Translating Pain

De Quincey, Wordsworth, Conrad

I hereby declare that this *travail de candidature* is my own work.

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the link between Romantic and modern writing. Ideas and concepts encountered within De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, Suspiria de Profundis* and *The English Mail-Coach* as well as Wordsworth's *Prelude* can also be found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Thus, Conrad is largely indebted to both De Quincey and Wordsworth's perceptions of the world. Within this framework, the dissertation concentrates on how the idea of suffering and pain (in relation to the 'self' and the 'unconscious') is translated linguistically.

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Introduction

'He whose talk is of oxen, will probably dream of oxen'.

De Quincey's statement magnificently demonstrates to what extent the mind influences or even defines the way a person perceives and processes the world. If said person is mainly interested in dealing with bovine matters, their mind's main preoccupations will be centred around practical questions linked to raising, selling or perhaps culling cattle. Nevertheless, the quote also illustrates how intellectuals perceived themselves during the Romantic period. For someone like De Quincey, dealing with such menial matters would have been frowned upon within higher circles. An intellectual of high social, moral and spiritual standards was expected not to 'talk of oxen' in order to prove that he was a 'chosen son', or an artist who was '*malade de sa différence avec son temps*'.

De Quincey, like Wordsworth, understands the mind and its unconscious spheres to be the seat of sublime processes that enable a person to be confronted with the idea of the self and the divine aspects linked to

human existence and therefore death. A great intellectual mind is capable of fantastic and literally mind-blowing achievements. At the same time, however, it cannot always be trusted, since linguistically indescribable and untranslatable drives and energies repressed within the unconscious may be provoked by certain experiences that result in (self-) destructive mental, psychological, moral or spiritual traumas. These very Romantic concepts - as well as the idea of space linked to inner and outer landscapes - are also largely found in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which demonstrates that Romantic ideas are also used in modern texts at the beginning of the 20th century. Even though Conrad's novella is a very modern text, its foundations - like repressed fears and phobias - are vastly connected to ideas explored by Romantic authors such as De Quincey and Wordsworth.

Translating pain is thus not only a Romantic endeavour. It is also an important element anchored within modern writing. Ideas of the self in relation to the unconscious and its anarchic, (self-) destructive drives are just as important in Conrad's work as the fact that *translating* pain and suffering is more or less impossible to do, even though it proves to be a highly creative exercise. De Quincey, Wordsworth and Conrad constantly struggle to be able to 'paint what then they were'.[1] Translating pain is as painful as experiencing it in its first, immediate instance.

[1] derived from Wordsworth's 'I cannot paint/ What then I was' in *Tintern Abbey*.

Suspiria de Profundis: A Topography of Destruction

Translating pain and its effects appears to be one of De Quincey's main literary rationales.[2] However, suffering is not simply connected to physical pain. Even though the author's creative impulses are deeply rooted within the realm of physical torment, the instances targeted by the artist lie within the sphere of deep psychological anguish and self-destructive 'antediluvian' tendencies and fears. It may seem strange to the uninitiated reader that De Quincey's creative urge climaxes with the realization that any creation is inevitably linked to destruction, or death. Nevertheless, in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, he states that

> (…) it may be observed, generally, that wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other.[3]

[2] Robert Morrison et al., *Thomas De Quincey: New Theoretical and Critical Directions*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), p. 2.
[3] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, (London, Penguin, 1986), p. 83.

Even though life and death are fundamentally two different notions, they are unfortunately also intricately and absolutely interlinked. Life suggests death, and in relation to De Quinceyan opium-fuelled dreams, death stands related to the idea of resurrection (e.g. Ann's resurrection in the *Confessions*). De Quincey furthermore suggests that

> The exuberant and riotous prodigality of life naturally forces the mind more powerfully upon the antagonist thought of death, and the wintry sterility of the grave. (…)
>
> On these accounts it is that I find it impossible to banish the thought of death when I am walking alone in the endless days of summer; and any particular death, if not more affecting, at least haunts my mind more obstinately and besiegingly in that season.[4]

The buoyant character of the summer is immediately spoilt by the ever-marauding forces of death that spoil the view of the infinite 'blue pavilion'.[5] To a certain extent, this passage is characteristic of the author's literary posture. Creation, obtained from the essence of incredible physical and psychological pain, always spreads the seeds of annihilation due to De Quincey's belief in the aforementioned 'law of antagonism'. As Morrison suggests, the author is convinced that 'we know God through the absence of God'.[6] Within this light, the reader suddenly senses the obsessive anxieties connected to De Quincey's work. As Porter points out, 'the fear of unconnectedness and isolation compels De Quincey to make a meaningful

[4] Ibid., p. 83.
[5] Ibid., p. 83.
[6] Morrison et al., p. 7.

order out of his autobiography'.[7] Thus, the tension between creation and destruction is particularly unsettling and eventually self-destructive.[8] It is the apocalyptic fear of death and irreversible tragic self-effacement that urges De Quincey to compensate for the inevitable loss of the self and identity. Thus, paradoxically, pain helps De Quincey to create and confront himself. The essence of the *Confessions*, the *Mail-Coach* and the *Suspiria* is scaffolded onto the foundations of physical and mental pain that enables the author 'to give an explanatory, terminable shape to psychic self-exploration' and thus to create or mould an idea of the self and to delienate some form of identity.[9] Trying to understand himself always unleashes self-destructive forces. Suffering and pain - inevitably - form 'the matrix' within which De Quincey's work is woven.[10]

The pain that De Quincey suffers has to be explored from various angles. As he explains in his *Confessions*,

> It was not for the purpose of creating pleasure, but of mitigating pain in the severest degree, that I first began to use opium as an article of daily diet. In the twenty-eighth year of my age, a most painful affection of the stomach, which I had first experienced about ten years before, attacked me in great strength. This affection had originally been caused by extremities of hunger, suffered in my boyish days.[11]

[7] Morrison et al., p. 6.
[8] See chapter on Joseph Conrad.
[9] Joel Faflak, *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery*, (Albany, New York, State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 151.
[10] Ibid., p. 160.
[11] De Quincey, p. 35.

The reader learns that one of the first experiences of opium was due to physical 'pain in the severest degree'. This is a crucial moment in the narrator's life. Nevertheless, it reflects only a small proportion of the De Quinceyan spectrum of suffering. Physical pain, on the one hand, forces the author to consume opium. On the other hand, the excessive use of opium also triggers mental suffering 'in the severest degree', as the drug makes De Quincey experience unexplored depths of the unconscious mind and its repressed memories. As Youngquist suggests, 'De Quincey suspends the old opposition of body and mind. Cognition occurs materially for him, the effect as much of incorporation as of sensation'.[12] In this way, cognition is also the result of incorporation. De Quincey explains that

> When I lay awake in bed, vast processions passed along in mournful pomp; friezes of never-ending stories, that to my feelings were as sad and solemn as if they were stories drawn from times before Oedipus or Priam - before Tyre - before Memphis. And, at the same time, a corresponding change took place in my dreams; a theatre seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour.[13]

Within these unexplored territories of the mind, the sufferer is confronted with repressed emotions and painful experiences dating back to his early childhood - or even beyond - to 'times before Oedipus or Priam', personae connected to death and destruction and to archaic places evocative of De Quincey's xenophobia in relation to exotic or 'tropical' regions.[14] Those

[12] Paul Youngquist, *De Quincey's Crazy Body*, (PMLA, Vol. 114, No. 3 May 1999), p. 351.
[13] De Quincey, p. 75.
[14] See the Savannah-la-Mar and the Malay episodes analysed below.

repressed memories - such as his sister's death - haunt the author in sublime nightly visions and dreams that shall be explored at a later stage in this chapter.

In the De Quinceyan matrix, the idea of place - or of tropical regions - is very often associated with the author's geographical perception of the mind.[15] As he conjectures in his *Suspiria de Profundis*,

> Some minds stand nearer to the type of the original nature in man, are truer than others to the great magnet in our dark planet. Minds that are impassioned on a more colossal scale than ordinary, deeper in their vibrations, and more extensive in the scale of their vibrations - whether, in other parts of their intellectual system, they had or had not a corresponding compass - will tremble to greater *depths* from a fearful convulsion, and will come round by a longer curve of undulations.[16]

To De Quincey, the mind seems like a massive sphere that can somehow be measured with 'a compass' and which has the ability to tremble to 'greater *depths*' from a fearful convulsion, causing long curves of undulations. The choice of lexis suggests that the author understands the mind as an 'intellectual system' with various 'parts', mirroring the idea of a planetary system located somewhere in the enormous expanses of the universe that can hardly be measured due to its 'colossal scale'. It is important to realise that the author represents the mind and its contents as a geographical region difficult to delineate and impossible to retrace linguistically. Within these representations and metaphors linked to the mind, the idea of painful

[15] Morrison et al., p.4.
[16] Thomas De Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*, (London, Penguin, 1986), p. 134, (my emphasis).

memory or 'fearful convulsion' is oftentimes linked to horizontal distance (such as the apparition of the Brocken) or abysmal vertical depth connected to movement. The idea of depth is evocative of the unconscious mind, removed from direct access and thus from conscious processes. It is the seat of liberating and creative yet self-destructive sublime visions feeding upon repressed and emotionally traumatic experience. The 'compass' may therefore be an important tool, but it is very often ineffective as the depths and the pains hidden beneath are generally too important to be scientifically measured and charted by the author. The pains lurking within these sublime abysses are beyond scientific dimensions known to the author or any other scholar. The topography of the unconscious mind remains uncharted terrain. Consciously drawing a map and attempting to delineate the 'various parts' of the mind seems unachievable.

The sunken city of Savannah-la-Mar successfully illustrates the author's perception of the mind and its unconscious depths containing, among other inflictions, 'the deep deep tragedies of infancy' that 'lurk to the last' within consciously inaccessible and impenetrable spheres.[17] De Quincey describes the city's destiny in the following paragraph:

> God smote Savannah-la-Mar, and in one night, by earthquake, removed her, with all her towers standing and population sleeping, from the steadfast foundations of the shore to the coral floors of the ocean. And God said, - 'Pompeii did I bury and conceal from men through seventeen centuries: this city I will bury, but not conceal. She shall be a monument to men of my mysterious anger; set in azure light through generations to come: for I will enshrine her in a crystal dome of my tropic seas.' This city (…) seems floating along the

[17] Ibid., p. 152.

> noiseless depths of ocean: and oftentimes in glassy calms, through the translucid atmosphere of water that now stretches like an air-woven awning above the silent encampment, mariners from every clime look down into her courts and territories, count her gates, and number the spires of her churches. She is one ample cemetery, and has been for many a year; but in the mighty calms that brood for weeks over tropic latitudes, she fascinates the eye with a *Fata-Morgana* revelation, as of human life still subsisting in submarine asylums sacred from the storms that torment our upper air.[18]

This extract magnificently hypostatizes De Quincey's view of the human mind and its contents linked to previous experience. The idea of depth in relation to memory and the unconscious is taken up and developed further. The city is 'buried, but not concealed', and it is to be understood as 'a monument to men of God's mysterious anger'. It is possible to say that the city represents live experience hidden beneath the impenetrable masses of water veiling images and above all emotions. The city's position symbolises 'a forgetting usually occasioned by some traumatic event or loss'.[19] It is also evocative of De Quincey's hydrophobia.[20] Nevertheless, considered within the light of the 'law of antagonism' and bearing the De Quinceyan idea of resurrection in mind, the reader realises that the opaque and blurred 'courts and territories' are not lost forever, but that the 'translucid atmosphere' has to be examined from an elevated position downwards - albeit by mariners unable to see properly to the ground of the ocean. Here, De Quincey points out two major problems. First, it is impossible to walk through the streets and avenues of the sunken

[18] Ibid., p. 165. ('Fata Morgana', etymology: Italian, literally 'fairy Morgan'; originally referring to a mirage seen in the Strait of Messina between Italy and Sicily and attributed to Morgan le Fay, whose legend and reputation were carried to Sicily by Norman settlers).
[19] Faflak, p. 22.
[20] See footnotes 51, 52 and 53.

city because they are simply present as vague images or ideas. They are at best as good as a *Fata-Morgana* and therefore not real. It is possible to obtain a second-rate visual impression or a conscious memory in relation to the flooded territories through the 'translucid' layer or barrier, but vividness and truth in relation to the city - as it once was - have disappeared. However, human life still 'subsists' within 'submarine asylums'. Life, ostensibly drowned forever in the 'noiseless depths of ocean', is still there. Memories, especially painful ones, never vanish from the mind and - just like sunken archaic cities - threaten to rise from the depths of the oceans if certain conditions are fulfilled. Faflak suggests that 'De Quincey identifies with the wandering figures of his text as projections of his own unconscious (Ann or Elizabeth, the Dark Interpreter, the apparition of the Brocken, Levana and the Ladies of Sorrow).'[21] To this list, it is possible to add the idea of Savannah-la-Mar, as it allows De Quincey to illustrate his idea of the unconscious within the framework of the *Suspiria de Profundis*. Faflak states that

> The confessional imagination's psychic determinism exposes the unconscious as the place where reason falters and where the text ends up skirting a psychic exhaustion of never being able to speak the 'whole burthen of horrors which lies upon (De Quincey's) brain'.[22]

The unconscious is to be understood as an area where 'reason falters' and which cannot be accessed via conscious means. It is the seat of unspeakable horrors, of sunken cities full of cancerous crocodiles and hydrocephalic women. Not only does the unconscious resist reason, it also evades language.

[21] Faflak, p. 158.
[22] Ibid., p. 160.

It represents 'what cannot be told' and it is evocative of what De Quincey calls the '*burden of the Incommunicable*'.[23] This is the second problem that De Quincey tries to explore with the Savannah-la-Mar tableau. The author, as in the Death-Fugue episode of the *Mail-Coach*, fails to seize the essence of the unconscious - the sunken city - linguistically. The lexis used reflects the idea of impenetrable depth. Words such as 'floors', the 'noiseless depths of ocean' and 'submarine' suggest immense distance, whereas the idea of a 'crystal dome' and a 'cemetery' suggest religious grandeur and thus eventually the idea of death. Similarly to the passages in the *Confessions* and the *Mail-Coach* in which De Quincey respectively substitutes language with painting or music, the fuzzy visualisation through a dense layer of 'crystal' water emphasises the idea of linguistic malfunction.[24] The 'glassy calms' and the 'translucent atmosphere' only enable the author to get an approximate idea of the sunken depths. The visions emerging from the unconscious cannot be adequately described. To solve this linguistic dilemma, De Quincey cunningly uses the word *Fata-Morgana*, which is an Italian substitute for the English word 'mirage'. Even though the author finds a way around this problem, he can still only find an approximate description borrowed from a foreign language. This is highly unsettling as De Quincey's general understanding of the world is tinged by 'imperialist, xenophobic and defensive' motives that feed upon the fear of the unknown and the threat that human beings from 'tropic latitudes' seem to carry with them. The essence of the unconscious - the city - remains a blurred vision and eventually untranslatable. De Quincey erases what he

[23] Ibid., p. 151.
[24] See second part of this chapter.

seeks to delineate.[25] Translating pain seems unachievable. Language collapses and the self or the idea of identity remains blurred.

This insurmountable problem of translating pain is studied with de Quincey's thoughts on the idea of the palimpsest. As he points out in *Suspiria*

> A palimpsest, then, is a membrane or roll cleansed of its manuscript by reiterated successions. (…) It arose in the middle ages, as a considerable object for chemistry, to discharge the writing from the roll, and thus to make it available for a new succession of thoughts. (…) /The chemists/ did the thing; but not so radically as to prevent us, their posterity, from *un*doing it. They expelled the writing sufficiently to leave a field for the new manuscript, and yet not sufficiently to make the traces of the elder manuscript irrecoverable for us. (…)
>
> What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, O reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet in reality not one has been extinguished.[26]

De Quincey's idea of a palimpsest and thus of the human brain wonderfully illustrates the way the author understands the human mind and its unconscious elements. The 'membrane or roll', like the membrane of a human brain, receives information which could be understood as 'live experience'. One such instance could be linked to the narrator being confronted with his sister's death. The idea of his sister dying is 'written' onto the 'membrane' representing the author's mind. As time goes by, the tragedy's acuteness vanishes from the author's conscious mind - the 'writing' and thus language is 'discharged from the roll' and the roll itself is made 'available for a new

[25] Morrison et al., p. 6.
[26] De Quincey, *Suspiria*, pp. 145-150.

succession of thoughts' - such as meeting Ann for instance. The chemists then '[do] the thing'. The lines referring to the sister's death are no longer visible as the writing has been erased. A new text, that of Ann, can be written onto the membrane. At some point, this text will vanish, too. In this way, 'everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings' have composed manifold strata of experience that each time 'seemed to bury all that went before'. However, in reality, in the De Quinceyan universe, the reader knows that 'not one has been extinguished'. On the contrary,

> oftentimes there is in the grotesque collisions of those successive themes, having no connexion, which by pure accident have consecutively occupied the roll, yet, in our own heaven-created palimpsest, the deep memorial palimpsest of the brain, there are not and cannot be such incoherencies.[27]

According to the author, the human palimpsest does not tolerate forgetting or 'incoherencies'. On the one hand, this mirrors De Quincey's fear of unconnectedness, but on the other hand, it can be understood as the author's justification of his early writings and the visions occurring in the *Confessions* and the *Mail-Coach*. It could be read as a theoretical approach to the De Quinceyan 'involute', which combines images of different origins to form one opium-induced complex dream vision newly created. Not one layer of ideas has been extinguished, the writing is still on the membrane and can be made visible again. Thus, the roll carries a multi-layered (hi)story of life of which each single sentence may manifest itself. Language connected to unconscious memories is redundant, but once the acuteness of the experience buried

[27] Ibid., p. 150.

within the realm of the unconscious manifests itself, a linguistic framework seems viable yet again although the intensity of the original writing - and thus of the original experience itself - cannot be reached. A mere *suspiria* from the unknown unconscious - *de profundis* - can be heard. Translating the pain buried within the depths of the unconscious seems futile. A mere painful sigh instead of a fitting translation is all that seems possible.

Forgetting himself: De Quincey and the Unconscious

As De Quincey has demonstrated with his explanations on the palimpsest, memory and the unconscious are key concepts in relation to understanding De Quincey's earlier *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. Memory enables the narrator to achieve the partial shaping of an identity. However, the paramount, mainly anarchic interference of the unconscious, revealing and partially edifying the substance or the transcendent textures of the self, at the same time questions and threatens any accomplishments. The potentially liberating movement of creative recollection and re-construction, affirmative of both the autobiographer's self and his identity, is dangerously destructive and ultimately annihilating.

Both concepts are easily explained by immediately referring to metaphorically charged analogies. In order to do this, it is necessary to borrow essential Freudian terms, since Freud's model can be effectively

applied to the text.[28] The lexis used consists of the concepts 'unconscious', 'preconscious' and 'conscious':

> The Unconscious is formally distinguished from the Conscious and the Preconscious. The Preconscious is what, not being in consciousness, can be brought to consciousness by ordinary introspective methods [*memory for instance*]. The Unconscious is the realm of that which cannot thus be brought into consciousness.[29]

Memory, which mainly seems to be connected to the sphere of the preconscious, as it is almost always readily available to the mind and thus to the conscious, helps to partially locate and define the author's idea of identity, as it permits creation and the 'lending of meaning to existence':[30]

> Let there be a cottage, standing in a valley, […] 18 miles from any town. […] Let it, however, *not* be spring, nor summer, nor autumn – but winter, in his sternest shape. Surely every body is aware of the divine pleasures which attend a winter fire-side: candles at four o'clock, warm hearth-rugs, tea, a fair tea-maker, shutters closed, curtains flowing in ample draperies on the floor, whilst the wind and rain are raging audibly without,
>
> *And at the doors and windows seem to call,*
> *As heav'n and earth they would together mell;*
> *Yet the least entrance find they none at all;*
> *Whence sweeter grows our rest secure in massy hall.*
>
> *Castle of Indolence*[31]

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[28] I am aware that Freud was only three years of age at the time of De Quincey's death. However, it seems that De Quincey's text comprises many characteristics that can be identified within the realm of Freud's reasoning and development of the theory of psychoanalysis. Freud's terminology mainly helps to name De Quinceyan processes.
[29] Alasdair MacIntire, *The Unconscious, A Conceptual Analysis, Revised Edition*, (London, Routledge, 2004), pp. 64-5.
[30] Edmund Baxter, *De Quincey's Art of Autobiography*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 16.
[31] De Quincey, *Confessions*, pp. 93-4.

The cottage and events happening inside, the images used, can be understood as metaphors for the processes occurring within the sphere of the preconscious and the conscious, in which memory is the linking element. The memories conjured up from the preconscious are nicely and 'beautifully' arranged within the cottage as conscious. This setting is reminiscent of Burke's idea of the 'picturesque' and not connected in any shape or form to the idea of the 'sublime', necessarily resulting from the emergences of the unconscious.[32] Within this 'Castle of Indolence', a narrow, protected space without 'pain', without apparent activity of the unconscious, only a limited extent of truth can be achieved, a vague construction of an identity can be completed. 'Communication' or 'translation' of these elements is possible, as the source of their substance is located within the preconscious, brought forward into consciousness through the workings of voluntary memory.[33] However, in fuelling his conscious creation in this manner, De Quincey soon realises that language translating and having as substance recollected and dead images is powerless. Language deflates and is at risk of implosion, it obstructs the substantial modelling of an identity. Recognising the weakness of such language, De Quincey imposes onto its sterile framework the purified, imaginative and illustrative intensity of painting. Thus, language does not merely transpose dead images, but a constructed, painted version of them, giving the creation and literature itself as 'opposed to experience' some poise:

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[32] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* ed. by James T. Boulton, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 17.
[33] John Whale, 'Translating Experience', in *De Quincey's Reluctant Autobiography*, (London, Croom Helm, 1984), p. 86.

> But here, to save myself the trouble of too much verbal description, I will introduce a painter; and give him directions for the rest of the picture. […] The article brought forward [in addition to the depiction of the room] should naturally be myself – a picture of the Opium-eater, with his 'little golden receptacle of the pernicious drug', lying beside him on the table. […] No: you may as well paint the real receptacle, which was not of gold, but of glass, and as much like a wine decanter as possible. Into this you may put a quart of ruby-coloured laudanum: that, and a book of German metaphysics placed by its side, will sufficiently attest my being in the neighbourhood; but as to myself, - there I demur.[34]

This tableau turns out to be incomplete, and a clear definition of identity is only approachable. An immediate depiction of the opium-eater is impossible. The self remains untouched and an identity is achievable as much as it is incomplete, derived from painted objects relating to De Quincey's occupations and passions.

However, there is hope of accessing the unknown, and thus of reaching out to the self, whose essence seems deeply connected to the unconscious. The reader may have noticed the link between the 'stern winter' 'raging audibly without' and the need for 'a very low temperature of the atmosphere' to produce 'ice-cream'.[35] The ice-cream is produced because the 'winter raging without', as a metaphor for the unconscious, allows it to happen.[36] It is a substance derived directly from the deep, dark, freezing night. The ice-cream, or the dream, is the dew, the ambrosia containing the essence of the unconscious. It is present in the conscious, but, as it has crystallised within a

[34] De Quincey, *Confessions*, pp. 95-6.
[35] Ibid., pp. 94-5.
[36] The term 'without' should be understood as 'outside of' the conscious, thus denying an immediate link between unconscious and conscious.

different climate, it immediately starts to melt, to change in character. It is possible to locate it, to touch it, to taste it, but its firm, crisp texture cannot be eternalised by any means. Immediate translation is not possible, due to the mere 'approximate correspondence' of language and experience mainly located within the unconscious.[37] As soon as the essence of the self is touched upon by the conscious and translated onto the grid of language, the ice-cream simply trickles through. The essence of the self is present in consciousness, it can be recognised, but it cannot be entirely grasped. It is this inability to seize the self artistically which, again, mirrors the painful 'burden of the Incommunicable', the curse denying the autobiographer to fully represent the self and experience located within the unconscious:[38]

> For several reasons, I have not been able to compose the notes for this part of my narrative into any regular and connected shape. I give the notes as I find them, or have now drawn them up from memory. […] Sometimes I speak in the present, sometimes in the past tense. Few of the notes, perhaps, were written exactly at the period of time to which they relate; but this can little affect their accuracy; as the impressions were such that they can never fade from my mind. Much has been omitted. I could not, without effort, constrain myself to the task of either recalling, or constructing into a regular narrative, the whole burthen of horrors which lies upon my brain.[39]

De Quincey is unable to compose the narrative into 'any regular and connected shape'. His language, the very tool of his vocation, fails to capture the essence. 'Notes', linguistic fragments, can only be given arbitrarily or drawn up from 'memory', the messenger of the preconscious informing the

[37] Whale, p. 80.
[38] Ibid., p. 81.
[39] De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 97.

conscious. Although the impressions cannot 'fade' from the mind, they are not within the realm of the unconscious any more. The effects of opium have set them free. They may be accurate, but not acute.

The unconscious, once its substance emerges, 'the nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendour', make the author literally descend towards his own self and the realm of experience, causing insufferable, sublime agonies:

> I seemed every night to descend, not metaphorically, but literally to descend into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever reascend. Nor did I, by waking, feel that I *had* reascended. This I do not dwell upon; because the state of gloom which attended these gorgeous spectacles, amounting at least to utter darkness, as of some suicidal despondency, cannot be approached by words.[40]

The unconscious outlaws the possibility for adequate language use. The nature of the self, intricately linked to the powers of the unconscious, leaves no room for shaping and representing experience adequately. The gloomy depths - comparable to those of Savannah-la-Mar - lead De Quincey into a world of antediluvian fears that even precede experience and thus totally resist linguistic penetration. The author can only give some 'light abstraction' of his 'Oriental dreams'.[41] The excruciating quest for the delineation of his identity is redundant. Any attempts, at best, remain shallow and fractured. Thus, towards the end of both the *Confessions* and *The English Mail-Coach*, De Quincey focuses on finding the self.

[40] Ibid., p. 103.
[41] Ibid., p. 109.

The Oriental imagery of the *Confessions*, assembled by such potent figures and concepts as the Malay, China or 'Indostan', hints at the exotic grandeur and sheer overwhelming forces exhumed from the abysmal depths of the unconscious. Bearing the palimpsest analogy in mind, it is De Quincey's desperate attempt to mould unspeakable and palsying anarchic influxes into linguistically conceptualised art. Thus, the presence of the oriental subject matter is a geographical, historical and culturally alien translation of the precarious attempt to reach out into the remotest parts and pasts of human experience. Places like Savannah-la-Mar, the Orient, or Asia, are the distant seats of human fears, of barbaric calamities and cultural anarchy.

> I know not whether others share in my feelings on this point; but I have often thought that if I were compelled to forego England, and to live in China, and among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep; and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. As the cradle of the human race, it would alone have a dim and reverential feeling connected with it. But there are other reasons. [Every] man […] is affected by the ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate religions of Indostan, &c. The mere antiquity of Asiatic things, of their institutions, histories, modes of faith, &c. is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in the individual. A young Chinese seems to me an antediluvian man renewed.[42]

Asia, as the cradle of the human race, is a space of chaotic agony, deep-seated anxieties that characterise the very origins of the human race. De Quincey, as one element at the end of that very long chain of experience, is inextricably linked to the remote continent's bestialities and associations. A journey to

[42] Ibid., p. 108.

Asia is a journey to the self. It is the space located 'without' the cottage, the '*officina gentium*' and thus of its inhabitants as well as De Quincey himself.[43] Emerging from the depths of the Orient along this chain of past experience and hereditary guilt, the Malay is conceived to impose a visual, corporeal and linguistically intelligible frame onto the messenger of the unconscious world. It is the self presenting its 'sallow and bilious skin' to the author at his front door.[44]

> One day a Malay knocked at my door. […] The servant who opened the door to him was a young girl born and bred amongst the mountains, who had never seen an Asiatic dress of any sort: his turban, therefore, confounded her not a little: and, as it turned out, that his attainments in English were exactly of the same extent as hers in the Malay, there seemed to be an impassable gulf between all communication of ideas, if either party had happened to possess any. In this dilemma, the girl, recollecting the reputed learning of her master […], came and gave me to understand that there was a sort of demon below, whom she clearly imagined that my art could exorcise from the house. I did not immediately go down.[45]

The Malay, from the realm of the unconscious existence, confronts the author with his own past as well as present. However, a real link between the author's conscience and the Malay still does not exist and, in real terms, is not possible at all. The 'impassable gulf between all communication of ideas' is too wide to span efficiently. No bridge could be long enough. Asia and England, during the day, seem too far apart. It is the night and its darkness that appear to fill the chasm, transforming it into an antediluvian ocean

[43] Ibid., p. 108.
[44] Ibid., p. 91.
[45] Ibid., p. 91.

'rocking and shaken with gathering wrath'.[46] The Malay, as the self, using the sea of experience to communicate with De Quincey, is able to emerge in all his sublimity. He haunts his dreams and turns into a 'fearful enemy for months'.[47] This turn of events is the celebration of an effective technique the author imposes onto his writing.

The structures of both the *Confessions* and the *Mail-Coach,* towards the end, resemble each other significantly. In the same way as De Quincey demonstrates the existence of the link between lived experience and dreams through the introduction of the Malay, he also uses the final dream of the *Confessions* (the vision of Ann's resurrection) as a complex concatenation - a palimpsest - weaving all the harrowing threads of past experience into one piece. Several themes encountered in the preliminary descriptions are combined in order to form a crystallised essence emanating the fragrances of all preceding occurrences. Since the same method is put into practice in *The English Mail-Coach*, I shall first concentrate on this work to illustrate the author's line of thought.

The third section of the *Mail-Coach* is entitled 'Dream-Fugue'. It is the so-called climax incorporating and interrelating major themes in its evolution and conclusion. The form and structure of the final creation is intriguing. Indeed, this last section can be demonstrated to incorporate concrete elements of a fugue. This particular conception of music is defined as a piece created for several voices, each voice exploring the particular theme in its own manner and time. It is also possible for a fugue to have two or even three

[46] Thomas De Quincey, *The English Mail-Coach*, (London, Penguin, 1986), p. 41.
[47] De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 108.

different themes.[48] Thus, the complexity of ideas and their correlations is multiplied and enriched, just like the multi-layered strata on a palimpsest. Upon close inspection, it becomes clear that mainly three important themes are introduced and explored in the 'Dream-Fugue'. These main guiding topics can each be understood and interpreted as 'involutes', creating an even larger and inextricably dense 'involute', the 'Dream-Fugue' itself.[49] The main pillars of the dream vision are the following individual involutes (like small colonised islands each contributing to the creation of a multi-ethnic archipelago): 'Elizabeth', 'Waterloo' and the 'mail-coach'. After analysing the vocabulary and different occurrences encountered within the dream, it emerges more or less that each particular element can be linked to one of the main three themes, or involutes. It could be argued that Christianity or the Church as such might be a further, independent theme. However, it seems as if this issue can be solved by injecting this theme into the membranes of the involutes surrounding 'Elizabeth' and 'Waterloo'. The semantics of 'Elizabeth' include notions such as 'grave' or 'cathedral', whereas 'Waterloo' is a metonymy for 'war' and thus, in relation to the English nation and nationhood, inevitably connected to religion. It is very disturbing that the three main involutes, or themes of the fugue, should be reduced to a destructive cacophony: death. However, although intimately linked to the notion of death, these involutes only happen and can be 'felt' through the manifestation and synthesising abilities of the unconscious faculties of the

[48] Catherine Soanes et al., *Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 698.
[49] Whale, p. 89.

self. The definition of the 'Dream-Fugue', or death-fugue as one might call it, is compatible with De Quincey's definition of the involute:

> Far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, pass to us as *involutes*…in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled than ever reach us *directly*, and in their own abstract shapes.[50]

This combination of deepest feelings and thoughts seems to De Quincey the only possible way of accessing the self. It happens predominantly in dreams, the 'perplexed combinations of concrete objects', the 'compound experiences' converge in both the *Confessions* and the *Mail-Coach* into climactic re-experiences. The single 'abstract shapes' of previous experience have been blended and interwoven within the realm of the unconscious mind to form direly complex visions of practically every major theme explored before the resurrection episodes of both texts. Both the 'Ann' and 'Sister Unknown' resurrections are interlinked and embedded into a residue of the preceding text's melt-down. They both partake in the 'Elizabeth' involute, composed by several elements mainly explored in the *Mail-Coach*.

De Quincey, ever since his childhood, is unable to cope with the loss of his sister who died of hydrocephalus.[51] He suffers from a constant and 'overwhelming sense of guilt' for not having confronted 'whatever it was that killed her'.[52] Her death is considered the 'most important psychic event of his life', and

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[50] John Barrell, *The infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism,* (London, Yale University Press, 1991), p. 32.
[51] Ibid., p. 26.
[52] Ibid., p. 26.

> many of the other girls and young women whom he encounters, in his waking life or in dreams, seem to become re-visions or surrogates of Elizabeth, and the deaths they die or seem to be in danger of dying are experienced as repetitions of her death.[53]

The Elizabeth involute feeds mainly on notions of death, water and femininity. A close inspection of the last moments of the fugue reveals the complexity and success of De Quincey's technique of unconsciously interweaving experience. Within the movement of the five parts of the fugue, numerous images and vocabulary related to water and its destructive powers create an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty. The opening lines of the fugue's first part are a complex construct interlacing different versions of Elizabeth and her attributes:

> Lo, it is summer – almighty summer! The everlasting gates of life and summer are thrown open wide; and on the ocean, tranquil and verdant as a savannah, the unknown lady from the dreadful vision and I myself are floating – she upon a fairy pinnace, and I upon an English three-decker.[54]

Certain elements composing Elizabeth's involute can be identified. The 'summer' is important, as the author's sister died in the summer under the strong effects of the sun's remaining heat.[55] This seemingly harmless and peaceful setting is deceiving – death is lurking underneath a surface of 'light' and apparent easiness. Similarly, the 'ocean', a translation of Elizabeth's condition and De Quincey's ensuing hydrophobia, seems 'tranquil' and

[53] Ibid., p. 26.
[54] De Quincey, *The English Mail-Coach*, p. 40.
[55] Barrell, p. 34.

'verdant as a savannah'.[56] The ocean, however, causes incredible distress and sublime fears to the author, it is a medium of destruction rather than salvation. The 'verdant savannah' in relation to the ocean is reminiscent of the damp meadows that 'reek with dewy exhalations which, together with the tea [previously consumed], condensed (I presume) inside Elizabeth's head, and formed water on the brain.'[57] In addition, the 'lady from the dreadful vision', floating in a 'pinnace' and thus linked to the girl of the mail-coach incident, is herself another incarnation of Elizabeth. The final lines of the fugue, another complex involute bringing together the three individual themes, engage and unite the ambiguous and dual circumstances of the final resurrection in the *Mail-Coach*:

> A thousand times, amongst the phantoms of sleep, have I seen thee entering the gates of the golden dawn – with the secret word riding before thee – with the armies of the grave behind thee; seen thee sinking, rising, raving, despairing; a thousand times in the worlds of sleep have seen thee followed by God's angel through storms; through desert seas; through the darkness of quicksands! Through dreams, and the dreadful revelations that are in dreams – only that at last, with one sling of His victorious arm, He might snatch thee back from ruin, and might emblazon in thy deliverance the endless resurrections of His love![58]

This final extract combines earlier episodes of experience. All of De Quincey's experience previously evoked and portrayed is to be penetrated and emerges in an ecstatic climax affirming the author's self. The complexity of the subject matter results from the registered moments of his life. The orgasmic re-

[56] See footnote 19.
[57] Barrell, p. 34.
[58] De Quincey, *The English Mail-Coach*, p. 46.

enactment of De Quinceyan existence in an intricately composed involute is as close and as dense as the revelations of the unconscious can be. The self is enshrined and lifted onto an invigorating altar of concentrated, re-lived feeling. There is 'no such thing as forgetting possible to the mind',

> a thousand accidents may, and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind; accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil; but alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever.[59]

These inscriptions, bound together and unveiled in his dream, affirm and construct the author's self. The three main themes of the preceding story are present. 'Elizabeth' is directly addressed by the author with the pronouns 'thee' and 'thy', complementing nouns such as 'God's angel' or 'grave'. There is also a variety of words relating to water, such as 'sinking' and 'desert seas'. The 'desert seas' however also make reference to a 'desert' and thus also to 'quicksands' in which people 'sink' and die. The idea of sand furthermore links these concepts to the mail-coach that has been 'running on a sandy margin of the road'.[60] This connection enhances the significance of 'riding', relating the mail-coach to the riding 'armies of the grave behind thee'. The 'Waterloo' involute is thus linked to the other main themes and vice versa. It is the 'victorious' arm of Waterloo and the interaction of God that make the resurrection happen, in the same way as

> The beggar, rearing himself against the wall, forgets his lameness – real or assumed – thinks not of his whining trade, but stands erect,

[59] De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 104.
[60] De Quincey, *The English Mail-Coach*, p. 33.

> with bold exulting smiles, as we pass him. The victory has healed him and says, Be thou whole![61]

On a different level, the beggar has undergone a resurrection under the aura of victory. This experience, like other occurrences, is re-lived in De Quincey's dream under a different but still recognisable form. Through the technique of involutes and enhanced by the sublime powers of the unconscious mind, his 'sister's' resurrection is grounded in real experience. This 'restorative moment', as Whale would call it, is characterised by a 'unified sublime effect' that 'leads to awe'.[62] It affirms De Quincey's sense of a 'breathlessness which belongs to a saintly trance'.[63] The author has achieved a deep sense of self. It seems constructive, liberating and invigorating.

However, this text would not be truly De Quinceyan if total annihilation was not immediate or inherent in the process. As Barrell suggests, 'Elizabeth's resurrection offers De Quincey a new chance to save her from death, or threatens him with a new chance to fail to do so'.[64] Success is threatened with immediate restriction or reversion. This danger of total destruction and impotence is simultaneously highlighted by De Quincey's use of language or the failure to do so effectively.

Firstly, the author, as in the *Confessions*, tries to escape the restrictions of language by fleeing towards a different form of expression – music. As in the cottage episode of the *Confessions*, music, similarly to the use of painting, is to replace the weakness of language in order to provide the multifarious voices

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[61] Ibid., p. 20.
[62] Whale, p. 144.
[63] Ibid., p. 145.
[64] Barrell, p. 38.

and themes of a fugue. The five-part structure and musical arrangement of the dream-fugue thus attempt '*tumultuosissimamente'* to compensate for the lack of adequacy resulting from a gap between 'language and experience'.[65] Secondly, De Quincey devises his own way of getting around this obstacle. Trying to create a direct link between past experience, restoration and linguistic translation, he simply cheats. The author, in his dream sequences, just simply repeats unusual concepts as well as vocabulary, expressions and entire phrases used in previously experienced episodes in order to overcome the 'burden of the Incommunicable'. De Quincey wants to give his visions fuelled by the unconscious sphere some adequate linguistic stance. His aim is to make the correspondence between experience and language as convincing and truthful as possible. After the incident with the oncoming mail-coach, the author sees the female passenger,

> But the lady - ! Oh, heavens! Will that spectacle ever depart from my dreams, as she rose and sank upon her seat, sank and rose, threw up her arms wildly to heaven, clutched at some visionary object in the air, fainting, praying, raving, despairing?[66]

Not only does the author announce the fact that this scene will appear in his dreams, he actively uses it to produce the above-mentioned effect. This same dramatic event is re-enacted in the dream-fugue in a different musical 'voice', which is understood as perfectly in line with the definition of a fugue. The mail-coach has been transformed into a 'pinnace', and in section II, it is transformed, by the interference of the unconscious element, into a 'frigate'.

[65] De Quincey, p. 35.
[66] De Quincey, p. 39.

The lady on the frigate, after an incident similar to the one with the mail-coach, is seen standing 'with hair dishevelled, one hand clutched amongst the tackling – rising, sinking, fluttering, trembling, praying'.[67] The use of this sequence of gerunds echoes the previously used line in the original mail-coach incident. It is picked up again later on in section IV, in relation to the vision of a 'child' 'grown up to woman's height'.[68] This child, Elizabeth, is seen standing – 'sinking, rising, raving, despairing'. Finally, for the last time, this element is repeated in the resurrection extract quoted above. The author has seen his 'sister' 'sinking, rising, raving, despairing'.[69] These direct repetitions with slight variations, similar to the different voices of one theme in a fugue, are intended to create an adequate correspondence between experience and linguistic conception. Nevertheless, this is not a success and any instance thus achieved is dissolved in the futility of this attempt. By strategically placing linguistic points of reference in both immediate experience and re-lived experience, De Quincey manages to prove a link between real experience and dreams, emerging from the depths of the unconscious to the realm of the conscious. However, by giving them a linguistic shape in their first, live instance and repeating these constructs within the dreams in order to pretend the presence of an adequate linguistic grid able to seize re-lived, sublimated and interwoven experience, De Quincey only makes believe such a process is possible. The self cannot be seized accurately through language. It can be approached or outlined abstractly and its message can be edifying and constructive. The linguistic failure to hold it does not allow a lasting adequate

[67] Ibid., p. 41.
[68] Ibid., p. 45.
[69] Ibid., p. 45.

record of the self. Initial success, as in the case of Elizabeth's resurrection, is doomed to permanent loss. De Quincey remembers himself only to forget and fail eventually.

The fact that De Quincey is partially able to define his identity through memory and the conscious and that he accesses the self within the light of the unconscious is initially constructive and liberating, as it shows their existence. The destructive linguistic failure to capture and hold both concepts, especially the self, leads to their evaporation and even annihilation. In line with de Quincey's belief in the previously explored law of antagonism, the *Confessions* end on the note that 'it may be as painful to be born as to die'.[70] Birth or resurrection, as constructive elements, are inevitably linked to the realisation that death, or total destruction, is unavoidable. The last moments of the *Confessions* seem to acknowledge this:

> my sleep is still tumultuous, and, like the gates of Paradise to our first parents when looking back from afar, it is still (in the tremendous line of Milton) –
>
> With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms.[71]

The last lines, combining notions of birth ('parents') and death ('dreadful faces', 'fiery arms') seem to register a powerful and inevitable move towards death, painful destruction and the loss of identity and self in the face of the unconscious. For this reason, Milton substitutes De Quincey in order to finish

[70] Ibid., p. 115.
[71] Ibid., p. 116.

the account. De Quincey is no longer able to situate identity or the self. He has irreversibly forgotten himself.

Wordsworth

The Suffering Son

In order to discuss the idea of translating pain in Wordsworth's work, it is important to point out that the act of creation is dependent on several advantageous, beneficial conditions concerning the budding artist. The core Romantic ideas of suffering, isolation and the idea of being different are interlinked and absolutely necessary for the act of artistic invention to happen. As Kermode suggests, 'from the beginnings of Romantic poetry the artist has been (…) '*malade de sa différence avec son temps*'.[72] This difference, resulting in actually being *malade*, in suffering, is the essence of the drive towards Romantic creation, even though this creation is very often linked to painful experience. The artist does not merely try to translate pain in order to create a masterpiece. In Romantic literature, the artist is confronted with the idea of creating a sense of self and identity. Thus, creation and the threat of destruction and self-effacement are elements that influence each other and

[72] Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 4.

which need to be analysed on various levels. With Wordsworth, self-destructive elements can be identified in relation to the 'divisive internal life of his imagination.'[73] From his early childhood, in the *Prelude*, it seems obvious to Wordworth that he, too, is different. As Rousseau states: '*Je ne suis pas fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai sus. Mais si je ne vaux pas mieux, au moins je suis autre*.'[74] This idea is reflected in the *Prelude* right from the beginning, in which the author explains that

> (…) I believe
> That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
> A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
> Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
> As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
> With gentlest visitation;[75]

The young Wordsworth, as Nature treats him as a 'favor'd' Being', seems somehow capable of registering the still more or less hidden presence of a deeper dimension within Nature. He recognizes that there must be a message that only someone who is '*autre'* can receive and understand. As Gill points out, this faculty makes him 'the best tutor and guide to the spiritual

[73] Perry Seamus, 'Wordsworth and Coleridge' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 162.
[74] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions (Texte du Manuscrit de Genève),* (Ebooks libres, 2012), p. 4.
[75] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind (Text of 1805)*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and corrected by Stephen Gill, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970), ll. 362-71, Book I.

nourishment available from natural beauty'.[76] The opening lines of the poetic autobiography express this ability:

> Oh there is a blessing in this gentle breeze
> That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
> And from the sky: it beats against my cheek,
> And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives.
> O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend![77]

Here, the mature Wordsworth understands this breeze as a 'blessing' as it 'beats against [his] cheek'. He welcomes it as a 'Friend' and 'Messenger', thus qualifying it as incorporating a further, unseen level of divine emanation. However, bearing De Quincey's law of antagonism in mind, it seems plausible that Wordsworth, as a chosen son, is not only able to register the 'blessing in this gentle breeze', but that he is also prone to being subjected to darker, more unsettling forces. This qualifies him as a suffering son. However, as a child, he is not able to recognise this divine presence in the phenomenal world in order to use it in a creative manner. He cannot translate what he perceives. Furthermore, the idea of danger or destruction is not immediately present either. His perception is limited to the intuitive knowledge that he is a 'chosen son':[78]

> Ye presences of Nature, in the sky
> Or on the earth! Ye visions of the hills!
> And souls of lonely places! can I think
> A vulgar hope was yours when Ye employ'd

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[76] Stephen Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 143.
[77] Wordsworth, ll. 1-5, Book I.
[78] Ibid., l. 82, Book III.

> Such ministry, when Ye through many a year
> Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impress'd upon all forms the characters
> Of danger or desire.[79]

Even though these lines seem to translate the outline of a blissfully happy childhood full of 'boyish sports, on caves and trees' which transform the young boy into a curious person full of 'desire' to know, the word 'haunting' points to a problematic relationship that the young poet seems to be developing in relation to the external world as opposed to his inner world. Although the aforementioned lines refer to 'primal scenes' encountered within the realm of Nature, the

> primal scene of the *Prelude* lies in aberrations within Wordsworth's *own* mental development signified by various traumas. (…) [Wordsworth] develops in himself not only the capacity for self-exploration but the capacity of the 'self-analytic element,' the ability to receive news from within the self only on its own terms rather than by those imposed externally - philosophically, psychologically, even metapsychologically. What Wordsworth hears from within himself, which he would describe and explain in the first instance, he would ultimately make answerable to an external reality.[80]

The 'primal' character of the *Prelude* is rooted within Wordsworth's mental and spiritual peculiarities caused by various traumas. There is a strong link between the inner landscapes of the young poet and the (cor-)responding outer expanses that seem to be turning him into an ambassador of the

[79] Ibid., ll. 490-98, Book I.
[80] Faflak, pp. 97-8.

'Presences of Nature'. His own mind is connected to - or projected onto - that of the Presences and vice versa. As Wordsworth explains,

> A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
> With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
> A pure organic pleasure from the lines
>
> Of curling mist, or from the level plain
> Of waters coulour'd by the steady clouds.[81]

The pleasure Wordsworth gains from being in a state of constant 'unconscious intercourse' with the 'eternal Beauty' during his childhood gives him 'organic pleasure' as opposed to conscious artistic pleasure resulting from his synthesizing adult mind. His mental projections are not complex enough to consciously link outward experience to the purely divine dimension within the visual sphere of nature. Nevertheless, there is a budding union that seems to be developing between the poet's mind and that of the great Mind, the 'Spirit of the Universe'. Within this highly spiritual sphere and with the help of imagination, the wished-for noumenal - or sublime - perception of nature is at a later stage in his life transformed into a refined, near-transcendental fabric of complex ideas. This Wordsworthian involute is thus projected onto outer landscapes and it is also reflected in his creation of art. It is the poet's vocation to receive this 'vision'. As Wordsworth explains,

> (…) in the series of Poems placed under the head of Imagination, I have begun with one of the earliest processes of nature in the development of this faculty. Guided by one of my own primary

[81] Wordsworth, ll. 586-93, Book I.

> consciousnesses, I have presented a commutation and transfer of internal feelings, co-operating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination.[82]

Wordsworth, as the suffering son of Nature, believes that his mind is in constant connection with the Great Mind beneath the visual sphere of 'Nature's self, or the breath of God'.[83] Nature is the element within which this 'breath of God' can be breathed. This intake of divine inspiration is consequently transformed with the help of the poet's 'Imagination' and in co-operation with the commutation and transfer of internal feelings and external accidents (referred to in the 'Preface' of the *Lyrical Ballads* as 'association of ideas'). Simple ideas, which are mainly formed in younger years, are more likely to be combined at a later stage in life in order to form more complex ideas. To this, it may be added that - within a Romantic universe - drives such as unhappiness, self-denying or even self-destructive tendencies are intricately linked to the mature poet's existence. This matter can be observed after the stolen boat incident:

> (…) and after I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days, my brain
> Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense
> Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
> There was a darkness, call it solitude,
> Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
> Of hourly objects, images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
> But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
> Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind
> By day and were the trouble of my dreams.[84]

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[82] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, (London, Longman, 1992), p. 268.
[83] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, l. 222, Book V.
[84] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ll. 417-27, Book I.

The boy, as he is still at the initial stages of his growing mind, has difficulties coping with the experience of the sublime offering access to the divine sphere. The resulting distress - or trauma - is caused by his mind's inability to transform the 'huge and mighty Forms' into complex ideas, or indeed images. He can only recognise that there are 'unknown modes of being', that do 'not live / Like living men'. They offer a different kind of life, the life of vital yet unsettling art, like the symbol or the Image in Yeats' or Shelley's poetry which young Wordsworth is unable to understand.[85] The Image, in Wordsworth's poetry too, is the result of 'action and contemplation', the interaction of Nature and Imagination. In addition, the poet clearly stresses the need for a great and powerful intellect. Within this light, Imagination is perceived as the supreme power in the process of (artistic) creation reflecting happiness as well as painful experiences:

> This love more intellectual cannot be
> Without Imagination, which in truth,
> Is but another name for absolute strength
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And reason in her most exalted mood.[86]

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[85] In *The Romantic Image*, Kermode explores mainly Yeats' and thus primarily Romantic literary and philosophical theories. Kermode suggests that what is true throughout different literary movements is the essence, the Thomist 'quidditas' of Coleridgean 'vital', 'living' art, the 'dancer', unifying 'body and soul' and thus presenting 'a life of its own.' This idea of art is inseparably linked to the concept of the Romantic Image, a synthesis of 'action and contemplation' as well as 'Imagination', only achievable with the help of the isolated artist, beneficiary of a highly sensitive and imaginative capacity. The Image as such is, by definition, a 'radiant truth out of time and space' that, eventually, constitutes the only possible reality of art, as anything other than the unification of 'action and imagination' is not art but merely a bland, meaningless act of copying. It is merely a reproduction of dead (mechanical) shapes void of any life and thus of truth.

[86] Wordsworth, ll. 159-63, Book XIII.

Imagination is the power that distinguishes the poet from Kermode's 'natural man'. Wordsworth recognises to what degree he is indebted to Imagination, which lets him perceive the world in a special way:

> (…) in life's every-day appearances
> I seem'd about this period to have sight
> Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit
> To be transmitted and made visible
> To other eyes (…).[87]

Thanks to his 'restored' Imagination, Wordsworth is able to shape the influx of the divine sphere into a message to be 'transmitted'. However, in order to achieve this, the interaction of memory is required. It is through memory that the poet achieves the necessary contemplation of edifying or harrowing events. It seems as if the essence in nature is mainly accessible through recollection, accompanied by the principle of association of ideas. The voluntary act of remembering is what completes the process of creation in the first place:

> Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. The emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does actually exist in the mind. In this mood, successful composition generally begins (…).[88]

Wordsworth stresses the fact that poetry results from recollecting emotion. Thus, positive or negative emotion 'recollected in tranquillity' is the first

[87] Ibid., ll. 369-73, Book XII.
[88] Wordsworth, 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, ll. 797-809.

element in a chain of events that causes the poet to become creative. In this respect, Wordsworth's understanding of creating art differs from De Quincey's point of view. Whereas De Quincey sees voluntary memory as a mere tool helping the recollection of dead images, Wordsworth perceives it as the only possible way towards triggering the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' that eventually culminates in 'successful composition'. Nevertheless, the idea of combining a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' with 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' creates a strange tension between both elements in relation to poetry and Wordsworth's craft. Wordsworth states that 'the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does actually exist in the mind'. This explanation, however, needs further scrutinization when it comes to certain powerful extracts from the *Prelude*. Even though the vigorous idea 'exist[s] in the mind', its acuteness is not only realised via Wordsworth's aforementioned mechanism. Analysing the following passage, another mechanism seems to be at work:

> At distance not the third part of a mile
> Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
> A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro' which
> Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
> Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
> The universal spectacle throughout
> Was shaped for admiration and delight,
> Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
> Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
> That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd
> The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.

> A meditation rose in me that night
> Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
> Had pass'd away, and it appear'd to me
> The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
> Of one that feeds upon infinity,
> That is exalted by an underpresence,
> The sense of God (…)[89]

The unsettling experience of the sublime - here located within a Wordsworthian 'spot of time' - is lodged within the realm of Nature that makes Wordsworth experience a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', even though he experiences this creative urge only after tranquil recollection. Nevertheless, although memory is the guiding principle enabling the poet to create true art, another dimension is hidden beneath Wordsworth's craft. The 'emotion recollected' is so powerful and unsettlingly overwhelming that it confronts the poet with a divine element hidden beneath 'that dark deep thoroughfare' that makes him perceive 'The Soul', the Imagination of the whole'. Thus, Wordsworth is confronted with a distressing recognition. He faces the eternal quality of divine existence as well as the ephemeral character of human reality. As Heffernan points out,

> By inflating the role of natural response in the exercise of imaginative power, such theory forces the poet to give up virtually all of the conscious control over his poem; consciousness plays no part in the creative act itself; the poet abdicates his responsibility to shape and mold the materials of his poem.[90]

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[89] Wordsworth, *The Prelude,* ll. 55-72, Book XIII.
[90] James A. W. Heffernan, *Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry, The Transforming Imagination*, (London, Cornell UP, 1969), p. 110.

Thus, Heffernan suggests that, although Wordsworth believes in the guiding principles of memory and imagination, the act of creating art is not conscious. This leads us to conclude that it must be linked to the realm of the unconscious. In this way, the fact of recollecting emotion voluntarily is followed by powerful revelations rooted within the sphere of the perilous and uncontrollable unconscious. Wordsworth's use of voluntary memory enables him to access the realm of the unconscious due to a 'species of reaction' that Wordsworth himself has trouble describing. De Quincey, on the other hand, only manages to access this world beyond language through the use of opium. In the famous lines quoted above, Wordsworth's encounter with the untranslatable unconscious is reflected in the use of metre. From 'At distance not the third part of a mile' to 'The sense of God (…)', the prevailing form is blank verse with the metrical pattern identified as iambic pentameter. Nevertheless, the line 'Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour' is quite disruptive in a sense that it does not respond to the definition of a regular iambic pentameter. The line is composed of eleven syllables. Furthermore, the rhythm of the previous iambic pentameter is interrupted quite abruptly by a caesura immediately after the strategic word 'chasm'. In this way, Wordsworth demonstrates to what extent he feels shaken by this 'fracture in the vapour' in which he recognises 'The Soul, the Imagination of the whole', i.e. God in relation to the notions of life and death. Wordsworth's 'recollected emotion' is too upsetting to be squeezed into a regular metric pattern. Translating emotion resulting from the depths of the unconscious is difficult - if not impossible. Within a Romantic universe, the unconscious is generally

perceived to be the seat of repressed anxieties, traumas and fears. This is echoed by Wordsworth's statement that

> the emotion, (…), from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.[91]

It is important to highlight the word 'voluntarily' within this context. The emotion and the passions linked to it cause Wordsworth's mind to be in a state of enjoyment. While remembering the 'universal spectacle throughout', 'admiration and delight' lead the poet to perceive 'The Soul, the Imagination of the whole' and make him conclude that the whole spectacle resembles a 'perfect image of a mighty Mind' exalted by the presence of God. These positively sublime experiences confront Wordsworth with the existence of God and finally with his own self and reassure him that he is deeply connected to nature and its divine dimensions. Thus, to some extent, he creates himself in relation to an external reality mirroring his inner landscape.

Nevertheless, there are occurrences that expose the poet to unpleasant memories that are not necessarily remembered 'voluntarily'. Even though the poet wants to be seen as a representative of an all-organizing *über*-intellectual mind, Gill rightly points out that

> Wordsworth had fathered a daughter on a French Royalist sympathizer when he was twenty-two years old. To some it was a relief to learn that Wordsworth had been like Keats and Shelley and

[91] Wordsworth, 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, ll. 797-809.

> Byron, a man with flesh and blood appetites, and not just a solitary visionary communing with Nature and the Universe, which is the figure most of the late portraits, busts, and statues conveyed. For others, though, the news had a more exciting meaning. Now, one could see why Wordsworth's early poetry is peopled with abandoned women and destitute figures and haunted guilty men. The haunted, guilty one was the poet himself. Further speculation about Wordsworth's relations with his sister, Dorothy, added to the sense that the poetry up to, say, 1803 was the product of a tormented spirit.[92]

As Gill suggests, Wordsworth is a poet with 'flesh and blood appetites'. This revelation - if it may thus be called - suggests, however, that Wordsworth is not entirely able to control his very manly urges and that he is somehow compelled to negate these coarse drives. Thus, repressed sexual feelings have to be kept at bay. In this way, the idea of suffering recurs frequently. As Gill reveals, a 'destitute figure' is omnipresent in Wordsworth's poetry. The poet, as the creator, declares himself:

> This only may be said, that from the first
> Having two natures in me, joy the one
> The other melancholy, and withal
> A happy man, and therefore bold to look
> On painful things (…)[93]

Like Faust, Wordsworth admits that he has 'two natures' within himself. Nevertheless, it seems as if he does not allow melancholy to take over. In the lines quoted above, the word 'melancholy' is preceded by 'joy' and it is immediately followed by 'happy man'. In this way, Wordsworth creates a framework within which melancholy can exist without being the dominant

[92] Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, p. 2.
[93] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ll. 867-871, Book X.

element. Wordsworth feels the need to stifle his unhappiness - resulting from guilt and repressed emotion - in order to be regarded as the disciple of an intellectual mind that can even organize unhappy and traumatic experiences. With a setup of this kind, he feels 'bold to look on painful things' because he knows that he must not let melancholy influence his way of action. The opening lines of *Book Eleventh* reflect this conviction:

> Long time hath Man's unhappiness and guilt
> Detain'd us; with what dismal sights beset
> For the outward view, and inwardly oppress'd
> With sorrow, disappointment, vexing thoughts,
> Confusion of opinion, zeal decay'd,
> And lastly, utter loss of hope itself,
> And things to hope for. Not with these began
> Our Song, and not with these our Song must end.[94]

Wordsworth refuses to accept man's unhappiness and guilt, thus also rejecting his own guilt in relation to his 'flesh and blood appetites' and various previous traumatic experiences. Even though Wordsworth creates his own bleak version of himself, he immediately points towards a different, less traumatic representation of himself. Nevertheless, the aforementioned traumas, in relation to the Wordsworthian 'spots of time',

> nourish the poet's conscience; for in each of the darker 'Spots' there is an awareness that he himself has committed a crime (as in the woodcock-snaring, birdsnesting, and boatstealing episodes), or a more numinous sense that a spot is associated with guilt (as in the passages concerning the 'Woman on the Hill' or the waiting for horses'). These transgressions awaken in the child a sense of grandeur within and beyond his own mind. They introduce him to the idea of

[94] Ibid., ll. 1-8, Book XI.

> death; but they also link him with the 'Soul of things', and make up the centre of his moral being.[95]

Newlyn clearly refers to the 'two natures' in the poet. On the one hand, the spots of time Wordsworth lives through connect him to the 'Soul of things', on the other hand, he realises that while experiencing these sublime moments, the idea of death reveals itself most powerfully:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A vivifying Virtue, whence, depress'd
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier and more deadly weight
> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourish'd and invisibly repair'd,
> A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
> That penetrates, enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.[96]

Even though these spots of time nourish and repair the poet's mind and 'lift [the poet] up when fallen', they cannot fully protect the poet from the destabilising effects of existence. In this way, creation often remains stifled and securing a sense of selfhood is not always guaranteed. Even as a child, the young poet is confronted with this reality. While riding over the hills one day, Wordsworth comes across a scene which he later on characterises as a crucial 'spot of time'. The poet

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[95] Lucy Newlyn, ''The Noble Living and the Noble Dead': Community in *The Prelude'* in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 63.
[96] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ll. 258-268, Book XI.

Came to a bottom, where in former times
A Murderer had been hung in iron chains.
The Gibbet-mast was moulder'd down, the bones
And iron case were gone; but on the turf,
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought
Some unknown hand had carved the Murderer's name.
The monumental writing was engraven
In times long past, and still, from year to year,
By superstition of the neighbourhood,
The grass is clear'd away; and to this hour
The letters are all fresh and visible.
[…]
fortwith I left the spot
And, reascending the bare Common, saw
a naked Pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near,
A Girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seem'd with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
An ordinary sight; but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I look'd all round for my lost guide,
Did at the time invest in the naked Pool,
The beacon on the lonely Eminence,
The Woman, and her garments vex'd and toss'd
By the strong wind.[97]

Wordsworth, while riding over the hills of a very wild and unwelcoming landscape and after having lost sight of his comrade, suddenly experiences a so-called 'spot of time' that confronts him with a complex and multi-layered situation. After discovering the engravings, he realises that the letters refer to a murderer who was hanged 'in former times'. Stunned by this sight, he gazes upon a dreary 'naked Pool that lay beneath the hills' and he then perceives a

[97] Ibid., ll. 289-316, Book XI.

young girl with a 'Pitcher' on her head. The entire scene is witnessed through the eyes of a boy who has been greatly impressed by the idea of a murderer executed for his 'fell deed'. In this way, the danger, frustration, pain, desolation and undefined feelings of guilt linked to perceiving the Gibbet-mast and its history are all projected onto the 'ordinary' if not innocent scene surrounding the young girl. Wordsworth manages to combine the external landscape with his inner landscape. He imbues this external landscape with a socio-historic past that suggests evil and death in its most atrocious form. Since the mind is 'lord and master', Wordsworth has no other choice but to shape the external landscape in order to match it with the internal configuration of the mind. As Newlyn states, through this 'spot of time', Wordsworth is linked to the 'Soul of things', but he is also introduced to the idea of death. Even though Wordsworth creates himself within outer and inner landscapes, death - like the seemingly eternal engravings (see De Quincey's 'Palimpsest') on the turf surrounding the former Gibbet-mast - remains the ultimate instance. Strikingly, in terms of language, the poet states that, in order to translate the experience appropriately, he should need 'Colours and words that are unknown to man'. As Gill suggests, Wordsworth's poetry 'shifts continually on the axis between the exultantly affirmative and the hesitantly exploratory'.[98] Here, as opposed to the affirmative character of lines 258-60 'There are in our existence spots of time, / Which with distinct pre-eminence retain / A vivifying Virtue', the hesitant nature of lines 310-11 reflects the poet's inability to translate the powerful dimension connected to the Gibbet-mast scenery. Language fails to grasp the essence of the vision. A

[98] Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet' in *Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, p. 153.

linguistic representation is impossible. Wordsworth points out this difficulty by referring to 'colours' as much as 'words'. Since words cannot fully satisfy the poet's needs, colour would have to compensate for the linguistic weakness. This trick, if it may thus be called, is also used by De Quincey, who, throughout the most powerful passages of his writing, readily refers to painting or music in order to re-create the linguistically untranslatable visions. In this way, Wordsworth somehow admits that emotion recollected, or even elements connected to involuntary memory, can hardly be seized linguistically. As a poet, he fails to create. If he cannot create, he cannot be. Although Hazlitt once suggested that Wordsworth 'seems to exist as if there were nothing but himself and the universe', it becomes obvious that his poetry 'also registers other tones', namely 'uncertainty, equivocation, [and] opacity'.[99] Thus, the poet himself, while being confronted with 'spots of time', is confronted with his own weakness and failure that - eventually - point towards the untranslatable nature of death.

[99] Ibid.

Conrad

Heart of Darkness: The Geography of Pain

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* powerfully illustrates the link between unknown, dangerous, primeval forces and the so-called British civilized world of the Victorian or even post-Victorian era. In this respect, it is in many ways very similar to De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. If De Quincey chooses to represent his antediluvian fears in relation to his unsettling opium-fuelled dreams of 'Indostan' that cause spiritual, mental and physical anguish, Conrad focuses on his own version of unknown territories. The heart of darkness, or one of the most remote parts of the African continent, is Conrad's very 'real' counterpart to De Quincey's Asian-themed nightmares or Malay encounters. In this way, Conrad's novel is also very Freudian. It is thus easy to establish a link between the central areas of the African continent and the fears and (self-) destructive phobias of the unconscious located somewhere in the Freudian self. With these qualities attached to it, this modernist novel can be understood as incorporating Romantic ideals and

ideas since it reflects both De Quinceyan and Wordsworthian subject matter. Thorburn emphasises

> Conrad's affinities with the *fin-de-siècle* tradition of the adventure story and ultimately, with the Romantic poets. In his very subjects and in his dominant attitudes toward those subjects, I want to suggest, Conrad was in fundamental ways a man of the nineteenth century, and his affinities with Wordsworth especially are even stronger and more decisive than his connection with, say, Kafka and other prophets of our disorder. To say this is not entirely to deny Conrad's modernity but to qualify it by making two related assertions which it will be part of my purpose to try to justify: first, that Conrad habitually relied on what must be called Romantic modes of storytelling and created fictional worlds in which alienation, despair, and human separateness are contained, however precariously, by a stoic Romanticism grounded in a sense of human sharing and continuity; and second, that the increasingly powerful argument for Romanticism itself as a modern tradition […] receives convincing, perhaps crucial support from Conrad's example.[100]

Thorburn rightly identifies Conrad as a man of the nineteenth century, even though his writing can also be understood as inaugurating that of the early twentieth century. Conrad's 'Romantic modes of storytelling' are reflected in the fictional worlds in which 'alienation, despair, and human separateness' create a modern universe tinged with Romantic hues. This is especially true for *Heart of Darkness*, a novella that combines both Romantic and modern elements.

The structure of the story is centred around a journey from London towards uncharted African terrain. In this respect, the move towards unknown land is nothing but a geographical translation of a psychoanalytical

[100] David Thorburn, *Conrad's Romanticism*, (London, Yale University Press, 1974), p. x.

approach to analysing the depths of the human psyche. As Coroneos states, 'geography [is] not only […] a scientific discipline but also […] a powerful tool of psychological and humanist interests'.[101] In this way, linking the idea of outer geography to inner landscapes seems quite logical. Corones adds that

> First published in serial form in 1899, *Heart of Darkness* belongs within the same period as the competing claims of early psychology; its concerns, and how Conrad tries to put them into expression, occupy a similar relation to the conditions from which that psychology emerged.[102]

No one is quite sure what to expect at the end of the geographical as well as psychological journey. 'Marlow describes a far-off land […] where every man, possessed of the 'devilry of lingering starvation', may become a butcher and where human flesh may be man's meat'.[103] Thus, the far-off lands may be understood as hallucinatingly dangerous and psychologically challenging. The very idea of pain is rooted within the concept of cannibalism which - without a doubt - leads to painful destruction. Nevertheless, if anthropophagy were the only form of pain or suffering in Conrad's novel, his writing would have to be characterised as trivial or intended for the sole purpose of mediocre entertainment. There is of course more to the core of painful annihilation - and its roots are in the very heart of light, London.

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[101] Con Coroneos, *Space, Conrad and Modernity*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 54.
[102] Ibid., p. 109.
[103] Bernard Meyer, J*oseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 168.

The capital of the British Empire lies at the centre of a seemingly unspoilt, serene environment. As the crew are leaving harbour and while they are navigating on the Thames, Marlow offers his impressions:

> The day was ending in serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds.[104]

The language used creates an atmosphere of serenity and visual vividness. Light seems to dominate the scene. Thus, Conrad suggests that London and its surroundings do not belong to the heart of darkness. It is a different universe, governed by the laws of light, civilization and generally benign forces. Nouns such as 'serenity', 'brilliance', 'sky', 'immensity' and 'light' in combination with adjectives like 'still', 'exquisite', 'benign', 'unstained', 'radiant' or 'diaphanous' create a genuinely positive framework within which London can function as the heart of the Empire, as the heart of light. In this way, it seems to be a safe haven that does not threaten or negate life. Nevertheless, this peaceful setup is threatened by other forces that - still - manage to penetrate into this realm of harmony:

> Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth.[105]

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[104] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (London, Penguin Classics, 2007), p. 4.
[105] Ibid., p.4

It is important to understand the change that is brought upon by the progress of a vessel travelling on the Thames. The further the vessel moves from the centre of London, the closer the crew get to the 'uttermost ends of the earth'. Conrad cunningly links the centre of the Empire to the furthest and most unknown parts of the planet. Even though the river Thames functions as a life-giving artery to London, it is at the same time a dangerous link to the unknown, the Other. The connection between the heart of light and the heart of darkness may seem faint, but it is real, acute. 'And this also', said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth'.[106] 'Darkness was here yesterday'.[107] Danger, destruction, annihilation only linger around the corner. The heart of darkness is geographically very far away, but historically - or psychologically - it is palpable right there. Marlow ponders:

> I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago. […] Imagine [them] here - the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina - and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages - precious little to eat fit for a civilised man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness like a needle in a bundle of hay - cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death - death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush.[108]

Marlow's depiction is strikingly different from the 'gauzy and radiant fabric' that is initially attributed to the Thames and its shores. Of course, this is no coincidence. Marlow's portrayal is nothing but a foreshadowing of the

[106] Ibid., p. 5.
[107] Ibid., p. 6.
[108] Ibid., p. 6.

conditions encountered later in the story. Within the heart of darkness, 'fog', 'disease', 'exile' and - of course - 'death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush' are elements that will occur towards the end of the journey into the unknown. Conrad manages to create a link between the inner and outer landscapes by associating 'fog' and 'exile' with 'disease' and 'death'. In this respect, the surroundings incorporate psychological and eventually physical turmoil. The 'radiant fabric' does not seem that luminous and pristine after all. Death is in the air. As Coroneos suggests,

> […] the form which seeing takes is often obstructive, partial or blurred. Not only is the object seen through a fog, but the fog itself is seen through a fog. The difficulty is not the angle but the depth of vision. For Conrad, communication depends very much on perceiving what lies in between things. […] Forests, streets, and horizons return the gaze, menacing the viewer. Seeing is frictional, massy, and carries a certain transactional weight. The space of perception is thus not simply a structure; it has a thickness, a density, a 'fleshiness''.[109]

The 'fog' that is used in the context of the Thames is also echoed at a later stage of the novel when Marlow is travelling on the jungle river towards the end of his journey. The so-called 'transactional weight' linked to the 'fleshiness' of seeing in Conrad's writing is of course also evocative of the difficulties connected to translating the subject matter and the idea of suffering linked to it. As Coroneos points out,

> it has been claimed that the story has 'probably had more critical attention per word than any other modern prose work'. A fertile source for numerous textbooks, it has also nourished the critical turn, from the myth and symbol criticism of the 1950s to post-colonialism.

[109] Coroneos, p. 112.

> Why is it that despite the words lavished upon it, *Heart of Darkness* remains so deeply obscure?[110]

The obscure character of Conrad's writing can be identified within the 'strenuous and intangible complexities of the imagery'.[111] The imagery thus described may be recognised in the fact that, for instance, the journey from London to the uttermost ends of the world is paralleled with psychological and physical processes that bring about changes in the characters and their deeds. Marlow, while approaching Brussels as a first foreign outpost, enters the city and observes it critically. His impressions of Brussels add to the very complex nature of the metaphor that the journey itself represents.

> Before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always made me think of a whited sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt.[112]

Even though Marlow admits that his views might simply result from 'prejudice', the very idea of Brussels as a 'sepulchre' makes the nature of the entire enterprise appear in a dubious if not dodgy light. The 'contract' - a devilish pact - needs to be signed with a company whose buildings are 'the biggest thing in the town'.[113] Thus, the company itself - like a cancer - feeds upon the sepulchral quality of the Belgian capital and its business, inevitably, must reflect the sombre nature of its headquarters. In Conrad's view and interpretation of the world, death even casts its shadows on menial business

[110] Ibid., p. 109.
[111] Ibid., p. 111.
[112] Conrad, p. 11.
[113] Ibid, p. 11.

matters which are in this case linked to colonialism and its shady exploits. To some extent, this setup reflects Conrad's very own pessimism or personal suffering as a private person and artist. It is reported that Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* 'at the end of a year-long period of depression and writer's block, haunted by the shadow of the incomplete novel *The Rescue*'.[114] In a letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad expresses his block in words that strongly coincide with content from *Heart of Darkness*:

> I sit down religiously every morning, I sit down for eight hours every day - and the sitting down is all. In the course of that working day of 8 hours I write 3 sentences which I erase before leaving the table in despair…
>
> I want to howl and foam at the mouth but I daren't do it for fear of waking that baby and alarming my wife. It's no joking matter. After such crises of despair I doze for hours till half conscious that there is that story I am unable to write… I am haunted, mercilessly haunted by *necessity* of style. And that story I can't write weaves itself into all I see, into all I speak, into all I think, into the lines of every book I try to read.[115]

Conrad feels 'haunted' by the very spectre of the unfinished work. In an artist's universe, writer's block is akin to self-destruction. If an author cannot write, he cannot be. This lingering threat is reflected in his writing, just like the 'story [he] can't write weaves itself into all [he sees], into all [he speaks], into all [he thinks]. It is the 'fog' that hides the shores of the Thames and

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[114] Finn Fordham, *I do I undo I redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves in Hopkins, Yeats, Conrad, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 141.
[115] Ibid., p. 148.

the unknown shoreline of the jungle river. It is the act of 'seeing [… which] is often obstructive, partial or blurred'. Conrad's turmoil is woven into his perception of the universe and the respective representations of it. His worlds - both real and fictional - become a chalice into which he pours his suffering, and his fictional characters suffer with him. The novella reflects Conrad's view of the world and its subject matter is deeply rooted in the author's complexes and preoccupations. One of Conrad's main sources of agony is anchored in the very fact that there is the 'antique opposition between words and things'. [116] 'Words are the great foes of reality' since they cannot translate it adequately.[117] Upon hearing of Kurtz, Marlow states himself:

> He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the dream any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream - making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams…'
>
> He was silent for a while.
>
> '… No, it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence - that which makes its truth, its meaning - its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream - alone…'[118]

[116] Coroneos, p. 13.
[117] Ibid., p. 8.
[118] Conrad, p. 33.

Marlow, to some extent, voices Conrad's concerns about the problem of referentiality. Also, the lines mentioned above reflect Conrad's anguish in relation to his depression and the writer's block resulting from it. In this way, notions of the author's self are reflected in Marlow's self. 'No relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation' is a painful idea that is taken up again a few lines below: 'No, it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence'. Conrad specifies that neither dreams nor what one would perceive as reality can be accurately related or translated. In this respect, he is in line with De Quincey who, throughout his artistic life, struggles with representing both dreams and reality with the help of language. As has been pointed out in the chapter on De Quincey, language fails to grasp the very essence of (re-)lived experience. Similarly, Conrad finds it difficult to delineate a true and accurate account of what the narrator is supposed to experience. Nevertheless, Conrad's use of double perspective between experience itself and 'the *now* of Marlow's telling about that experience' enables him to legitimise that barrier.[119] He cannot be blamed for failing to translate real life events accurately. Marlow has to be blamed. However, Conrad does not seem to be able to accept this linguistic failure. As Wittgenstein lamented, '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world'.[120] Chantler adds that

> The specific meaning of the terms Marlow uses is unclear. What does he mean, for example, by 'reality'? It is a signifier (a sound-image) floating free from a clear signified (a concept). Does he know what he

[119] Thorburn, p. 119.
[120] Ashley Chantler, *Heart of Darkness: Character Studies*, (London, Continuum, 2008), p. 33.

> means? The piling abstractions suggest not, suggest that he is clutching at words in the hope that something solid might be made from the epistemological haze.[121]

Marlow's language is as hazy as the dense fog that blurs any perception of the outside world, both in London and in the Congo. He does not have a clear concept of 'reality'. He merely uses the word, clutching at it in order to gain some kind of insight in relation to the very concept of it. Marlow's words, just like Conrad's writing, fail to create a definite link between the signifier and the signified. Conrad's failure is thus reflected in Marlow's speech. Nevertheless, as any student of English literature knows and in order to give Conrad some credit, he is not the only author to have suffered this fate. De Quincey suffered greatly too while trying to communicate the incommunicable. The fact that he reverts to painting and music in his writing only confirms the tensions he felt towards translating what cannot be translated. In the Savannah-la-Mar episode, vast domes and entire cities hidden beneath the depths of the sea are used by De Quincey to translate this very consideration. Seeing through the translucent qualities of water only puts a layer on top of 'reality', which suggests that reality as such cannot be perceived and therefore not be grasped linguistically. The signifier and the signified only match to a certain extent. Speaking the truth is impossible and it is human fate that it cannot be changed. Conrad's torment partly results from this recognition. The 'fog' and the numerous occurrences of 'death' that are found in the story are thus turned into a metaphor for suffering. Marlow himself becomes a victim of the difficult relationship between reality and

[121] Ibid., p. 33.

words. At some point, Conrad plays with the absurdity of language in relation to the situation Marlow is in:

> What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work - to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. There were cases of them down at the coast - cases - piled up - burst - split! You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that station yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the grove of death. You could fill your pockets with rivets for the trouble of stooping down - and there wasn't one rivet to be found where it was wanted. We had plates that would do, but nothing to fasten them with. And every week, the messenger, a lone negro, letterbag on shoulder and staff in hand, left our station for the coast. And several times a week a coast caravan came in with trade goods - ghastly calico that made you shudder only to look at it, glass beads about a penny a quart, confounded spotted cotton handkerchiefs. And no rivets. […]
>
> 'I slapped [the boiler-maker] on the back and shouted, 'We shall have rivets!' He scrambled to his feet exclaiming, 'No! Rivets!' as though he couldn't believe his ears. […]
>
> 'I had given up worrying about the rivets. One's capacity for that kind of folly is more limited than you would suppose.[122]

Conrad clearly uses this passage to underline the absurdity or futility of language in relation to 'reality'. He chooses one of the silliest and most useless objects he can possibly think of in order to illustrate the gap between language and reality, between the signifier and the signified. The repetitions of the word 'rivet', like a typical Conradian 'fog', blur the surroundings and the journey into the unknown towards the unconscious where language falters. The rivet is turned into an abstract version of itself by the inflationary

[122] Conrad, pp. 33-7.

use of its signifier. Marlow, through the unconventional use of language, somehow distorts reality. At this stage of the journey, language and reality seem to match less than in civilized surroundings like London, for instance. The 'rivet' is all of a sudden at the centre of attention and thus, there is a temporary change of perspective that threatens to alter the focus of Marlow's understanding of reality and of the situation in which he finds himself. The prevalence of the word 'rivet' either suggests madness on behalf of the speaker or a complete breakdown of linguistic and epistemological conventions. Both language and reason do not seem to function properly within this far-off environment. Marlow - and thus also Conrad - can only use language inappropriately. Conrad's use of onomatopoeia in 'cases - piled up - burst - split' further support the idea that linguistic conventions no longer work within the - psychological and physical - haze of the jungle. Translating pain is becoming increasingly difficult as the pain itself is interfering with language and its authority. Marlow, nonetheless, concludes that 'One's capacity for that kind of folly is more limited than you would suppose'.[123] Marlow realizes that he is undergoing some kind of 'folly' that cannot really be explained or accepted. At the same time, the failure of language mirrors the 'unreal' quality of the environment.[124] Strangely enough, even though the signifier and the signified do not really match in such an environment, Conrad manages to create an even stronger link between form and content. Indeed, because the signifier and the signified do not match, form and content are

[123] Ibid., p. 37.
[124] Ibid., p. 44.

linked more convincingly. Upon hearing about Kurtz for the very first time, Marlow ponders:

> As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the very first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dug-out, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home - perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was 'that man'. The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as 'that scoundrel'. 'The scoundrel' had reported that the 'man' had been very ill - had recovered imperfectly … The two below me moved away then a few paces, and strolled back and forth at some little distance. I heard: 'Military post - doctor - two hundred miles - quite alone now - unavoidable delays - nine months - no news - strange rumours.[125]

Conrad experiments with how reality can be registered either directly or indirectly via language or indeed other (artistic) media. Marlow states that he can 'see' Kurtz for the very first time. Of course, this 'seeing' is different from an immediate visual impression. 'Seeing' is in this case linked to imagination and mental processes that conjure up an image resulting from a linguistic sketch. Conrad creates the signified with the help of the signifier. Language creates reality. This Wittgensteinian approach is of course problematic. Is reality that has been created through language reality at all? Can the two men's accounts be trusted? How complete or incomplete are their descriptions? The difficulty is of course that reality as such cannot be perceived. However, an immediate, visual impression is no more trustworthy

[125] Ibid., p. 39.

an impression of reality than a linguistic account. The world - as we know it - is always processed by and through the human body. Perceiving as well as re-creating reality is inherently flawed and simply limited to the faculties of the five human senses. The *noumenon*, the thing in itself, as Kant calls it, remains hidden to the human being and cannot be known. In this respect, it is very similar - metaphorically and culturally - to the Freudian unconscious. Neither the *noumenon* nor the unconscious can be accessed. In this way, Conrad uses the extract above to illustrate the difficulties linked to translating immediate experience within the context of this journey into the unknown. Marlow - and the reader - are given an impression of Kurtz although he is not present. His name, or immediate signifier, is not even spoken, as if Conrad refuses to use a signifier for a signified that cannot really be understood. Nevertheless, in Conrad's universe, this depiction - or description - is as valid as the 'real' Kurtz, even though it remains incomplete, impressionist. As Thorburn claims,

> Virtually all the impressionist strategies to which Marlow has recourse during his narrative - the jumbled, digressive chronology; the breaks in the story when Marlow interrupts himself to address his listeners or merely to pause reflectively; his persistent admissions of inadequacy; the adjectival diction - all these strategies serve […] to show us, in the words of one of the novel's admirers, 'how hard it is to know, and how hard to judge'.[126]

The 'impressionist strategies' that Thorburn evokes can also be observed in the extract that seems to be creating some kind of useful delineation of Kurtz: 'I heard: 'Military post - doctor - two hundred miles - quite alone now -

[126] Thorburn, p. 119.

unavoidable delays - nine months - no news - strange rumours'.[127] The phrases that Marlow overhears are nothing but linguistic fragments aimed at demarcating some kind of concept relating to Kurtz. No complete sentences are heard. Any information about Kurtz seems very vague, blurred and difficult to process. The reader needs to synthesise the various, disparate bits of information himself. This, in itself, is an impressionist approach to representation. At the same time, it reflects Conrad's self-doubt in relation to writing or using language appropriately. 'I cannot paint/ What then I was' cries Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey*.[128] Similarly, Conrad is having trouble with 'painting' the very strange nature of the surroundings and Marlow's experience linked to it. As Thorburn suggests, 'the novella is fundamentally Marlow's story: a journey into regions where Marlow confronts, as in a dream, aspects of himself'.[129] While moving further down the river and before meeting Kurtz for the first time, Marlow recognises that

> Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes

[127] Conrad, p. 39.
[128] Thorburn, p. 118.
[129] Ibid., p. 122.

> when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of peace did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time. [130]

Conrad's description is reminiscent of De Quincey's agonising opium-fuelled dream narratives. Similarly to De Quincey's 'infinite depths' in which he encounters 'cancerous crocodiles' and threatening ancient sunken cities, Marlow's journey into the depths of the jungle also confronts the narrator with circumstances similar to 'the earliest [and therefore threatening] beginnings of the world'. Conrad, like De Quincey, mentions 'crocodiles and hippos' that 'sunned themselves' - prehistoric, unapproachable creatures that are linked to antediluvian processes and fears, mostly encountered within the anarchic textures of the unconscious. Just as in De Quincey's writing, the jungle - like Indostan or Savannah-la-Mar - is the seat of unspeakable horrors governed by anything but reason. It is where the unconscious manifests itself. As has been discussed in the chapter on De Quincey, not only does the unconscious resist reason, it also evades language. It represents what cannot be told and it is evocative of what De Quincey calls the *burden of the Incommunicable*. This incommunicable nature of the surroundings is mirrored convincingly in the passage quoted above. With 'vegetation' said to have 'rioted' on the earth, combined with words such as 'empty', 'silence', 'impenetrable' and 'gloom', Conrad manages to craft a very unwelcoming,

[130] Conrad, p. 41.

threatening, opaque and *dark* environment in which strange psychological processes are allowed to happen, if not triggered. The author, anew, creates one of his typical dense *fogs* that put a blurring layer between the narrator and his surroundings, but also between the author and the reader. Marlow, just like the reader, feels the weight of the 'warm, thick, heavy, sluggish' air. The journey is not meant to be a pleasurable experience. It is burdensome, awkward, stifling. It is a journey into unknown, dangerous forests where 'you lost your way', if not your very self. It is a place that is challenging not only in a physical sense, but also culturally, morally, emotionally and psychologically, 'till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once - somewhere - far away - in another existence perhaps'. The other existence, in De Quincey, is linked to the impenetrable nature of the unconscious. Here, in the *Heart of Darkness*, a similar link can be made. Conrad carries on, stating that 'there were moments when one's past came back'. The 'past' manifests itself in a 'noisy dream', like the atrociously painful experiences De Quincey re-lives in his opium-fuelled dreams. Thus, re-living the past is not necessarily a good thing. Conrad, through the power of association, tries to make the reader aware of this issue. By creating a threatening and unpleasant environment, the 'past' that is conjured up is inevitably a disagreeable element, as it is, like in the *Confessions*, linked to antediluvian fears rooted somewhere in a distant Asian - or in this case African - past.

This is further explored as the ship moves on towards the heart of darkness:

> We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. […] Suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us - who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand, because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign - and no memories.
>
> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there - there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were - No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it - this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you - you so remote from the night of first ages - could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything - because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future.[131]

This very powerful extract exposes the essence of how Conrad understands this expedition. The language itself matches the content, as it reflects the uneasiness, the difficulty linked to describing such a remote and unfamiliar landscape and its attributes. Conrad has to repeat several words in order to

[131] Conrad, p. 44.

make sure that the message reaches the reader. Again, signifier and signified do not seem to match properly. In order to stress this unsettling fact as well as the environment's cultural remoteness, the word 'prehistoric' is used twice. He also repeats unusual adjectives like 'unearthly' or 'inhuman' in order to stress the alien character of the events developing within the vicinity of the steamer. Even though Conrad highlights the fact that these creatures are not 'inhuman', the repetition of the word still suggests a problematic relationship between the narrator and the people he witnesses. Furthermore, the most striking element of the extract is its 'impenetrable' quality. Conrad stresses the loss of understanding vehemently:

> '… on an earth that wore the aspect of an *unknown* planet'.
> '… on the edge of a black and *incomprehensible* frenzy'.
> 'We were *cut off from the comprehension* of our surroundings'.
> 'We glided past like phantoms, *wondering*…'
> 'We *could not understand*, because we were too far and *could not remember'.*
> *'… no memories'*.

Crystallizing these phrases from the extract, it turns out that Conrad interprets the jungle environment as one of sublime cultural, moral, historical and psychological amnesia. Knowledge and knowing become impossible, which in itself is a very distressing and agonizing experience. This recognition corresponds to a total loss of orientation. It describes a form of existence similar to that on an 'unknown planet', completely 'incomprehensible' and with 'no memories'. The repetitive use of uncommon words mirrors this recognition. This technique allows Conrad to deal with Marlow's distorted

perception of the cosmos he is trying to navigate and that, as a revenge, is manipulating him. As Thorburn states,

> Marlow is obsessed with the problem of using 'mere words' to get at the 'unspeakable' truths which his experiences in Africa have suggested to him. The abstract diction, the waywardly eccentric narrative line, the interruptions and confessions of failure - all are central to *Heart of Darkness*.[132]

The previous extract from *Heart of Darkness* combines the elements that Thorburn enunciates. The repetitions leave an abstract delineation of the events. Conrad's depiction, again, is impressionist. The narrative, through the use of words such as 'unearthly' or 'inhuman' also turns the description into an 'eccentric' account. The confessions of failure, on the other hand, are not immediately recognisable. However, through the numerous repetitions and the abundance of hyphens, it becomes clear that Marlow's depiction is hesitant, and thus threatened by failure. Interestingly, even though Marlow claims that 'there were moments when one's past came back to one', here, all of a sudden, he states that there were 'no memories' at all. As he is progressing deeper into the jungle, towards the unconscious, language, knowledge and memory fail. In this instance, as in De Quincey's writing, voluntary memory is no longer active. The unconscious cannot be accessed via voluntary memory. However, within this unsettling environment, the anarchic drives of the involuntary memory manifest themselves. The instant 'one's past comes back to one' is characterised by the interference of the unconscious. Furthermore, within this context and while seeing people on the

[132] Thorburn, p. 121.

shore, Marlow points out that 'what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly'. This striking if not disquieting recognition is completed by the fact that there might be 'just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise' and a 'dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you - you so remote from the night of first ages - could comprehend'. If there is comprehension, there is also a sense of assimilation, or belonging. As Bohlmann points out,

> we find that […] existence applies to man only once he consciously attempts to distinguish himself from the masses and strives to realise his essence, or selfhood. Only then can he truly be said to exist.[133]

Bohlmann suggests that the self can only exist if it can be distinguished from the masses as such. However, within this setting of cultural amnesia, the validity of this premise is questioned. Marlow, so far, has been trying to keep a gap between himself and the African wilderness. He has more or less managed to do so. For instance, the moment he gives an injured slave a cookie for comfort is telling. Marlow does not interact with the slave out of compassion. He does so in order to defend his position as a superior social being governed by the laws of the highly civilized British Empire. In this way, he manages to define himself against the Other and he is able to distinguish himself from the toiling masses. A sense of selfhood and existence is thus secured. However, as the journey through the African continent goes on and as the gap between signifier and signified increases, the difference between

[133] Otto Bohlmann, *Conrad's Existentialism*, (Chippenham, Antony Rowe Ltd., 1999), p. 47.

inner and outer landscapes diminishes accordingly. Conrad contradicts Bohlmann's idea in as much as Marlow can all of a sudden 'comprehend' the tumultuous uproar. Marlow's selfhood is under threat. The anarchic, uncontrollable forces begin to dominate the developments on and around the ship.

Conrad manages to produce an atmosphere in which the destructively claustrophobic quality of the jungle becomes threatening to a point that the reader starts to feel uncomfortable himself. The author plays with the relationship between the reader and the author, suggesting that the gap between signifier and signified also creates a distance between the writer and the reader. Language, since it is doomed to fail within the amnesic African environment, is becoming ever more absurd and futile. In a log cabin in which everything has deteriorated that used to suggest the faintest idea of civilization, Marlow finds an old book:

> The dwelling was dismantled; but we could see a white man had lived there not long ago. There remained a rude table - a plank on two posts; a heap of rubbish reposed in a dark corner, and by the door I picked up a book. It had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was, 'An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship,' by a man Towzer, Towson - some such name - Master in his Majesty's Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. […] Such a book being there was wonderful enough; but still more astounding were the notes pencilled in the margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn't believe my eyes. They were in cipher! Yes, it looked like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book

> of that description into this nowhere and studying it - and making notes - in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery.[134]

Within this setting of dismantled cabins and useless, crumbling remains, Marlow discovers a damaged volume which Conrad has placed there to illustrate how communication becomes difficult, if not impossible. The dirty remains of an old, dissolving book with 'illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures' is full of representations that do not need language as a main means of communication. The diagrams and illustrations are non-linguistic reflections of real-life objects and concepts that do not rely on language only to function properly. Also, more importantly, the notes in the margins of the book are apparently written in cipher, a secret alphabet that only a very select group of people can understand and use. Without this group, this kind of writing becomes obsolete. Language, once removed from its habitual social setting, is futile. Communication breaks down. The African jungle is taking over.

A very important character within this context is of course Kurtz. Kurtz - the name itself is a misspelt German translation of 'short' - is a character that is at the same time 'completely known to Marlow, and completely inaccessible, both near and far'.[135] As Thorburn states,

> language *is* to Marlow, as to Conrad, at once bewildering and illuminating, and it is appropriate that Conrad's most ambiguous character, both villain and hero, should be a master of language. […] It seems impossible not to recognize in Marlow's mingled admiration

[134] Conrad, p. 46.
[135] Coroneos, p. 117.

> and disdain for Kurtz something of Conrad's deep ambivalence toward the profession of the artist.[136]

Conrad is still an author whose work is regularly stifled by writer's block and depression. Thus, it is not surprising that an intimidating character should have qualities that the author himself does not have (or does not believe to have). Kurtz is extremely eloquent, to the point of irritation. His presence within the oppressive African jungle is surprising, if not incomprehensible. He is a mystery to everyone.

> He was very little more than a voice. And I heard - him - it - this voice - other voices - all of them were so little more than voices - and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense.[137]

Conrad describes Kurtz as nothing more than a disembodied voice. However, since language does not function properly within this dense, impenetrable forest, Kurtz's eloquence is ambiguous, too. The author uses words such as 'jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage' and 'mean' to describe the discourse that Kurtz - and indeed others - produce. Even though Kurtz seems to be very articulate, his language is eventually nothing but 'silly jabber'. There is, however, a reason for Kurtz's behaviour:

> And the lofty frontal bone of Mr Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this - ah - specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball - an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and - lo! - he had withered; it

[136] Thorburn, p. 123.
[137] Conrad, p. 59.

> had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite.[138]

Kurtz has become part of the wilderness. He is no longer a 'civilized' man. He lives within the boundaries of an impenetrable darkness. In a Freudian sense, he is the voice of the unconscious. He has access to areas that normally remain sealed. However, even though he is able to look into the heart of darkness, his 'eloquent' translation of the 'wilderness' within his 'veins' remains unintelligible to outsiders. His ugly, bald, death-like head is able to glimpse at the anarchic outbursts of the heart of darkness, but at the same time, this same head is unable to translate the wilderness in a way that everyone can understand. Linguistically, the heart of darkness remains untouched. Furthermore, meddling with the *Incommunicable* is ultimately and inevitably (self-) destructive. Kurtz's physique is characterised by decay. 'They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this - ah - specimen, was impressively bald'. This statement only makes sense when used in relation to a corpse. It is said that hair sometimes keeps growing after a person's death. Kurtz has all the physical features of a dead, 'disinterred' body. Being exposed to the heart of darkness, or the Freudian unconscious, is akin to being exposed to a deadly, radioactive substance. Kurtz's exposure to the African heart seems to destroy him, to 'consume his flesh'. Thorburn argues that Kurtz is the 'inner Marlow', and in this respect a doppelganger of Marlow and indeed Conrad. Marlow and Kurtz's experiences reflect at the same time those

[138] Ibid., p. 59.

of the author. Kurtz's suffering is therefore also Conrad's. Kurtz's eloquence - which is flawed - mirrors Conrad's insecurity.

Kurtz's questionable and risky existence within the jungle is linked to a very base drive - greed. Indeed, the entire business is based on 'raiding the country'.[139] Thus, the heart of darkness is not only a place of impenetrable darkness and incommunicable horror, it is also a place of viciously destructive moral, social and cultural decline that eventually distorts people's psyche. As the doctor in Brussels at the beginning of Marlow's journey suggests, 'the changes take place inside, you know'. [140] Mental health cannot be guaranteed. Kurtz, who has conquered this dangerous space, has been absorbed by it. His sense of self is threatened. This thought, when applied to Bohlmann's utterance used above, is quite distressing. 'Existence applies to man only once he consciously attempts to distinguish himself from the masses and strives to realise his essence, or selfhood'.[141] What is Kurtz trying to do then? During a conversation between Marlow and one of Kurtz's followers, Kurtz's actions are described:

> He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses […], but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone, far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up,' he said. […]
>
> 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered something about the villages round that

[139] Conrad, p. 69.
[140] Ibid., p. 13.
[141] Bohlmann, p. 47.

> lake. 'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. […]
>
> 'He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would talk to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful. This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away. When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people - forget himself - you know.'[142]

After 'two illnesses', Kurtz is no longer the same person. He has been infected with some kind of disease bred in the depths of the impenetrable, lethal forest. The 'wilderness', injected into his 'veins', has literally made him ill. After surviving these illnesses, he manages to make the Africans follow him, 'adore' him. Even though he 'hated all this', and 'suffered' too much, he cannot 'get away'. The jungle swallows him up, he disappears for weeks in order to 'forget himself'. He no longer attempts to 'distinguish himself from the masses'. His selfhood is under threat. Annihilation is imminent.

The idea of annihilation and destruction is omnipresent towards the end of the novella. Threat, fear and mental anguish are elements that characterise the last pages of the story even more than previous passages. The brumous atmosphere is getting ever more impenetrable, dense and unbearable. The Conradian 'fleshiness', the disturbing, frightening 'fog' is getting even more opaque. This, too, is projected onto Kurtz:

[142] Conrad, pp. 69-71.

> […] the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.[143]

Kurtz has been confronted with his innermost emotions - the unconscious has been called upon. He knows 'things about himself which he did not know'. He has found out about the darkest, deepest and most vicious elements anchored within his unconscious. Within this deeply unsettling and distressing African heart, memories, traumas, fears and phobias - located within the impenetrable realm of the unconscious - have emerged and changed Kurtz into a self-less, neurotic and physically decaying being that has become part of an indefinable, unspeakable, linguistically untranslatable environment. Marlow is not immune to the dangers either. He also feels physical changes within himself that seem to confine him to the surroundings. 'And I remember I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity'.[144] The beat of the drum is everywhere. The rhythmic, threatening sound of the African instrument creates a very tense ambience. In this respect, it is a linguistic trick that Conrad uses to compensate for the gap between the signifier and the signified. Just like De Quincey uses painting or music, here, Conrad has devised a musical version of his typical 'fog'. The rhythm, like the impenetrable mist, confirms the transactional weight characterising Conrad's writing. In this context, Kurtz is portrayed as an integer part of the heart of darkness:

[143] Ibid., p. 72.
[144] Ibid., p. 81.

> I came upon him, and, if he had not heard me coming, I would have fallen over him too; but he got up in time. He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest.[145]

This description is anything but flattering. Kurtz does not seem to be alive any longer. His ghostly appearance is frightening - as frightening as the fires and the 'murmur of many voices from the forest'.

Kurtz's pain is Conrad's pain. As Thorburn suggests,

> The obstacles to knowing and recreating the world are personal and intimate in part: memory or sight may be faulty, confined by temperament and the limits of one's gifts. But they are also general or universal: what happened or what is will never fully yield to language and the ordering faculties of the mind.
>
> Failure thus becomes Conrad's truest subject, and repeatedly in his best books the failures dramatized in the literal story are mirrored again in the falterings and confessions of inadequacy that rush from the mouths of his narrators'.[146]

This is certainly true for Marlow, but it is also valid in relation to Kurtz. Kurtz's failure to secure a sense of selfhood and meaning also mirrors Conrad's deep distresses in relation to his own self and with regard to his work as an author. Kurtz's self failing to define itself against 'the masses' mirrors Conrad's self-doubt. Thus, Kurtz's initial quest for freedom and material wealth within the African jungle is eventually self-destructive. And just like the wilderness has whispered things to Kurtz, writing the *Heart of*

[145] Ibid., p. 81.
[146] Thorburn, p. 124.

Darkness has also 'whispered to [Conrad] things about himself which he [perhaps] did not know'. A sense of selfhood is never secured. Creating art often reveals this highly distressing fact.

Kurtz, therefore, has to die. As Fordham suggests, the events in *Heart of Darkness* reformulate

> the self and personal identity. To orient my discussion of this vision in which the self is, supposedly, radically reformulated, I make use of Levenson's view that the self in this novella is hazily located within a vision of radical *disorientation* of a kind emblematic of modernism.[147]

Reformulating, undoing the self as a well-defined entity is thus perceived as a typically modernist endeavour. Disorientation and self-destructive tendencies are certainly modernist preoccupations. However, as has been demonstrated, these concerns are rooted in Romantic literature and explored by authors like De Quincey and Wordsworth. Kurtz, therefore, is thus both a Romantic and a modernist figure. However, in essence, Kurtz is more of a De Quinceyan character than Marlow, who seems to have been given a Wordsworthian makeup since he manages to survive the heart of darkness. To some extent, in the aftermath, the traumas of the African jungle have turned him into a more self-assured being with privileged knowledge. A few moments before dying, Kurtz undergoes a moment of sublime, self-revelatory anguish:

> One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear [Kurtz] say a little tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.' The

[147] Fordham, p. 142.

> light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, 'Oh, nonsense!' and stood over him as if transfixed.
>
> Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror - of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath -
>
> 'The horror! The horror!'[148]

The veil has been rent. For the first time, vision does not seem blurred. The fog has disappeared. For Kurtz too, seeing becomes possible. The 'intense and hopeless despair' is linked to a 'supreme moment of complete knowledge'. Here, it seems as if Conrad manages to synthesise both De Quinceyan and Wordsworthian features. The author combines De Quinceyan, (self-) destructive despair with a supreme moment of complete knowledge typical of Wordsworth's writing. However, the moment of complete knowledge is quickly turned into another moment of agonisingly sublime truth, mirrored by Kurtz's outcry 'The horror, the horror!' Marlow never clarifies what the horror is, but Kurtz's recognition must be so distressing that it is literally lethal. As Bohlmann suggests, Kurtz

> had in solitude looked into the Nietzschean 'abyss' of his deformed self - and judged it a place of horror enveloped by a universe of horror […]. [Marlow's] intimations lend themselves to an existential reading

[148] Conrad, p. 86.

> that what Kurtz perceived was the nothingness, the 'hollowness', of his self and the brute world - that, in Camus's words, everything is absurd'.[149]

Kurtz's recognition, the confrontation with his own self, seems to have been liberating but at the same time self-destructive. Kurtz has experienced a truly Romantic moment. In relation to Wordsworth, the revelatory instant is characteristic in as much as it is a truly painful, sublime and self-changing, knowledge-creating flash. On the other hand, it is also truly De Quinceyan since accessing the incommunicable is inevitably self-destructive. After confronting himself with his own nothingness, his self dissolves into nothingness, too. Kurtz is no more.

With *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad manages to develop Romantic concepts within a modernist framework. Translating pain, to him, is a major concern, and with the creation of Marlow and Kurtz, he has given birth to characters that enable him to process his own traumas and anxieties. Whether Conrad felt liberated after writing the story is a different question. Nevertheless, it has given him the opportunity to deal with his own nothingness, which - eventually - proves to be highly creative.

[149] Bohlmann, p. 100.

Conclusion

Translating pain has proved to be a painful experience in itself. If it seems initially liberating and edifying in relation to the self, it is also a highly destructive venture. It has been shown that Conrad's writing is largely influenced by and rooted within the Romantic *Gedankengut* shaped and moulded by authors like Thomas De Quincey and Wordsworth. De Quincey, even before Freud, is able to organise a psychoanalytic system that mirrors the mind and its complex processes resulting in partially liberating yet highly destructive moments. The seat of all evil is located somewhere in the darkest and deepest parts of the unconscious. It absorbs and represses emotions, fears and phobias, and releases them only under certain circumstances in order to destabilise - if not destroy - the self of the sufferer in question. Within this setup, space plays an important part. For De Quincey, places like his cottage, Savannah-la-Mar, or Indostan are highly revelatory in relation to the mind and its unconscious spheres. Similarly, Wordsworth links repressed anxieties and emotions to places like the lake in the stolen boat episode or 'a

blue chasm' in relation to a Wordsworthian 'spot of time' in the mountains. In the same way, Conrad uses space as a metaphor helping to explore the unknown windings of the stream leading towards the *Heart of Darkness* that has to be understood as the centre of the inaccessible - the unconscious. Just as in De Quincey and Wordsworth's writing, space is used to translate the workings of the unconscious mind. Unfortunately, in line with true Romantic ideas, translating pain remains flawed at best. Due to an insurmountable gap between signifier and signified, it is mostly impossible to grasp the essence of the unconscious and the pain itself linguistically. Conrad readily refers to a typically Conradian fog whenever language seems too weak to seize the signified in an appropriate way. This trick can also be observed in De Quincey's writing, be it with the 'translucid atmosphere' of Savannah-la-Mar or the idea of the palimpsest.

Being confronted with one's self is necessarily a traumatic and painful experience that usually culminates in annihilation and self-destruction, even though some personae - like Marlow - manage to escape. Translating pain is therefore generally a dangerous and highly unsettling way of trying to come to terms with human existence and its ephemeral character. '*He whose talk is of oxen*' will not suffer in relation to this quest. The 'chosen son' - the artist whose talk is of the universal, eternal or divine dimension - will suffer universally, eternally and diabolically.

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