writes in *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*: ‘Nobody had ever found Todgers on a verbal direction, though given within a minute’s walk of it...Todger’s was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few.’¹⁶ De Quincey, in *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, refers to ‘the mighty labyrinths of London’¹⁷, while in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian tells Lord Henry of the way in which he found Sibyl Vane at work in a London theatre: “‘I don’t know what I expected, but I went out and wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares.’”¹⁸ Wyn Kelley notes the way in which inevitability is inscribed within labyrinthine literature: ‘The hero has only limited power to choose his path or control the journey once it has started. The labyrinth works to fulfill the logic of his initial choice for redemption or error and bring him to the logical consequences of that choice. The hero may choose, then, whether to enter the labyrinth or not, but once inside he finds all paths leading to the inevitable conclusion.’¹⁹ Nothing is more inevitable in these texts than addiction.

Despite his claim at the end of the *Confessions* that he had freed himself from opium, De Quincey took opium every day from 1812 to his death: ‘During certain periods (1813-1815, 1817, 1828, 1844), his dosage rose as high as 12,000 drops of laudanum a day with accompanying derangement of his sleep and waking hours. At other times he was apparently able to reduce his dose to a maintenance level (50-1,000 drops a day) at which he could function

reasonably well.²⁰ In 1821, newly arrived in London, De Quincey was introduced to the proprietors of the *London Magazine*, and for them, in a little room at the back of no. 4, York Street, Covent Garden, De Quincey produced what appeared anonymously in two installments (September and October 1821) as *Confessions of an English Opium Eater: Being an Extract From the Life of a Scholar*. It was immediately successful. However, although clearly a book about opium, *Confessions* is also one of the first important books about London; and it is particularly fascinating in terms of its relationship with the great urban centre and Romanticism. The idea of an urban romantic may seem oxymoronic, but then *Confessions* is driven throughout by unreconciled oppositions. In contrast to Wordsworth's trudge up hill and down dale, De Quincey prefigures the city Romanticism of Baudelaire and the Parisian *flâneur*, or city wanderer. Where other Romantics found the sublime in mountain scenery, De Quincey's more lamplit, opium-fuelled imagination found it in the vastness of London. The city becomes another nature: 'Sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole star...I could have believed that I must be the first discoverer of some *terrae incognitae* and doubted whether they had been laid down in the modern charts'²¹ De Quincey writes of his nocturnal ramblings under the influence of opium:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances; for an opium eater is too happy to observe the notion of time. And sometimes, in my attempts to steer homewards...I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, alleys without soundings, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without obvious outlets or thoroughfares, as must baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney coachmen.²²

In *De Quincey's Disciplines* Josephine McDonagh writes:

In the description of his nightly excursions in the streets of London...he indicates how opium also has the capacity to elide temporal and cultural difference, for it expands his sense of time and space. However, as he describes a landscape that is as opaque as an impenetrable text, comprised of 'problems of alleys', 'enigmatic entries', and 'sphinx's riddles of streets', it is as though his own

confused mind has been projected onto the landscape of London, which becomes as alien as the undiscovered world.²³

When De Quincey describes his fruitless attempts to find the prostitute Ann again, he writes:

If she lived, doubtless we must have been sometimes in search of each other, at the very same moment, through the mighty labyrinths of London; perhaps even within a few feet of each other – a barrier no wider, in a London street, often amounting in the end to separation for eternity!...I may say that on my different visits to London, I have looked into many, myriads of female faces, in the hope of meeting her...²⁴

Wolfreys notes of this passage: ‘This passage, more than any other, makes clear the effect which London can have. The figures of the labyrinth and eternity suggest the double abyss of endless space and unending time, spaces beyond mapping and temporality which cannot be registered.

Identity is dissolved through the very figure of London.’²⁵ He further suggests:

The anxiety caused by the loss of Ann is, in itself, merely symptomatic of the larger effect of London on De Quincey. For London is a city of losses, disappearances, obscured identities, dreariness and dream-like states. It is the place of anxiety and anguish, of both body and mind. Personal relationships are unsustainable in a location peopled by anonymous attorneys, Jewish moneylenders, unfulfilled desires and addictions...*Confessions* is the most purely symptomatic London text, haunted relentlessly by the figure of the desiring self constantly in search of a knowable other as the means by which to define the limits of personal identity.²⁶

An equivalence between London itself and opium addiction is very precisely maintained by De Quincey, whose account of the first time he bought opium conflates the city and the opium seller:

By accident, I met a college acquaintance, who recommended opium. Opium! Dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain! I had heard of it as I had heard of manna or ambrosia, but no further. How unmeaning a sound was opium at that time! What solemn chords does it now strike upon my heart! What heart-quaking vibrations of sad and happy remembrances! Reverting for a moment to these, 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. My road homewards lay through Oxford Street and...I saw a druggist’s shop. The

druggist (unconscious minister of celestial pleasures!), as if in sympathy with the rainy Sunday, looked dull and stupid, just as any mortal druggist might be expected to look on a rainy London Sunday.²⁷

Wolfreys writes of this episode: ‘It is London which, because of its threatening, engulfing aspect causes De Quincey to turn to opium. Here we see the city erasing identity by imprinting itself in all its banality onto the individual.’²⁸

Lehan writes of portrayals of the city throughout Dickens’s work: ‘Dickens’s city was both lure and trap: a lure to those who are called to it as if by a magnet, because only the city offers the means of realizing a heightened conception of self; a trap in its workings, which lead to human destruction.’²⁹ Just as the city offers ‘the means to realize a heightened conception of self’, so too do drugs and alcohol, most prominently on offer in the city. Although most of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is set in Cloisterham, Dickens’s fictionalized Rochester, the novel opens in a London opium den. C.S. Roberts offers a pragmatic explanation for this:

Dickens, right up to March 1870, had been giving readings to fascinated and horror-stricken audiences of the murder scene in *Oliver Twist* and passion was far from being spent. So, ‘the ancient English Cathedral Town’ is first presented to the reader of *Edwin Drood* in the befuddled consciousness of a drug-addict in a London opium den.³⁰

While such an explanation must always remain a possibility, it is more likely that Dickens was not as interested in a sensationalist opening as he was in immediately aligning his protagonist against the conventional morality of his novel, and London was where opium was consumed.

In addition to the depiction of London as ‘labyrinthine’, both the theatre, as an image of deceit and illusion, and the association of ‘eastward’ with opium and transgression, are pervasive features of these texts. In the American ‘alcohol’ texts, the labyrinth also strongly features. In *Sobering Tales*, O’Reilly writes:

Drink and the city are both labyrinthine - one temporal, the other spatial. The temporal labyrinth of drink draws the drinker into a present and future where the

past, concealed at each subsequent turn, is made continually unusable. The labyrinthine city draws the spellbound passenger into progressively meaner streets: the “looker-on” becomes a participant, the participant becomes an enthusiast, the enthusiast becomes habituated, debilitated, and finally a corpse - the last word in worthless simulacra.³¹

Opium is shown to confuse the demarcation between objective and subjective, between the real city and the city of dreams, far more strikingly, and much more persistently, than alcohol. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* opens *in media res*, immediately establishing a blurred conflation between a London opium den, Cloisterham, and the exotic East:

An ancient English Cathedral Town? How can the ancient English Cathedral town be here? The well-known massive grey square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? ... Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.³²

De Quincey writes in *Confessions*, using similar exotic Oriental imagery:

O just and righteous opium! that to the chancery of dreams summonest, for the triumphs of despairing innocence, false witnesses; and confoundest perjury; and dost reverse the sentences of unrighteous judges; - thou buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles - beyond the splendours of Babylon and Hekatompylos.³³

McDonagh also notes the exoticism of his terminology:

In the description of his nightly excursions in the streets of London...he indicates how opium also has the capacity to elide temporal and cultural difference, for it expands his sense of time and space. However, as he describes a landscape that is as opaque as an impenetrable text, comprised of ‘problems of alleys’, ‘enigmatic entries’, and ‘sphinx’s riddles of streets’, it is as though his own confused mind has been projected onto the landscape of London, which becomes as alien as the undiscovered world.³⁴

In the confused mind of the urban alcoholic or opium addict, nothing can be taken for granted, nothing is ever quite as it seems.

As earlier noted, the city, addiction, and the theatre are invariably intertwined. De

Quincey writes: ‘Thus I have shown, or tried to show, that opium does not of necessity produce inactivity or torpor; but that, on the contrary, it often led me into markets and theatres.’³⁵

Wolfreys cites Raphael Samuel to suggest: ‘Writing the city becomes, in Raphael Samuel’s words, a theatre of memory in which takes place, over and over, the struggle for power. The city itself, as well as being an improper stage, also offers a barely comprehensible range of images, a Symbolic Disorder over which no single power structure can dominate.’³⁶ Opium does dominate the addict, but like the stage, it can only offer the addict illusion. In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens writes of Jaspers: ‘He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays his pipe upon the hearthstone, draws back the ragged curtain, and looks with repugnance at his three companions. He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a ‘strange likeness of the Chinaman.’³⁷ Dorian Gray’s own supply of opium is carefully hidden in his home, and is concealed within an exotic and elaborately decorated Chinese box:

His breath quickened. A mad craving came over him...At last he got up from the sofa on which he had been lying, went over to the table and, having unlocked it, touched some hidden spring. A triangular drawer passed slowly out. His fingers moved instinctively towards it, dipped in, and closed on something. It was a small Chinese box of black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with round crystals and tasselled in plaited metal threads. He opened it. Inside was a green paste, waxy in luster, the odor curiously heavy and persistent.³⁸

Writing of Dorian Gray’s drug addiction, Curtis Marez cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s suggestion that in both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and in Dickens’ *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* ‘literary depictions of drug addiction often function as displacements for the “secret vice” of homosexuality.’³⁹ I disagree with this ‘displacement’ theory of opium addiction. The vice that is being directly addressed is, simply enough, opium addiction itself. While homosexuality was

considered the ‘worse’ of the two vices, opium addiction was hardly socially acceptable. In a similar vein to Sedgwick, referring to Ann in *Confessions*, Wolfreys writes: ‘...the figure of the woman, like the opium found in the city, is merely one more addictive trace offered by London and serving as a metonymic figure or signature for the Capital, which fuels simultaneously both desire and anxiety’.⁴⁰ However, a woman is not ‘addictive’ in any way that is comparable to opium addiction. Both writers, it seems to me, overlook the possibility that, sometimes, ‘a cigar is just a cigar’.

In an interesting reworking of the convention that has the protagonist discover the illusory nature of theatre, Wilde, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, has the actress Sibyl Vane announce much the same lesson to the novel’s protagonist:

You taught me what reality really is. Tonight, for the first time in my life, I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played. Tonight, for the first time, I became conscious that the Romeo was hideous, and old, and painted, that the moonlight in the orchard was false, that the scenery was vulgar, and that the words I had to speak were unreal, were not my words, were not what I wanted to say.⁴¹

The American alcohol texts are primarily concerned with the dangers attendant on an inability to distinguish between illusion and reality, as are the opium narratives - the city, alcohol and opium, and the theatre are all equally duplicitous.

O’Reilly writes of *Franklin Evans*: ‘Theatrical performance and its trappings focus and essentialize life in the secret city, and both theater and city metaphorically express grievous epistemological errors. These errors are repeated in alcohol abuse.’⁴² The ‘glass fronted’ saloon announces the legality of drinking, and selling, alcohol, which is in direct contrast to the images of concealment always associated with opium dens. In ‘The Man With The Twisted Lip’ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle employs the same imagery as Crane to transform the building into something resembling the human: ‘Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep

flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search.’⁴³ In both cases, the ‘mouth’ symbolizes ingestion of a substance which is being criticized within the main body of the narrative. Crane’s ‘yellow glare’ adds a further human image, actually intimating the saloon’s treacherous and hostile intent to the patrons who are so easily lured inside. The stress upon dissimilitude: ‘imitation leather;’ ‘counterfeit massiveness;’ and ‘mahogany-appearing’ further the novel’s drive to reveal the epistemological errors inseparable from drunkenness.

Like the streets that all seem to converge on a saloon in *Maggie*, and like the unavoidable saloons in *Franklin Evans*, the topography of the city itself reduces the options available to the protagonists. Wolfreys writes:

De Quincey is never at home with his presence in London, even at the remove afforded by memory and confession. What we can observe about London as a modern metropolis is a connection between the city and the Oriental Other... Certainly the two come together for De Quincey in London, in that the habitual taking of the ‘drug of the Orient’, opium, is always connected with the Saturday night pleasures afforded by the city at the heart of empire, such as going to the opera or observing the proletariat.⁴⁴

Although the city is at ‘the heart of empire’, opium dens are never at the centre of the city. Opium dens are never encountered easily, or in daylight; instead they are always associated with extreme distance, winding streets, and darkness. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde depicts his protagonist’s fateful visit to the opium den where his real identity will be uncovered by Sibyl Vane’s brother:

There were opium-dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new. The moon hung low in the sky like a yellow skull. From time to time a huge misshapen cloud stretched a long arm across and hid it. The gas lamps grew fewer, and the streets more narrow and gloomy... The way seemed interminable, and the streets like the black web of some sprawling spider. The monotony became unbearable, and, as the mist thickened, he felt afraid.⁴⁵

Wilde's imagery dramatizes the novel's persistent distrust of opium. A simile links the moon with death, and a 'misshapen' cloud is anthropomorphically represented, thereby emphasizing the perverted nature of Gray's quest, while the 'narrow' streets are themselves transformed through simile into an image unequivocal in its sinister malevolence. The English opium narratives construct a London landscape that restricts choice once the journey has begun. Here, topography is destiny.

Opium dens are always situated in the East End of London and the imagery surrounding them is always that of the exotic, dangerous East. De Quincey writes in *Confessions*:

In China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyze. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes.⁴⁶

Marez writes of Gray's quest for opium in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: 'Wilde accurately places his opium den in the quays of London's East End docks, home to visiting sailors - notably South East Asian sailors - and the Chinese merchants who catered to their needs.'⁴⁷ Dickens employs extensive Eastern imagery during the opening scene set in the opium den in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: 'Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers.'⁴⁸ The final chapter of this novel, as we have it, is also mostly set in the same opium den, and Dickens describes Jaspers' journey to it: 'Eastward and still eastward through the stale streets he takes his way, until he reaches his destination: a miserable court, especially miserable among many such.'⁴⁹ In Conan Doyle's 'The Man With the Twisted Lip', Watson describes his visit to the opium den where he will find Holmes, characteristically for an opium

narrative, in disguise: ‘Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge.’⁵⁰ It is not only opium, however, which is associated with the East. In *Franklin Evans*, Evans, now sober, describes a final encounter with an old friend: ‘As I was passing one day along a street on the eastern side of the city, my course was impeded by a crowd, gathered around a tipsy loafer, who was cutting up his antics in the street...It was Colby, my early intimate, the tempter who had led me aside from the paths of soberness.’⁵¹ Further geographical connections between the opium and the alcohol narratives can be seen in the images of spatialisation which occur throughout all the texts.

The streets in all these narratives are, invariably, narrow and the protagonists are always hemmed in by their surroundings, thereby emphasizing their reduction of choice and their loss of free will. In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens writes that ‘the streets of Cloisterham city are little more than one narrow-street by which you get into it and get out of it.’⁵² As Dorian Gray makes his interminable journey to the East End opium den the streets become ‘more narrow and gloomy.’⁵³ Once inside, the interiors of opium dens are also often described as oppressive and claustrophobic: ‘I walked down the narrow passage between the double row of sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying fumes of the drug’,⁵⁴ Watson informs us, while in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the opium den is described as containing ‘the meanest and closest of small rooms.’⁵⁵

In *Franklin Evans*, the East, alcoholism, and narrowness are linked twice. In desperation, Evans joins a gang of criminals, who meet on the east side: ‘Starting at one of the eastern wharves, is a street running up from the river - a narrow, dirty street, with many wooden houses, occupied as taverns for seamen and abiding places for degraded women.’⁵⁶ Similarly, recovering from a five-day bender, Evans considers begging: ‘There seemed to be no better plan than to

walk down the wide handsome street, leading to the east from where I stood, and knock at every house.’⁵⁷ On both occasions, Evans begins his degraded alcoholic descent from the narrow and stunted east; it is significant that the street of affluence is described as ‘wide’, implying within the labyrinthine context of the novel, choice and freedom of will. Conan Doyle, too, employs precisely the same dichotomy: as Holmes and Watson leave the opium den for the suburbs the city’s topography is transformed: ‘we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets, which widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad balustraded bridge, with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us.’⁵⁸ Such spatialisation reinforces the epistemological concerns shared by this body of texts; it is not only that the east is depraved, which is a moral anxiety, but also that it is wrong, an epistemological concern.

As Holmes leaves the befuddling smoke of the opium den for the wide streets of the suburbs, he begins to apply his mind to the question of truth - what ‘really’ happened in the opium den. The ‘sluggish’ water which flows under the bridge parallels Holmes’ befuddled thinking; the further he is removed from the opium den, the sharper and more accurate his thinking becomes. When they return to London, Holmes having solved the puzzle during the night, through thought alone, their trip back into the city is equally symbolic: ‘In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey side. Passing down the Waterloo Bridge Road we crossed over the river, and dashing up Wellington Street wheeled sharply to the right and found ourselves in Bow Street.’⁵⁹ Through the sequence of active verbs the pace of their journey is brisk, both street names are indicative of victory, and they turn to the ‘right’. Even the somewhat inappropriate passive construction ‘we found ourselves’ works to imply that Truth itself has brought them there; something which is wholly beneficial and not totally outside human agency. At the conclusion of

Franklin Evans, the concept of width of the street is also used to indicate freedom and liberation from illusion and deceit. Evans, now sober and very respectable, encounters a triumphant Temperance procession: ‘I had wandered to and fro for an hour or more, when I came out in a wide street, to the sides of which I saw the people flocking from every corner.’⁶⁰

The American alcohol novels are strikingly more optimistic than the English opium narratives. Maggie is not killed by alcohol, although clearly it plays a large part in her downfall, and Franklin Evans becomes an abstainer. However, De Quincey spares his readers none of the horrors of a decade-long opium addiction, while Isa Whitney, who is the reason Watson is in the opium den, and who became addicted to opium at university after reading De Quincey, is abandoned to his miserable fate as a slave to opium, once Watson encounters Holmes. Jaspers, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, would surely have been punished for the murder (we assume) he committed, and yet, perhaps surprisingly, Wilde is no less stern a moralist than Dickens. Wilde writes as Gray leaves the opium den, articulating the earlier noted ‘inevitability’ of urban, labyrinthine narratives of nineteenth-century London:

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin, or for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their terrible end as automatons move.⁶¹

Evaluating the different effects of wine and opium, De Quincey argues ‘But the main distinction lies in this – that whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary (if taken in a proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation and harmony.’⁶² These last words ‘order, legislation and harmony’ are precisely what cannot be found in the crooked, meandering, obfuscated, narrow and foggy streets of nineteenth-century London, hence the overwhelming attraction of opium.

Notes

¹ Kelley, W. *Melville's City: Literary and Urban Form in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

² Spears, K. M. *Dionysus And The City: Modernism In Twentieth-Century Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 71.

³ Wolfreys, J. *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text From Blake to Dickens* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 17.

⁴ Spears, 74.

⁵ Whitman, W. *Franklin Evans or The Inebriate: a Tale of the Times* (New Haven: College & University Press, 1967), 58.

⁶ Wilde, O. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁸ Brand, D. *The Spectator and the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47.

⁹ Lehan, R. *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 1998), 43.

¹⁰ Dickens, C. *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 191.

¹¹ Wolfreys, 111.

¹² Young E. and Caveney, G. *Shopping in Space: Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), 133.

¹³ O'Reilly, E.B. *Sobering Tales: Narratives of Alcoholism and Recovery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 60.

¹⁴ Lehan, 227.

¹⁵ O'Reilly, 60.

¹⁶ Dickens, C. *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 127.

¹⁷ De Quincey, T. *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 173.

¹⁸ Wilde, 173.

¹⁹ Kelley, 396.

²⁰ Boon, M. *The Road of Excess*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 37.

²¹ De Quincey, 192.

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- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ McDonagh, J. *De Quincey's Disciplines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 160.
- ²⁴ De Quincey, 34.
- ²⁵ Wolfreys, 109.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 104.
- ²⁷ De Quincey, 178.
- ²⁸ Wolfreys, 110.
- ²⁹ Lehan, 40.
- ³⁰ Roberts, C.S. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5.
- ³¹ O'Reilly, 60.
- ³² Dickens, C. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 1.
- ³³ De Quincey, 194.
- ³⁴ McDonagh, 160.
- ³⁵ De Quincey, 192.
- ³⁶ Wolfreys, 27.
- ³⁷ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 2.
- ³⁸ Wilde, 139-40.
- ³⁹ Marez, C. 'The other addict: reflections on colonialism and Oscar Wilde's smoke screen' (*Journal of English Literary History*, 64:1, 1997), 257.
- ⁴⁰ Wolfreys, 105.
- ⁴¹ Wilde, 114-5.
- ⁴² O'Reilly, 61.
- ⁴³ Conan Doyle, A. 'The Man With The Twisted Lip' (*The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*. London: Penguin, 1981), 230.
- ⁴⁴ Wolfreys, 105.
- ⁴⁵ Wilde, 221.
- ⁴⁶ De Quincey, 241.
- ⁴⁷ Marez, 279.
- ⁴⁸ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁵⁰ Conan Doyle, 230.

⁵¹ Whitman, 180.

⁵² Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 18.

⁵³ Wilde, 220.

⁵⁴ Conan Doyle, 231.

⁵⁵ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1.

⁵⁶ Whitman, 121.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁸ Conan Doyle, 233.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 241.

⁶⁰ Whitman, 168.

⁶¹ Wilde, 226.

⁶² De Quincey, 181.