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TRANQUILITY AND SUBLIMINAL MOODS: THE EFFECTS OF OPIUM ADDICTION ON ROMANTIC AND POSTROMANTIC WORKS

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Abstract
The romantic period in English literature can be reckoned as the most successful era in the formation of specific type of poem genre. This success is indebted to several factors, however, among all the features which contributed to the architectonics of this genre of literature, the role of opium and drugs in general always remained passive, if not hidden. As one of the focal points of romanticism has been on the concept of tranquility, the present study attempts to elucidate the centrality of drugs in bringing up the so-called *tranquility* so that the poets could *overflow* their *spontaneous feelings*. Taking into consideration the main work of De Quincey, this paper overviews the works of Romantic poets from Coleridge to Browning showing the hidden signification of drugs throughout their works. Later in the discussion of mainly European poets, the productive effect of drugs is also made clear in Edgar Allan Poe's works, and finally, the remarkable role of drugs is related to what M. H. Abrams considers as the sacred *milk* in shaping romantic poets' minds. Finally, it is also made clear that without the existence of such a "Milk of Paradise," there would have never been such a brilliant period in the grip of literature at all.

The main emphasis of Romantic poetry on the spontaneity of feelings has been a hackneyed description for a long time, yet, there is a grain of truth in it. The British Romantics viewed spontaneity as a fundamental aspect of artistic production. As part one's artistic activity, spontaneity, was supposed to come into being through different phases; sleep and dreaming, presence of supernatural elements, effects of medical drugs and more importantly of the opium. Opium was widely used and regarded as a painkiller, tranquilizer and a sleep-aid. It calmed down and facilitated tranquility. In fact, the feelings, or in general the moods, which were prior conditions to the metamorphosis production of poetry were dependent to the possibility of the exposure of subliminal part of psyche. Although it is the hardest of any imaginations for a modern hearer of opium to consider this circumstance as a means for the target tranquility, the records of the Romantic mentioned period prove the inevitable role of opium over the blossoming of poetry:

> …legally available, [opium] but was recommended by reigning medical opinion for an enormous variety of ailments from earliest infancy on; opium- taking was subject to no sanction outside of the judgment and conscience of the taker; and those who

> indulged often had extravagant expectations about the psychic effects of the drug . . . Anyone who investigates the effects of opium must take into account the differences—in sensory endowment, the tendency to fantasy, the proclivity to subtle self- analysis, the wealth of available literary memories, and the power of the trained imagination—between the representative addict who turns up in a modern clinic and Crabbe, Coleridge, De Quincy, and Francis Thomson. . . (Abrams, 1971, pp.xii-xiii)

Of the most straightforward example of the pieces is Thomas De Quincey's work entitled as *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. In this piece, De Quincey confesses the usual uses of opium from his childhood. The initial doses, as according to him, were used because of the long-lasting pain he used to have: "That my pains had vanished was now a trifle in my eyes: this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me—in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed" (1821, p.41).

As stated clearly by De Quincey, the physical pain-killing expectations from opium disappeared to give way to mental effects. Eventually, opium was introduced into mental processes. These mental effects were reckoned as "positive effects" (De Quincey, 1821, 41) by him, but they entered to the spheres of subconscious and facilitated a practice known as automatic writing:

> the effects of opium helped to shape De Quincey's understanding of the mind and the unconscious. He repeatedly discusses the unconscious in connection with the processing of external impressions via the senses, and his observations often rely directly on the state of his nervous system. In the Confessions, the brain occupies a central position regarding cognition and dreams… (Iseli, 2015 pp.163-4).

Deviating from more direct confessions, opium usage was more complex among the Romantic poets. For instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge conceived the hallucination resulting from opium as a novel way of stimulating imagination. As a result, opium was not considered as a drug of emancipation from physical and mental pain, but as a fundamental aid towards the creation of poetry. A good example of such mood is presented through in Coleridge's *The Pains of Sleep* which, according to Schneider, was written during the fanciful state of mind:

> But yester-night I prayed aloud
>
> In anguish and in agony,
>
> Up-starting from the fiendish crowd
>
> Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
>
> A lurid light, a trampling throng,
>
> Sense of intolerable wrong,
>
> And whom I scorned, those only strong!
>
> Thirst of revenge, the powerless will
>
> Still baffled, and yet burning still!
>
> Desire with loathing strangely mixed
>
> On wild or hateful objects fixed. (Coleridge, lines 14-24)

It would be so naïve of a modern reader to regard such state–of mind as accidental or one of those rare moments of usages of specific medical drugs of a specific period. Coleridge's emphasis over the distinctions between the literary terms *fancy* and *imagination*, and his accolade of the latter, all signify some moments of noble states. Additionally, in one of the letters to his friend John Thelwall, Coleridge describes a kind of unique mood which was very crucial to his art of creation: "I should much wish, like the Indian Vishnu, to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos, & wake once in a million years for a few minutes -just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more" (1797). For a formal reader of Coleridge's works, it becomes unquestionable to consider the use of opium not as a shameful deed, but as a basic element of creation of art in this period.

The prevalent usage of opium during the Romantic period enabled the poets to have a unique understanding of time and space even in the descriptions of familiar periods and places (settings). The bombast of feelings arisen from these settings

are poetically shown in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. In the first poem, the common view of an explorational trip is treated with such odd moments and presence of supernatural elements which can only be touched upon by a visionary mood produced by wine for a modern poet and opium for a romantic one., Wordsworth speaks of a "tranquil restoration" which is very rare for a usual and conscious poet to perceive it. Additionally, his wordings of "the life of things" are only possible under the conditions of a dreamy illusion;

> If this
> Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
> In darkness and amid the many shapes
> Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
> Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
> Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
> How often has my spirit turned to thee! (Tintern Abbey, 1798, lines 52-60)

The usage of drugs leading to hallucination, as M. H. Abrams claims, were everywhere-seen throughout the creation of primary texts of literature, starting from Homer up until the modern versions (1971, p.3). This milk of paradise was an ideal source of inspiration for many artists, but interestingly, its usage was reckoned something of a necessity to many other following poets and writers of the romantic age. Another extravagant example of this age is George Crabbe. Crabbe was not only a literary figure of Romanticism, but also a man of science. His career as a surgeon, and his use of addictive substances are matters of paradoxical controversial facts although opium was prescribed firstly as a drug for his physical deficiencies. In one of the pieces from Crabbe's son, it is mentioned that the primary target was only for medical treatments: "Let the digestive organs bear the whole blame; you must take opiates" (Crabbe, 1834, p.153). As a result, Crabbe increased the doses, and this led to the mental hallucinations which were not fatal in many respects, but helpful:

> For the first time, these many nights, I was incommoded by dreams, such as would cure vanity for a time in any mind where they could gain admission… Asleep, all was misery and degradation, not my own only, but of those who had been.- That horrible image of servility and baseness- that mercenary and commercial manner. (Crabbe, 1834, pp.153-4)

The title of Crabbe's master poem, *The World of Dreams*, denotes something of a subjective experience, though many consider him as a realist literary figure; "It is a generally accepted tact among critics that George Crabbe was a realist" (Garmon, 1960, p.1). In this work, he describes a mood which is very rare for a common man of realism, and there, he puts more significance on the new condition he is able to perceive;

> Soon as the real World I lose,
> Quick Fancy takes her wonted way,
> Or Baxter's sprites my soul abuse —
> For how it is I cannot say,
> Nor to what powers a passive prey,
> I feel such bliss, I fear such pain;
> But all is gloom, or all is gay,
> Soon as the ideal World I gain. (Crabbe, lines 9-16)

The loss of the real world is only possible to fade away when the fancy gets over him. No doubt that this new ecstasy is derived from the overdoses of opium and its subjective effect. In one other following poem, Crabbe has more direct addressing of the use of opium as a means to transcend both the physical pains and boundaries of real world. In this poem, *The Library*, he mocks the long-lasting views of his people over the gratitude of ideal concepts, among them wisdom. However, he invites the reader to the new mood arisen from opium. Notice how the romantic concept of tranquility is treated in his poem. Accompanying it is the heavenly fancy:

> This BOOKS can do;--nor this alone; they give
> New views to life, and teach us how to live;
> They soothe the grieved, the stubborn they chastise,
> Fools they admonish, and confirm the wise:

….
Come, Child of Care! to make thy soul serene,
Approach the treasures of this tranquil scene;
Survey the dome, and, as the doors unfold,
The soul's best cure, in all her cares, behold!
Where mental wealth the poor in thought may find,
And mental physic the diseased in mind;
See here the balms that passion's wounds assuage;
See coolers here, that damp the fire of rage;
Here alt'ratives, by slow degrees control
The chronic habits of the sickly soul;
And round the heart and o'er the aching head,
Mild opiates here their sober influence shed.
(The Library, lines 41-62)

For some other writers and poets of this period the effects of opium were in other addictive drugs. In one of the letters to his her beloved, Elizabeth Barrette Browning writes something of a confession to her addiction to morphine; "Can I be as good for you as morphine is for me, I wonder, even at the cost of being as bad also? – Can't you leave me off without risking your life, - nor go on with me without running all the hazards of poison?" (Smith, 1899, p.452) Her lover's response was like the following: "May I call you my morphine?" According to Louise Foxcroft, her addiction to drugs started from the age of fourteen. Although she was mourning of her problems with her husband for the reason of her own addiction, in another letter to her brother she sketches out the fountain which watered her ideas and works:

> I am writing such poems – allegorical – philosophical – poetical – ethical – synthetically arranged! I am in a fit of writing – could write all day & night – and long to live by myself for three months in a forest of chestnuts & cedars, in an hourly succession of poetical paragraphs & morphine draughts (Browning, 1914, pp.9-10)

In her major poem *A True Dream*, Browning recounts an image which, as Althea Hayter claims, is a direct outcome of her opium addiction:

Upon the ground I laid mine head.
And heard the wailing sound;
I did not wail, I Did not writhe-
I laid me on the ground.
And larger And larger They waxed still,
And longer still and longer;
And they shrieked in their pangs, Come, come to us.
We are stronger, We are stronger."
Then up I raised my burning brow,
My quiv'ring arms on high;
I spake in prayer, and I named aloud
The name of sanctity. (1833)

It is clear from the lines that she was not in a sober mood when she hears the sounds calling her; "And heard the wailing sound; I did not wail, I Did not writhe-." When she is about to recover herself, the cosmic pains overcome her tranquility. Although it has been remarked by some critics that Browning's main source of addiction was not pure opium, it is known that she used laudanum which its side-effects are exactly the ones presented in Browning's poem; "…depression, slurred speech, restlessness, poor concentration while withdrawal… muscular aches and abdominal cramps, agitation, nausea" It is also worth noting that the long uses of this substance circumstance resulted in the both physical and mental destruction of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Therefore, the final expectation was not that of excellence and experience for her writings, however, the same indulgence was something of a noble catalyst for her peer poets and writers.

The effects of opium uses did not limit the following works. One of the prominent figures of prose after the romantic period was Wilkie Collins. John Bowen, one of the critics of Collins's works, brings forth the main traits of his characters in his works. Bowen argues that almost all main characters in his stories have some complexities in their minds. These complexities, according to Bowen, are all either because of the writer's concern with opium and morphine, or for the reason of old idea of tranquility in the drugs. In either cases, opium and drug addictions play fundamental roles in initiating the spontaneity being emphasized in the Romantic poetry. Moreover, as Brodie claims, Collins's main masterpiece, *The Moonstone*, is filled with many

traces of opium uses which were very prevalent during that age:

> Ezra Jennings, the English opium-eater of The Moonstone, is dying of a disease that is implicitly attributed to "the mixture of some foreign race in his English blood." In the mid-nineteenth century, colonial invasion literally took the form of Oriental drugs that disrupted metropolitan life by overstimulating or debilitating it, by causing its citizens either to run amok or to become immobilized. Detective fictions are primary evidence for such anxiety of empire: both Edwin Drood and "The Man with the Twisted Lip" are set in the East End of London, a place that, according to Barry Milligan, was configured "as a miniature Orient within the capital of the empire. (Brodie, 2002, p.87)

Modern followers of Romantic Movement obtained that sacred heritage from their ancestors as they created their own works. Edgar Allan Poe was one of these great dream writers of the post-Romantic period. For Poe, it was not opium which made his most subjective works, but alcohol and its effects which are very similar to those of opium. The high use of alcohol puts the use of opium under shadow, but it should also be noted that he used opium throughout his life (Brodie, p.85). In current age, Poe is famous for writing pieces with very deep psychological layers of meanings. In his poem, *A Dream Within a Dream*, he talks about a state of being which is more pleasant than the real experiences of everyday man:

> Take this kiss upon the brow!
> And, in parting from you now,
> Thus much let me avow —
> You are not wrong, who deem
> That my days have been a dream;
> Yet if hope has flown away
> In a night, or in a day,
> In a vision, or in none,
> Is it therefore the less gone?
> All that we see or seem
> Is but a dream within a dream. (Poe, lines 1011)

In this poem, Poe considers both his present and past time as a dream in which his hopes and dreams are considered as another dream within it. In his narrative work, *Berenice* (1835), Poe comes up with a character afflicted with monomania. Unaware and indulgent in his dream of his beloved cousin, Egaeus has several quotes related to hallucinations which at the ending part turn out to be the result of murdering of his cousin; however, more interestingly, it shows how a sublime life a person could have through hallucination. Then he speaks of state of being more similar to that of opium and alcohol:

> "Here died my mother. Herein was I born. But it is mere idleness to say that I had not lived before - that the soul has no previous existence. You deny it? … There is, however, a remembrance of aerial forms - of spiritual and meaning eyes - of sounds, musical yet sad - a remembrance which will not be excluded; a memory like a shadow - vague, variable, indefinite, unsteady; and like a shadow, too, in the impossibility of my getting rid of it while the sunlight of my reason shall exist (Berenice, 1835, 1-2).

With the passage of time, the scope of tranquility gained from opium gave way to different practices in the world of literature. For instance, the hallucinations in prose works of Poe were mainly used for the purpose of creating gothic impressions, but the facts of his life such as his addiction to opium, alcohol, and drugs are inevitable.

George Eliot is another representative female writer who narrates his novel, *Middlemarch* (1872) around about the topic–of addiction. Dr. Tertius Lydgate prescribes some doses of opium in order to soothe the pain and sleeplessness, but he also finds some effects of tranquility in the drugs and alcohol like those of Romantics;

> The chief new instruction that Lydgate had to give was on the administration of extremely moderate doses of opium, in case of the sleeplessness continuing after several hours. He had taken the precaution of bringing opium in his pocket, and he gave minute directions to Bulstrode as to the doses, and

> the point at which they should cease. He insisted on the risk of not ceasing; and repeated his order that no alcohol should be given (Eliot, p.436).

Other character of Middlemarch, Will Ladislaw, takes opium for some medical purposes. But according to Foxcroft, there are several allusions to the characterization of De Quincey and Romantic views of opium in the portrayal of Will throughout the novel;

> Will Ladislaw, who makes 'himself ill with doses of opium', is represented as decadent. He takes opium for gain, he aspires to genius, believes he 'must have the utmost play for its spontaneity', and that he should be 'placed in an attitude of receptivity' that would 'evolve the genius … not yet come'. Unfortunately he, like many before him, is misguided and he discovers that there is a 'dissimilarity between his constitution and De Quincey's' for 'nothing greatly original had resulted from these measures'. Yet another Eliotic artist admits to his friend that he has been smoking opium, having 'meant to do it sometime or other', as if it had become a recognised rite of passage for the romantically inclined young man (Foxcraft, 2007, 56-57).

Charles Dickens, though a writer more of a realist movement, is another prose writer following the Romantic age. In his last novel, *Hard Times*, Dickens deals with characters who are highly obsessed with alcohol. This work of Dickens is very well-known for portraying the lives of Victorian people in a realistic way, but the same elements of addictions in Romantic literature are presented here in this work, only with a difference that they are treated as inferior sides of humans. For instance, Dickens gives addresses to drunk people not with 'he' or 'she,' but 'it', and additionally, he describes the mood caused by alcohol with more disgusting images;

> Going to the hearth to set the candle down upon a round three- legged table standing there, he stumbled against something. As he recoiled, looking down at it, it raised itself up into the form of a woman in a sitting attitude. 'Heaven's mercy, woman!' he cried, falling farther off from the figure. 'Hast thou come back again!'
>
> Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her (Hard Times, pp.74-75).

In the preceding excerpt, Dickens narrates the mood of a drunk woman through her husband's- Stephen Blackpool's- expressions. It is also insightful to look at his last novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. According to some critics, among them Wendy S. Jacobson, the personal experiences of opium-eating have been incarnated in the character John Jasper. One confession of Jasper has exact parallels in the life of Dickens himself;

> I have been taking opium for a pain - an agony - that sometimes overcomes me. The effects of the medicine steal over me like a blight or a cloud, and pass. You see them in the act of passing; they will be gone directly. Look away from me. They will go all the sooner. (Dickens, p.8)

Adding to all these facts in this novel, David Paroissien identifies a delicate relationship between Jasper and De Quincey;

> By coincidence, John Jasper and Thomas De Quincey are almost exactly the same age. Had Dickens completed the second half of the novel, further resemblance between the two might have emerged. We might have learned, for example, about the origin of Jasper's habit and about a possible link between events in his early childhood and recurring elements in his dreams, a connection in the case of De Quincey made clear in his Confessions. (Paroissien ,2008, p.257)

The love of drugs, alcohol and opium crippled into later years of nineteenth century with the influential work of Henry Cole's *Confessions of an American Opium Eater* (1895). No doubt this work was an influence from De Quincey's work Confessions of an English Opium-Eater. The long use of opium has left deep effects in Cole and as a result, his final versions of a drug user have been portrayed very effectively in this work;

> From one of these a lean, wan face, belonging to a creature who is just arousing himself from his long drugged sleep, stares out upon us with terrible eyes—eyes that dilate with some strange interior light; ferocious yet unaggressive eyes; fixed full upon us, and yet absolutely devoid of that unconscious response for which we look in human eyes as distinguishing them from those of brutes. This is the gaze of what is called an 'opium devil'—one who is supremely possessed by the power of the deadly narcotic on which he has leaned so long. Without opium he cannot live; though human blood runs in his veins, it is little better than poppy juice; he is no longer really a man, but a malignant essence in forming a cadaverous human shape (Cole, 1895, pp.235-236).

Whereas there appeared a kind of creative role of opium in the work of De Quincey, the shortcomings of such uses are more prevalent in Cole's work. In this latter book, Cole reckons the final effects of opium as destruction and eradication of self. An addicted subject is no more a human being capable of surviving. In this respect, the free-thinking effects of opium have got into thin air and the left is only a piece of drug-not self- which is in need of more of itself (drug).

Although it is obvious that the dark aspects of addiction overweigh the creative ones after Romantic period, but with the exposure of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a kind of ambivalent look comes into focus. Wilde's great affection towards Muarice Rollinat, a powerful literary figure of 1890s, was something more than a personal matter of inspiration. Rollinat was an admirer of Romantic features of literary production, but what attracted him the most was the prevalent imagination of opium and its powerful effects over the creation of art during Romanticism. It is not a matter of coincidence that though Wilde's protagonist, Dorian Gray, who was a merciless criminal, used to hate everything except the aroma of opium:

> At the end of the room there was a little staircase, leading to a darkened chamber. As Dorian hurried up its three rickety steps, the heavy odour of opium met him. He heaved a deep breath, and his nostrils quivered with pleasure. When he entered, a young man with smooth yellow hair, who was bending over a lamp lighting a long thin pipe, looked up at him and nodded in a hesitating manner (Wilde, 1890, p.187).

Addiction, as mentioned above, have had solid function throughout the creation of literary pieces from the time of Homer till present age. This addiction encapsulated several forms such as drinks, alcohol, opium and specific drugs. These elements helped the writers to come up with unique expressions of bizarre moods whether through narration of their own life experiences in the form of autobiography or portrayal of characters in their artistic works. It can be concluded that addiction worked as a framework for the creation of art up until the age of Romanticism. During the Romantic period, the addiction to alcohol and opium was necessary for the achievement of tranquility. Back then, addiction formulated the content of many works of Romantic works in general; it was necessary so that the new experiences could be expressed by means of tranquility produced by drugs, more specifically opium.

It was exactly during the Romantic age that uses of opium were reckoned as a necessity for the subjective creation of art. What Romanticism did was to bring the uses of addictive substances before the eyes of public, and formulate their main concern of tranquility through the use of drugs and opium. After the Romantic era, the conceptions of addiction were changed radically. Both people and readers of literature considered addiction something inferior, however, its influences did not leave the writers.

Many writers with the experience of addiction during their lifetimes introduced new dreamy and subliminal forms and contents into their works. Therefore, this circumstance was not that of a destruction for the areas of literary productions, but as what M. H. Abrams names, it was the *Milk of Paradise*.

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