

So Far Out
Intertextuality and the Opiate Novel

I'm getting so far out one day I won't come back at all

– William Burroughs, letter to Allen Ginsberg

One: Frames of Reference

Although the heroin novel has become a recognisable form, there is no clear definition of this subgenre. Characteristically it blurs boundaries between autobiography and fiction, and is a narrative of self as being and/or becoming an opiate addict. It is typically written from the first person perspective, and there have been, somewhat problematically, criteria of authenticity equated with the truth of events and perceptions represented. In contrast to the recently popular 'rehab autobiography', it deals rather more with the development of addiction than with recovery. Frequently there is the development of a writerly identity within the framework of an established addiction, the writing of the narrative itself becoming a product and partial justification of the habit. Thus writing, and the version of self it seems to support, is intimately tied up to the trajectory of addiction. The outcome is the justification of self as addict and/or artist rather than a normative, redemptive journey. Susan Zieger characterises 'drug autobiography' as "self-consciously flaunt[ing] its more elite, literary origins, claiming authority over the drugged self's experiences that is not primarily didactic or regulatory but scholarly and aestheticised" (2007: 1533). Crucial to the structure and thus meaning of an autobiographical opiate novel is the narrativising associated with the establishment of addict identity, a provocative stance, and the assertion of addiction being part of, or at least legitimately informing, the creative process. "The concept of addiction is itself inseparable from what anthropologist Pertti Alusuutari calls 'biographical reasoning' (1992: 60). Addiction discourse both reflects and supports the modern notion of the bounded, singular individual who exists over time, and whose experiences and actions can also be understood as having a measure of continuity" (Keane, 2002: 568). Writing which is at least partially autobiographical, with the full range of fictional devices available to it, is clearly well suited to this type of arrangement of narrative towards the outcome of the present, allowing at once for an

ordering of memory in support of identity, and an artistic statement of self, an insertion of that identity into literary culture. Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (1960) and William Burroughs's *Junky* (1953), like their predecessor *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) by Thomas de Quincey, are landmark texts in the development of this deeply personal, revealingly fictionalised, and frequently stylised writer-as-addict mode.

In some ways, this type of text invokes the German *Kunstlerroman*, a version of the *Bildungsroman* concerned with the development of the protagonist as artist. While the *Bildungsroman* typically traces the development of an individual from childhood to adulthood and finding a place in society, the *Kunstlerroman*, conventionally understood as beginning with Goethe's *The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister* (1796), adapts this generic form to trace the development of the individual artist, from initial creative stirrings through to the establishing of a mature artistic voice, and finding a place in the world. As such this form accentuates feelings of alienation and restlessness which are resolved through the protagonist's embracing and expressing their creative self. Often it involves the escape on some level from a stifling context to one where exploration of creative impulses and the learning of art are enabled. The subgenre values inspiration, intuition, the subjective, and the perceived 'difference' of being an artist.

The three main texts discussed in this section are readily brought together by way of shared concerns of expression and representation. Each contributes through the adjustment of formal characteristics which become the conventions of this type of writing. Each is equally bound up in investigating and testing its own concerns and means of expressing them, and representing a shared but subjective experience, as well as manifesting certain contextual boundaries and connections.

No finer introduction to Trocchi's life and work has been written to date than that by his publisher, John Calder:

Although he is still largely ignored by the staid organs of literary reference, as he was in his lifetime by most of the establishment of the day, Alexander Trocchi remains one of the most interesting, if controversial, writers of his time, still much read, and not only in the Scotland of his birth, where he is widely admired by younger writers. He is the British equivalent of the American beats, but the tradition to which he belongs is really more that of the 'damned'

French writers, from Baudelaire and Rimbaud to Celine and Genet. One could almost also mention Cocteau, who was responsible for introducing him to heroin, the cause of his eventual downfall and death. (Calder, 2009: v)

While resident in Paris, Trocchi also edited the literary magazine *Merlin*, which ran for only seven issues between 1952 and 1954, but boasted a staff including Jane Lougee, Richard Seaver, Austryn Wainhouse, Christopher Logue, John Coleman, and Baird Bryant (Battista, 2009: 1). He was involved in the Situationist International and related projects, many of which were evanescent and conceptual. He then turned to the second-hand book trade to maintain his lifelong heroin habit, and died of pneumonia in 1984.

William Burroughs was one of the better known Beat writers who outlived, and outwrote, that initially liberating but perhaps ultimately restrictive label. He is best known for his work after *Junky* and *Queer* which includes a lengthy list of titles, the best known of which is *Naked Lunch* (1959). Burroughs was also a very influential figure in the postmodern music, film and art scenes, and is referenced in a number of popular and subcultural texts. But “Burroughs’s work in the 1950s is significant for its adversariness – [*Junky*] was banned in this country [the USA] and became an underground book – and for its foreshadowing of that explosion of self which characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Through his fictions, we can observe the decades in change; the more the change, the closer the continuity to his racing imagination” (Karl, 1983: 205). Burroughs continued to write until his death in 1997.

Thomas de Quincey was one of the younger Romantic writers. He was far more prolific in prose than in verse, and in addition to *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* wrote a number of essays on various topics, and worked as a critic and journalist. He was a lifelong addict, and frequently in debt as a result, but he remained a prolific, if erratic writer until his death in 1859.

Two: De Quincey's Contrary Confession

Confessions of an English Opium Eater is uneasily a Romantic text. It comes out of the Romantic opium-taking tradition, and purports to value poetry, inspiration, and the leadership of Wordsworth. But the function of opium for de Quincey is not as an aid to inspiration and poetic vision; instead, it is an experience about which he is compelled to write. While the subject of the text is partly a journey into the depths of the author's habit in search of himself, this ambitious meander is consistently and conspicuously set at street level. De Quincey's positioning of his narrator-self and his text oscillates between the Romantic outlook on the lone troubled artist driven out to live amongst the ill-fated but genuine poor, and a more modern one of the author as an anonymous body in a city of others, with a vivid interior life experienced in solitude. Thus his work contributes to the tradition of autobiographical opiate novel not only the possibility of one's own addiction as subject matter, and the provocative notion of creating oneself through that lens, but also the liminal social positioning which becomes essential to the vantage point of authors influenced by him. De Quincey pre-empts what writers after him invoke. The influence of his work is such that "addiction is now the language in which older discourses of temptation, indulgence, temperance and redemption are conducted" (Jay, 2012: 15). Clej suggests that de Quincey might be viewed as "a paradigmatic figure of modernity, even if he was not exactly a modernist...through his confessional writings de Quincey is in many ways responsible for defining the modern self, that is, a post-Romantic form of subjectivity based on transgressive techniques, simulation, and bricolage" (1995: vii). Thus his influence is traceable in terms of formal concerns as well as thematic ones.

Although it is framed as a memoir, and was often read as the most factual account of opium addiction available in the nineteenth century, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* is essentially an innovation in the novel. "De Quincey insisted that his *Confessions* were not to read as an admission of guilt. This was a work of 'self-accusation'" (Plant, 1999: 30). Understanding the text in this way requires a slight shift in paradigm. The necessary question to ask is not what the assorted 'confessions' of the opium eater under

a seemingly descriptive title are – incomplete, selective, clouded by both opium and memory, ambivalent – but rather what *Confessions of an Opium Eater* is – a constructed, framed, edited text, no less writerly for appearing to be straightforward, honest, and factual. It is a work of literature, not a document, because it involves a creative intervention into the factual narrative.

In trying to trace the origins of his opium terrors, de Quincey has to negotiate his own psyche, and in particular the role of memory in shaping his identity. He can not separate his past from his present self, his writing from his state of mind, his opium reveries from his anxieties and nightmares. This seems peculiar to both the working memory and the influence of opium, suggesting the extent to which the two are intertwined. Although he claims that his book is about the drug, “not the opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale” (7) it is evidently about himself-and-opium. Jay argues that “as its title subtly indicates, the true subject of his book is not the drug but the opium eater himself” (Jay, 2011: 81). The ensuing rapture and turmoil started by this union are what de Quincey attempts to unravel, and they have much to do with the shadow-play of identity and agency. In certain moments he gets close to what he is looking for – the intersection between himself and the high, and a way to write about it, to dig back for lost connections, to make them apparent and logical by creating a narrative.

In doing so, he is mirroring the experience of addiction, which Szabados and Probert, editors of a collection of essays dealing with writing and addiction collectively titled *Writing Addiction* (2004), describe as a cyclically renewed effort to find the origins of the habit, to rediscover the first high, and also to get through it, past it, beyond it: “Addicts in every high are performing their addictiveness as if to get to the bottom of it, both in the sense of understanding it, and also in the sense of going to the very bottom – so far down that one cannot seem to go further” (Szabados & Probert, 2004: 8). But despite this narrativising structure, the text remains “a fractured and hallucinatory narrative” of which “[de Quincey’s] addiction to opium [is] the central fact” (Jay, 2011: 81).

From a carefully constructed retrospective vantage point, which seems a lonely, melancholic space, de Quincey asks himself: “What was it that did in reality make me an opium eater? That affection which finally drove me into the *habitual* use of opium, what was it? Pain was it? No, but misery. Casual overcasting of sunshine was it? No, but blank desolation. Gloom was it that might have departed? No, but settled and abiding darkness” (23). Coming from a bleak outlook and “moving regressively from the end to the beginning” (23), writing back to find the source of his addiction, de Quincey sets his questions ‘backwards’ too – “pain was it” as opposed to ‘was it pain’, for instance. He is so invested in these responses, because they explain and justify so much of his present situation, that he presents them as foregone conclusions. The answers are cryptic and immersed in the dark imagery of the questions. “Misery” is too closely related to “pain” to be an opposite, thus the “no” at the beginning of the statement is of questionable value. The “overcasting” of the next question, in itself a metaphor, overshadows the response, “blank desolation”. De Quincey is writing from an opium-related depression, and as this sequence shows, his current view informs his retrospection. Opium has perhaps transformed it, but later on he suggests that the imagery of his terrors is derived from the imagery of his earlier life.

While investigating why he is trapped in his addiction, de Quincey shows that he is likewise trapped in his psyche. The “settled and abiding darkness” (23) is at the heart of both matters, to the point that while writing in order to decipher this pattern, his language is wholly informed by this “abiding darkness”. Mike Jay’s observation about de Quincey’s career in general is apt in relation to this dynamic in *Confessions* – “opium was his inescapable subject, and his great summation shimmered before his eyes, but its threads became ever harder to gather” (2010: 4). Like addiction, once begun, the text is inescapable. He can finish it but he cannot clear away what remains unresolved. As Bewell suggests in ‘Confessing Addiction,’ “de Quincey sees the self as a palimpsest in which no writing – either of will or desire – is ever lost, in which opium discloses the many layers that underlie the construction of a being” (2004: 81).

De Quincey's project of going back to find the origin of the addiction is perhaps an issue of dismantling himself as a 'being' to see what the bottom layers may reveal. But "for de Quincey, opium does not enfranchise; it gives knowledge of the contradictory, and often tragic depths of one's being. There is no peace at the end of the opium-eater's journey" (Bewell, 2004: 81), which is the trajectory of the narrative – "only guilt and pain raised to an apocalyptic pitch. It does not lead to a place beyond language" (ibid). Perhaps this realisation surpasses the knowledge he is searching for in the text, a realisation only possible through seeing that the textual experience cannot go "beyond language". On the other hand, perhaps there is a sense of encompassing some of the experience in that the various dream states he is so concerned with "reached their completion only when he wrote them into literature" (Hayter, 1968: 103), but this captures and transforms only the dream with emphasis on imagery, rather than its connection to memory and self.

De Quincey seeks to unravel the structures of and relationships between a number of elements: his present self, his younger self, the laudanum addiction, the high (made up of 'pleasures' or reveries, dreams or dreamlike terrors, and an in between empty or soothed state, what Abrams terms a "sanctuary" (Abrams, 1962: 4) in which "misereries" are 'tranquilised' (212)), and the text. De Quincey theorises the situation in the section titled 'The Pains of Opium':

Thus far the *nexus*, as between cause and effect, is sufficiently established between the one experience and the other – between the boyish records and the records of mature life. There needed no other *nexus* to justify the unity of the entire Confessions. But, though not wanted, nevertheless it happens that there *is* another and a distinct link connecting the two separate records. (213)

De Quincey continues to discuss *Confessions* from a distance, commenting on the central concern, the "*nexus*" – the relationship between memory and identity – and, more obliquely, on the relationship between these and opium and writing, in other words, the whole 'cast' of elements entangled in the text. Next he discusses his opium dreams:

But naturally these dreams, and this dream-scenery, drew their outlines and materials – their great lights and shadows – from those profound revelations which had been ploughed so deeply into the heart, from those *encaustic* records which in the mighty furnaces of London life had been burnt into the undying memory by the fierce action of misery. And thus in reality the early experiences of erring childhood not only led to the secondary experiences of opium, but also determined the particular form and pressure of the chief phenomena in those secondary experiences. (213)

He argues that the content of his visions was derived from his experiences as a young runaway in London, and in particular the “misery” he felt during that time. In making this point, he also indicates how the ‘unravelling’ project of the text is complicated: opium is a solace for his depression, which he links back to this part of his youth, yet his visions are shaped by these memories and experiences, making them an inescapable part of the opium experience. Milligan notes that “the relationship between these entities – the experiences of youth, the dreaming mind and opium is the organizing framework” (Milligan, 2003: xviii) of *Confessions*. In other words, the culminating point of terminal addiction incorporates the elements feeding into it, imposing order onto experience even as it permanently disorders the writer’s personal universe. “It is the unpredictable, even chaotic interaction between the three factors that charts the path” (ibid) of the text, and it is the compression of this unpredictability into a fairly linear, retrospective narrative which provokes de Quincey to step back and add commentary on the nature and concerns of his writing.

De Quincey describes his opium-taking habits, and then his rapidly escalating use of the drug. In doing so he allows the rituals and processes of drug use to inflect his narrative voice. Only once these have been entrenched does he begin to tell of the effects of the drug in detail. His first experience of opium is imbued with the significance which memory allows events ordinary at the time: “I feel a mystic importance attached to the minutest circumstances with the place, and the time, and the man (if man he was), that first laid open to me the paradise of opium-eaters” (178). So enraptured is he that the man in question, the apothecary who first sold him laudanum, becomes a mystical being:

When I asked for the tincture of opium, he gave it to me as any other man might do, and, furthermore, out of my shilling returned to me what seemed to be a real copper halfpence, taken out of a real wooden drawer. Nevertheless, and not withstanding all such indications of humanity, he has ever since figured in my mind as a beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself. (179)

When, on returning to the same place some time later, de Quincey finds that the chemist is no longer on Oxford street, he concludes: “I believe him to have evanesced” (179). It is tempting to compare de Quincey’s interaction with the druggist to that of modern users with modern dealers, and perhaps there is something of the “illicit buzz of the modern

drug deal” (Jay, 2010: 2) to the passage. But Jay maintains that “to his contemporaries...it would have read as bathetic parody of his own Romantic pretensions, a taste of... perverse and facetious wit” (ibid). The style rather than the sentiment resonates with later texts though, and so a comparison on such grounds is more useful. For instance, in *Junky* Burroughs uses similar hyperbole to parody the complex web of commerce on the heroin scene: “It was time for him to pay off. And pay off for the rest of his life, waiting on street corners and in cafeterias for the connection, the mediator between man and junk. Gains was a mere parish priest in the hierarchy of junk. He would speak of the higher-ups in tones of sepulchral awe” (35). Bill Gains is a dealer whose name is at odds with his constant ‘paying off’ and suggests how fully he is trapped in his role as intermediary, paying as he gains, using as he sells, losing as he profits. He is fully caught up in the modern American capitalism of the drug trade, which originates partly in the unrestricted availability of laudanum in de Quincey’s Britain.

It is worth noting that aside from one occasion in the text de Quincey does not actually eat opium, but drinks it as laudanum, a tincture of opium dissolved in spirits, legal and commonly available at the time, and widely used, though typically not as often, nor in the quantities ‘confessed to’ by de Quincey. De Quincey thinks of laudanum as being purely an opiate; that is, he takes it for the opium, and is not concerned about its alcohol content. One of his initial descriptions of the opium high is based on a comparison between opium and alcohol:

It is not in the quantity of its effects merely, but in the quality, that it differs altogether. The pleasure given by wine is always rapidly mounting, and tending to a crisis, after which as rapidly it declines; that from opium, when once generated, is stationary for eight or ten hours: the first, to borrow a technical distinction from medicine, is a case of acute, the second of chronic, pleasure; the one is a flickering flame, the other a steady and equable glow. But the main distinction lies in this – that whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary...introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony. (181-182)

He suggests that the two experiences are different in terms of ‘structure’, or the trajectory of experience upon ingestion – the alcohol high moves towards a climax, which tends to take the form of a “crisis”, while the opium high is consistent and sustained. In some ways, both are reflected in the structure and trajectory of the text itself, in that de Quincey

seeks a state of satiation, plenitude, in his addiction, and in his writing of it, but it is interrupted by crises, cravings and lacunae of fear and remorse. De Quincey uses the terms “acute” and “chronic”; perhaps the two might differently be termed as a high of desire, and one of plenitude. In the former, more and more alcohol is ingested in an attempt to satisfy, to reach a state always sought after until it has been overshoot and missed; in the latter, after a single measured dose craving, desire, and need are removed. The opium high negates desire, it is a state of equilibrium, of not wanting and yet of emptiness rather than fullness, a non-state. It is described as “a steady and equable glow”, a plateau of being which provides “the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony” to his mind, a distinct calm and clarity, in sharp contrast to the anxiety he describes later.

Towards the end of the text, when he is consuming enough laudanum to equal “320 grains a day in 1816, 480 grains in 1817-18 and [again] in 1843” (Berridge, 2010: 2) according to *Confessions* and other sources, “it must have [also] amounted to [drinking] a bottle or two of strong spirits a day” (Jay, 2010: 4). De Quincey was unknowingly an alcoholic as well as an opium addict. Although he was aware of the alcohol content of laudanum, he denied his alcoholism, and identified himself solely as an opium addict. The glowing high he writes of, though reliant on opium, must have, to some degree, been coloured by alcohol. Relatively soon after his addiction becomes established, he notes that he prefers laudanum to solid opium because “the solid opium began to require a length of time, continually increasing, to expand its effects sensibly, oftentimes not less than four hours; whereas the tincture manifested its presence instantaneously” (220). De Quincey seems in this statement to be expressing a yearning for a faster, sharper, more direct hit of drug upon the body and its senses – later accomplished through the use of the hypodermic needle.

At the beginning of his opium use, de Quincey, residing in London, “used to fix beforehand how often within a given time, when, and with what accessory circumstances of festal joy, [he] would commit a debauch of opium” (188), mostly enjoying his dose at the opera, or when he inhabited the margins of working-class bars. The language here is interesting; “fix” in this usage means to determine, but its relationship to the later use of

‘fix’ as in to inject is unmissable, if incidental. De Quincey reveals the extent of planning, and with it, anticipation, which fashioned his drug use; this provides a striking contrast to the way in which the drug takes over his routine and rationality. ‘Committing’ “a debauch of opium” takes place as an indulgence in a structured space, a planned event. The term is suggestive of a secret pleasure, a temporary wildness permitted the self, a brief, measured ‘debauch’, and not yet a need, a fear, a sin, a temporary measure taken with the next dose always already in sight. At this stage his use is recreational. But while his relationship with opium is straightforward enough, his persona, and the space he is coming to inhabit, is already becoming duplicit, and marginal. “On his Saturday night debauches in Covent Garden, listening to the opera from a five-shilling gallery perch and eavesdropping on the poor in backstreet taverns, he was in the crowd but not of it, both aristocrat and outcast” (Jay, 2010: 3). Hayter notes that “this practice...of seeking crowds of people among whom to experience the effects of the drug” is “most unusual for opium takers” (1968: 226), but it seems that de Quincey does so to crystallize his sense of alienation in society and isolation in opium, going into the crowd to better notice his difference from it. This resonates with Baudelaire’s *flâneur* persona, a figure constructed around the pleasure of observation, and the particular urban skill of seeming to be within a crowd while maintaining a sense of distance from it.

A shift takes place when de Quincey increases his usage from once every three weeks to every week. The change is essentially one of self-perception. Describing his whereabouts and state of mind, he notes: “And what am I doing amongst the mountains? Taking opium” (196). It is now his main occupation, and is becoming his identity. Having crossed some sort of line within himself, or within his relationship with opium, he revels wickedly in this new space. He claims to be perfectly healthy and undamaged for all the opium he has taken thus far, “though in quantity such that I might well have bathed and swum in it” (197). De Quincey is enjoying his laudanum greatly; he is enjoying having become an opium eater – his whole life is now “a debauch of opium” (188), and he likes teasing the reader with these facts, parading them in front of his assumed audience. His rapidly increasing addiction becomes apparent not just when he begins using opium daily,

but because of his perspective on the increased use: “At the time I began to take opium daily, I could not have done otherwise” (199).

From this decisive moment, the tone of the text takes a downward turn. De Quincey’s outlook becomes bleaker, his humour darker and increasingly self-deprecating. Accompanying this change is an increased self-absorption. There is also a lack of interest in the outside world, and the beginning of an animosity towards others. Effectively, at this point de Quincey’s writing is, in content though not in form, completely and intentionally out of control. At the same time, de Quincey asserts his identity as not just an opium user, but an addict:

From this date [1813] the reader is to consider me as a regular and confirmed opium-eater, of whom to ask whether on any particular day he had or had not taken opium, would be to ask whether his lungs had performed respiration, or the heart fulfilled its functions. Now, then, reader, you understand what I am. (200)

It is a defiant self-assertion. Only once this is accepted by the reader and by de Quincey himself, can the terrors and pleasures be written about and understood. Although descriptions of the opium experience are not limited to any particular section of the text, they, especially the negative episodes, tend to gather and ‘spiral’ towards the loss of control in the later parts of the text. The writing of the ‘dark’ side of de Quincey’s opium visions and reveries hinges on clarifying, articulating, understanding his identity as an addict. Interspersed throughout the text, they are tempered by other strands of narrative, but towards the end “these latter confessions” (234) gather ominously, almost overwhelmingly, giving the most evocative sense of de Quincey’s state of mind found in *Confessions*, an account of “the shadowy terrors that settled and brooded over my whole waking life” (234). They are far less cluttered with fact and detail, and far more direct, if at times unclear, than the other sections where the author is at pains to explain himself. Stylistically, these sections move away from the bulk of the text into less clear but more evocative mode of writing.

These “shadowy terrors” (234) are first manifest in his dreams, and initially de Quincey likens the phenomenon to a childhood phenomenon – a mingling of nightmare, imaginative fear of the dark, and an unsure sense of control in the dark spaces between

these. He quotes a child's description: "I can tell them to go, and they go; but sometimes they come when I don't tell them to come" (234). Interestingly, in his prologue to *Junky*, Burroughs also places emphasis on formative childhood experiences, including a tendency towards vivid nightmares: "My earliest memories are colored by a fear of nightmares. I was afraid to be alone, and afraid of the dark, and afraid to go to sleep because of dreams where a supernatural horror seemed always on the point of taking shape" (xxxvii). De Quincey struggles for a language to describe his visions, noting repeatedly that they, or in this case the melancholy and anxiety which accompany them, "cannot be approached by words" (236). He jumps between the accurate and the metaphorical: "Whatsoever things I did but think of in the darkness, immediately shaped themselves into phantoms for the eye; and, by a process apparently no less inevitable, when thus once traced in faint and visionary colours, like writings in sympathetic ink, they were drawn out by the fierce chemistry of my dreams, into insufferable splendour that fretted my heart" (235).

De Quincey is seemingly the master of his writing. He has agency and control, but in the experiences he relates, he is little able to control what his mind conjures up. Thus a split occurs, which the text battles to encompass: he thinks of "whatsoever things", but they "shaped themselves" "for the eye" (235) – for him or 'at him', for him to see – they return to him in their new form. The same process repeats itself in the second part of the sentence. Once he has seen them, once he has visualised these thoughts, "they were drawn out" – he loses control, his dreams are governed by their own "fierce chemistry", and present his thoughts back to him "in a splendour which fretted my heart" (235).

Despite the "incommunicable" (235) nature of his solitary experience, he continues striving to write of it. Perhaps, if he has control of the retelling, but not of the original experience, then the representation of his visions can afford him some power over them. In this sense, the writing is intended to make known, and thus subdue. However, the representation of something so vast, so subjective, as unusual as a hallucination and its accompanying emotions is inordinately difficult. It becomes a struggle between the opium vision and de Quincey, whose sole armament is the fact that he, not the opium, is

writing the narrative, describing the experience. He tries to contain his fear by noting exactly what it is and is not, what it does and does not do. A similar notion is explored by Burroughs in his idea of a 'word virus': "As soon as something is written, it loses the power of surprise...So I achieved some immunity from further perilous ventures along these lines by writing my experience down" (Burroughs, 1985: 12). If it can be described, Burroughs seems to suggest, perhaps the anxiety can be contained.

With a similar motive, de Quincey notes his observations in order to mark the borders of his fear with language. It makes him see his dark, troubling thoughts as visions; it muddles his dream and waking states. It makes him depressed and fearful. It affects his sense of time and space, which further threatens his grasp of reality. Through accurate, simple language he tries to control the vast strangeness of the experience: "Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable and self-repeating infinity. This disturbed me very much less than the vast expansion of time" (236) which causes him to have "feelings representative of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience" (236). But he is evasive, relying on terms like "unutterable" and "beyond the limits", and so distance between himself and the reader, between his mind and his writing, is too great to traverse in this way.

De Quincey's positive experiences with opium are left implicit to a large extent; they are far less overtly described than the terrors. The pleasures seem self-evident to de Quincey. Within the text, euphoric opium intoxication, with or without reveries, is his normal state; his life before opium, and the paranoid nightmares which come in the latter stages of his addiction, are a deviation from this state, and thus are explored in far more detail. "Dreams of horror after long consumption of opium, rather than the pleasures experienced at the inception of the habit, stimulated most his desire for literary expression" (1962: 7) writes M.H. Abrams in *The Milk of Paradise*, one of the earliest studies of the influences of opium on literary writing.

Writing the high experience is difficult, perhaps more so than writing withdrawals. There is nothing to latch on to, hence de Quincey's near "failure to give a detailed picture of his

visions of pleasure” (Abrams, 1962: 15). Other than the wanderings of the mind, if they can be remembered afterwards, there is very little discernable or translatable material. The visions come with high doses, and later on. Initially, there is just the ineffable high, to which everything else soon becomes a more or less unpleasant contrast which, because it is a contrast, is easier to define and write about.

Nevertheless, de Quincey does in a few sections write something concrete on the ‘Pleasures of Opium’. He writes of his first experience that “I took it; and in an hour, what a revulsion! What a resurrection, from its lowest depths of the inner spirit! what an apocalypse of the world within me” (180). From the first, there is a sense of revisiting some aspect of himself, a release of something already there. ‘Revulsion’ here is used to mean a sudden turn around, a complete reversal, not necessarily a negative one; the ‘resurrection’ not so much of the narrator, but of something within him, something which was in the “lowest depths of inner spirit”. He has found something at the core of himself (perhaps linked to, but more than just the body’s capacity for addiction). The experience is not only euphoric, it is also fundamental, a reawakening of the depths of himself. It is also deeply internal; whatever happens on a grand scale is limited to “the world within me”, a dynamic which slips out of control at the end of the text, when “the world” and “within me” become conflated.

In many drug texts, ineffability is at the core of the interplay between drug and text. It is a powerful, meaningful non-representation accentuating the paradoxical dynamic of seeking out an experience beyond the usual, and thus beyond the scope of referential language, and seeking to represent this in writing. The unspeakable comes to be understood as significant because it cannot be described. It becomes a marker of authenticity, even though the actual writing project is purportedly to produce an authentic account of the experience. Potentially, the ineffability of a particular experience allows for the possibility of new modes of representation, a new ‘textual mapping’. Yet part of situating a drug text as authentic involves its relation to other, older texts. Thus the code of reaching and sanctifying ineffability is reproduced.

This perverse alliance, a dishonour amongst thieves, forms a link between opiated writers that has extended across time and space...all of them chasing their own and each other’s dragons

too, as though they were compelled to repeat the same compulsion to repeat, making the journey over and again through scenes already played out in advance. Writing on drugs has evolved and mutated like a contagion, each writer reading the other's work, repeating their adventures, and also their mistakes, endlessly rehearsing the same refrain. (Plant, 1999: 135)

Ann Marlowe addresses this layering of textual addiction in *How to Stop Time* (1999), writing that “a novel about heroin is weighed down by the inherent consistency of everyone's experience of the drug in a way that a novel about love or revenge is not; those experiences are universal but not identical. Few writers are skilled enough to overcome this obstacle. So heroin demands nonfiction, memoir, truth-telling, but even here the trick is to outwit the drug, to introduce what the drug will not: surprise” (Marlowe in Morrison, 2005: 972). An opiate novel, Morrison suggests, is “a failed quest for transcendence that is scarred by consumption, consumerism, disembodiment, and deadening repetition” (2005: 972).

De Quincey writes that “the minutest incidents of childhood” (236) feature in his visions, not as memories but as dreams, things which he could not readily recall, but which he ‘recognises’ when presented with them. He fares better describing this process, then begins to ramble, seeking universal and anecdotal points of reference. He describes reveries of cityscapes and panoramas of peaceful lakes, which over successive episodes become restless oceans. Within these, he starts to see disturbing images:

Now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal itself; the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; faces imploring, wrathful, despairing; faces that surged upwards by thousands, by myriads, by generations: infinite was my agitation; my mind tossed, as it seemed, upon the billowy ocean, and weltered upon the weltering waves. (242)

He writes himself into the scene, and his mind ‘tosses’ and ‘welters’ on this macabre ocean. There is also what Abrams terms an “omnipresent sensation of distorted time” (Abrams, 1962: 10) in “thousands” becoming “generations”, a quantity becoming a time, an era. The vision is immediate – “now it was” but also infinite in that the faces do not cease, they are endless, timeless, replicating. His “agitation” is “infinite” in scope as well as in duration.

His visions become more elaborate and increasingly paranoid – he is “stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at” (243) by animals, scorned, laughed at, persecuted, hated, “sacrificed” (243) and buried, judged guilty of impossible sins by people and gods. The people appearing in his dreams, frequently oriental tableaux and scenes of imagined ancient life, are cruel, foreign, and repulsive, and his torment is that he can not dispel them. But because they are so laden with orientalist imagery and common assumptions and prejudices, these scenes are difficult to read as de Quincey’s ‘own’. It is as though he is borrowing a cultural-symbolic shorthand, coding his terrors in stock images. Although he is aware of “the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*” and of the “counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyse” (243) even with this insight he is unable to lessen the power of these visions or cease his terrified ramblings. The ‘universal’ terror of the ‘other’ is perhaps employed to articulate his subjective horror of the particular ‘other’ of his mind, but in doing so it overrides what it was meant to illustrate, and the description becomes too stylized to be effective.

The last vision is dated “June 1819”, and in describing it de Quincey allows his narrative to disintegrate into abstract considerations and disconnected ideas. There is a vague sense of impending catastrophe, an unrooted anxiety to this section:

The morning was come of a mighty day – a day of crisis and of ultimate hope for human nature, then suffering mysterious eclipse, and labouring in some dread extremity. Somewhere, but I knew not where – somehow, but I knew not how – by some beings, but I knew not by whom – a battle, a strife, an agony, was travelling through all its stages – was evolving itself, like the catastrophe of some mighty drama, with which my sympathy was the more insupportable, from deepening confusion as to its local scene, its cause, its nature, and its undecipherable issue. (247)

This passage is permeated by an unrooted, vague anxiety, a sense of impending catastrophe which he cannot identify. Heading towards a cumulative crisis, he attempts to exteriorize it, to attach it to “human nature” in general, some imparticular war or revolution. Having become isolated within his anxiety and depression, having been living for some time in a peculiarly half-real world, he attempts, in his moment of crisis, to connect with the social, human world, but cannot. His externalised sense of impending doom, unfounded dread, unsuccessfully projected onto a “humanity” he is completely alienated from, approaches psychosis. His sense of the real and the imagined or

hallucinated (besides his visions, there is a sense of imposed, opium-induced perceptions, ideas, moods, which are not visual hallucinations) has disintegrated, as has the boundary between interior and outer, 'real' worlds. Subjective anxiety and matters of "human nature" are indistinguishable, and neither can be ascertained nor evaluated by definite, discernable criteria. His paranoia has changed from ideas of persecution to a sense of overwhelming, 'universal' dread, enveloping not only him but his sense of the rest of the world as well, leaving him no refuge and no perspective.

De Quincey unravels at this juncture in the text, and his language becomes increasingly vague, but remains abstractedly coherent, clinging to universals and broad terms. To him something as vague as 'human nature' or 'humanity' is linked to his own personal sense of breakdown. 'Everything' is an intricate, interconnected maze, like the dream city of his vision. Within this paranoid web, having obscured the balance of subjective and real, imagined and actual perceptions, he has lost the distinction between himself and what is exterior to himself.

The succession of frightening and depressing visions, occurring both in sleep and when awake, leads to the breakdown. Despite this, de Quincey does not renounce opium, or deny his enjoyment of it. The crisis is both physical and psychological, and the writing around it is more coherent than that of the later visions, perhaps because there is no struggle with articulating the private, in that the distinction has been lost, so the writing is somewhat detached, unemotive, in contrast to the subject matter, but not directly in conflict with it. The resolution it precipitates is the attempt to stop his opium use, at least temporarily. He describes it as follows:

I had become awestruck at the approach of sleep, under the condition of visions so afflicting, and so intensely life-like as those which persecuted my phantom-haunted brain. More and more also I felt violent palpitations in some internal region, such as are commonly, but erroneously, called palpitations of the heart – being, I suppose, referable exclusively to derangements of the stomach. These were evidently increasing rapidly in frequency and in strength. Naturally, therefore, on considering how important my life had become to others besides myself, I became alarmed and paused seasonably; but with a difficulty that is past all description. (248)

In the preface, de Quincey sums up his reason for desiring opium and the state of addiction that comes with it despite the negative experiences. He maintains that the attraction is “the power of opium – not over bodily disease and pain, but over the grander and more shadowy world of dreams” (10). This is paradoxical, in that the opium launches him so deep into the “shadowy world of dreams” that he fears for his sanity and dreads sleep. Yet the pages devoted to trying to articulate his dark visions do not prevent him from making this statement. This comes back to his original notion, that the dreams are manifestations of earlier experiences lodged in his subconscious, which the opium simply draws out and transforms into imagery. If it is not simply a manifestation of the contradictory convictions of an addict, the inexplicability of this statement indicates more about the benefits of opium as he perceives them to be, than the vague sketchings of the inexpressible ‘pleasures’ he repeatedly claims it gave him. Jay suggests that “it was integral to his narrative that [the pains] were inseparable from the pleasures” (2010: 4), perhaps in the sense of maintaining authenticity, in that to de Quincey, the two could never be divorced.

If *Confessions* fits uneasily into its original literary context, it holds “a prominent position in the development of modern culture” (Milligan, 2003: xiv) and belongs more comfortably at the beginning of the traditions which subsequently absorbed it. Both Trocchi and Burroughs firmly indicate *Confessions* as having a “formative role in so-called drug culture” (ibid), and, more so, the literature of that culture. De Quincey’s work is instrumental to the formation of a genre, not just as a “moral template for the public presentation of drug use” that “continues to proliferate in modern-day tabloid ‘My Drug Hell’ confessionals” (Jay, 2011, 81) but in texts that personally, not moralistically, continue to weigh up the ‘pleasures’ against the ‘pains’ of opiates, and for the structures of representation of those considerations. “This morality play can also be seen as a literary device, another twist in de Quincey’s artful self-dramatization” (ibid, 82). It is a template of such self-dramatization, of the discovery of self-on-drugs through text. “De Quincey’s literary output, which is both a symptom and an effect of his addictions to opium and to writing, plays an important [and] mostly unacknowledged role in the development of modern and modernist subjectivity” (Clej, 1995: v). Such continuities

reflect on the significance of de Quincey's work as unabashed dwelling on the drug experience, relentless attempts at knowing and writing the self, and the ways in which this can be done.

Three: Trocchi's Anti-Novel

The subcultural reputation of *Cain's Book* tends to overshadow its substance. This is compounded by the fact that so much of its worth lies in its style and stance, in addition to its content. Basically, it is a plotless, revolving account of the author's time spent living and working on an industrial scow in New York harbour. It is told in the first person, moving between past and present tense. By implication, it is sometimes being written by the author's alter ego narrator, Joe Necchi. It dwells on the musings and deliberations he has concerning his liminal presence in relation to the city and forays into it in search of people and drugs, his daily routine, memories, his writing, and his heroin use, all of which combined come to take on an insular unity.

Beat biographer James Campbell suggests that "the ingenuity of *Cain's Book*, the tease that draws you into it again and again, is that it questions its own processes at every turn, consciously undermining its own validity as a 'novel', yet finally existing freely as a work of art" (1992: 461). The essence of the text is daring boundaries of being. It is explicit, illegal, simultaneously brazen and furtive. "Trocchi has dealt with the tough subject of drugs and the junkie life with rare truth and candor" to the extent that he is aware and willing to prove that "he is 'the loneliest man in the world'" (Seaver, 1992: xv). Perhaps the provocation of the text lies in the combination of all these elements: it is the 'stance' Trocchi takes in the text, the "posture" or "original attitude", of which he notes, "to get at its structure one must temporarily get outside of it. Drugs provide an alternative attitude" (236).

The hero, vicar of the Self in the new fiction, serves to mediate the contradictions of culture. His dominant aspect is that of the old rebel-victim. He is an actor but also a sufferer. Almost always, he is an outsider, a demonic or sacrificial figure, anarchic, grotesque, innocent or clownish, wavering still between martyrdom and frenzied self-affirmation. Thus, the rebel-victim incarnates the eternal dialectic of the primary Yes and the everlasting No; and his function is to create those values whose absence in culture is the cause of his predicament and ours. His morality is largely existential, defined by his actions and even more by his passions,

a self-made morality, full of ironies and ambiguities. The will of the hero, however, is always in some sense redemptive; he differs from the mythic scapegoat only in his allegiance to the forms of art. (Hassan, 1973: 73)

Hassan is writing here of work by Saul Bellow, perhaps Norman Mailer; of Philip Roth's *Rabbit* (1960), of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959). But figures like Joe Necchi and to some extent Burroughs's William Lee encroach on this space, not so much contemporary to their time as the *now* of it, not so much a-canonical as anti-canonical, and fit the description on another level. "The fictional hero", Hassan continues, "is an outsider because the very conditions of life, of his own consciousness, require estrangement. The forms of estrangement, however, evolve curiously in the postwar years" (Hassan, 1973: 77). "Another attitude begins to emerge from Beat literature: more hardened or dangerous, familiar with crime, drugs, perversion acquainted with nihilism in the bone, the night of the Hipster" (ibid: 79).

Neither the pseudonym of the autobiographical narrator nor the factuality of the text suggest a concern for discretion or artifice, but terms like 'autobiography' or 'memoir' do not capture the creative intervention the text's subject matter is subjected to. Trocchi is so negligent of reproach that criticism on such grounds does not feature in any meaningful way. But in terms of generic concerns, it is "confessional" (Campbell, 1992: 463). Yet in both theme and style, it is the author's 'stance' – self-absorbed, self-sufficient, self-destructive, melancholy, bold, and "as harsh and unrelenting about himself as he is about the bourgeois society he detests" (Seaver, 1992: xvi), which holds the text together. Trocchi, Campbell notes, "took full advantage of university before opposing it" (1992: 460) as did Burroughs; de Quincey simply took it for granted before running away from it. "[Trocchi] breathed out phrases like 'the Aristotelian impulse to classify' as casually as blowing smoke-rings" (ibid).

There is a strong sense of body politics, of the body as a site of contention, tied into the confrontational aspect of the text. Taking drugs, ingesting a forbidden substance, doing to one's own body what is not allowed is defiant, and raises issues of identity, autonomy,

and the personal and social self. Jacques Derrida notes, with reference to issues of drugs and the experience of the 'real' or 'artificial', and how these distinctions are perceived/understood in terms of culture, that

At stake here is nothing less than the self, consciousness, reason, freedom, the responsible subject, alienation, one's own body or the foreign body, sexual difference, the unconscious, repression or suppression, the different 'parts' of the body, injection, introjection, incorporation (oral or not), the relationship to death (mourning and interiorization), idealization, sublimation, the real and the law. (Derrida, 1994: 243)

The heroin dependence represented by Trocchi functions as an antisocial shorthand, bringing to the fore, with each instance of ingestion, all the associated questions and statements of self Derrida identifies in the discourse of drugs. Writing is also in a position to complicate boundaries of public and private, and deals with many of these concerns. But rather than being a matter of ingestion, it is a matter of production, of something of the self released, produced. There is also the notion of desiring "the firm and fixed identity of a thing or body. To become body, the addict ingests the chemical substance to achieve relief" (Szabados & Probert, 2004: 5), although in doing so he ingests something more, at least in his own cosmology, and in broader drug-culture discourse. He ingests an experience, an aspect of myth and culture, and a part of himself he is seeking, even if that is just a reinforcement of his sense of self created by recurrent use. "It was not that there was anything ominous in the thought of turning on; it was, vaguely expressed, a feeling into the possibility of profound transition the drug represented, the transition in space, in time, in consciousness" (69). In the same way, what the author creates, or manufactures, is not just 'text' but a version of himself inserted into literary history. "The author uses the public language to forge through writing an idiosyncratic private vocabulary, thereby becoming a body of text" (5). Through Joe Necchi, who is in a sense Trocchi's "idiosyncratic private" word for himself, Trocchi does exactly this. He observes that "I find myself cultivating a certain crudity of expression, judging it to be essential to meaning, in a slick age vital to the efficacy of language (71). To become the body, the writing must be profane, precise, the language an anchor in the 'real'. He becomes his text which deals not only with his drug experiences and his identity explicitly, it also mirrors these, becomes them. "If I write: it is important to keep writing, it is to keep me writing. It is as though I find myself on a new planet, without a map, and having everything to learn. I have unlearned. I have become a stranger" (115).

At the same time the textual self, and to some extent, especially in Burroughs's junk cosmology, the addicted written body is a shade, a vehicle. It is the body of addiction, the self held together by text. Writing keeps Trocchi going, keeps him writing, just as heroin keeps him going, and keeps him addicted. Writing is also an experience of defamiliarisation and representation, a venture to "a new planet" where everything is strange and must be learned, must be made, created. It is repeatedly a new journey from 'strangeness' to self – from alienation to integration, fragmentation to wholeness.

Szabados and Probert provide more questions:

What is the relationship between the desire for intoxication or euphoria and the compulsions of addiction? Is there a sense in which writing provides similar highs and compulsions? Are writing and substance addiction similar transgressive behaviours? Could it be that both writing and addiction are ways of losing control, or perhaps of losing controls? (Szabados & Probert, 2004: 1)

That Necchi is already an outsider in his context is made apparent in the first pages of the text. He describes how he needs to "be careful" (9) of having his drug use discovered because "two of the workmen in wide blue dungarees and wearing baseball caps were still hanging about. They were inquisitive. They had heard the noise of the typewriter during the afternoon and that was sufficient to arouse their curiosity. It's not usual for a scow captain to carry a typewriter" (10). In this statement Trocchi is aware of arousing suspicion because he is a writer, not because he is an addict, although he recognises that the one might draw attention to the other. To him, his identity as writer is already socially problematic in the context he has sought out for himself, the drug user identity is an addition to that problematic identity. The number of 'they's in this fragment inscribes an 'us-them' split, but there is no invitation to 'usness'. Trocchi is willfully on his own in the dichotomy. At least socially, writing and injecting are equally 'different' behaviours to him here. But here is where he chooses to do both, suggesting that the constant counterpoint is part of the experience.

Describing the ritual of fixing, Necchi states that "all this is not for nothing; it is born of a respect for the whole chemistry of alienation" (33). Heroin, not the high but the entire

practice of using, is a manifestation of that 'respect', an expression of the feeling of alienation. The drug becomes a talismanic substance which releases, strengthens and substantiates his sense of alienation. Once high, "even in the face of the enemy, a man can accept" (34). The high space is also a space of safety, comfort, a space where the identity is briefly 'whole', integrated. At all other times, and especially when he is without the means of getting his next fix, the addict is not whole. He is lacking and incomplete. For Necchi, as for de Quincey, this incomplete self it is insistently a precursor to his habit. Only when high can he "accept", which suggests that to him the position of alienation is not one where he is a victim, but rather where he is the perpetrator. Or when he is both; he is an outcast because he has removed himself, not because he was driven away. Much like Irvine Welsh's Mark Renton, who is a newer version of the contradictory intellectual-addict character, Trocchi wants simultaneously to remove himself from society and to be missed by it, to draw attention to his rejection.

"Junk, for Trocchi, is a moveable void: taking that void around the city with him, in him, he ensures that he inhabits negative space constantly" (2006: 3) notes writer Tom McCarthy. It is also a self-reinforcing void, a cause and an effect, a cure and the illness in one. Heroin fills that void and thus delineates its existence, revealing the negative, empty space which might otherwise have gone unnoticed. "When the sky of transcendence comes to be emptied...and not just of Gods, but of any Other, a fatal rhetoric fills the void, and this is the fetishism of drug addiction" (Derrida in Morrison, 2005: 972). Banco notes that "taking drugs introduces one to the alterity within – even at the risk that such alterity is horrifying or banal". Such an encounter, only reinforced through repetition, results in "the resolidification of selfhood and its interiority" (2008: 38).

Szabados and Probert suggest that "both addicts and authors desire relief from the sufferings of rupture as they seek a more authentic identity" (Szabados & Probert, 2004: 5). If this "rupture" can be understood as partly occurring because of the internal and external sense of alienation and the concept of "a more authentic identity" can be linked to the notion of attaining integrity (thus of repairing the rupture) or wholeness in Trocchi's writing then perhaps his text functions as another means of attaining that brief

wholeness. The selflike narrator is, within the text, also the author and is therefore involved in a process of writing himself. This resonates with issues of “self-destruction and self-creation” (ibid). “So writing and addiction may be a liberating experience as authors and addicts re-create themselves using the resources provided by their struggle with the illusions and self-deceptions associated with the traditional ideas of self and authorship” (ibid).

Illusions and self-deceptions are also a part of the addiction process, the narrative of becoming an addict. If “autobiographical consciousness is that consciousness which thinks about itself – its past, present, and future” (Mandel, 1980: 49), the consciousness of an addiction autobiography is one that shapes the past and future into collaborating with, justifying, accounting for the present state of self. “This identity may or may not be thought of in linguistic terms”; (ibid), in this case it largely is. “Both addict and writer often yearn for romantic solitude and wholeness” (ibid), which is why alienation and wholeness become integrated, become possible only in the recurrent, reinforcing moment of alienation explored and expressed through fixing and through writing.

Necchi comes close to defining this wholeness, this authenticity, through a series of comparisons with other experiences. He then brings it back to the level of language in this passage:

The mind under heroin evades perception as it does ordinarily; one is aware only of contents. But that whole way of posing the question, of dividing the mind from what it's aware of, is fruitless. Nor is it that the objects of perception are intrusive in an electric way as they are under mescaline or lysergic acid, nor that things strike one with more intensity or in a more enchanted or detailed way as I have sometimes experienced under marijuana; it is that the perceiving turns inward, the eyelids droop, the blood is aware of itself, a slow phosphorescence in all the fabric of flesh and nerve and bone; it is that the organism has a sense of being intact and unbrittle, and, above all, *inviolable*. For the attitude born of this sense of inviolability some Americans have used the word 'cool'. (10-11)

There is an awareness of the physical self, the body – “the perceiving turns inward”. He is concerned with, and anchored in, himself, and the wholeness is entire, not just psychological. The whole person feels “intact”, and as an extension of that, “inviolable”. He understands this inward focus as best matching the sense of the term “cool” in American subcultural jargon. His finding a slang term the most appropriate for the

attitude surrounding or developing from his subjective experience suggests a connectivity outside of the mainstream, and validates the importance of colloquial language to accurate description of specific things outside the scope of everyday experience and therefore language. In such instances, subcultural language disseminates better than conventional language. His process of matching the subjective experience to a popular but particular word in a sense mirrors his process of writing, as well as elucidating his high experience. Writing about *Junky*, Burroughs understands his narrator, William Lee, to be “covered, protected and also severely limited” (1985: 90) by heroin, or by his addiction, and possibly a similar dynamic informs Necchi’s identity.

In a similar scene, Necchi describes a woman, Fay, getting high: “When she put the eye-dropper with the needle attached back into the glass of water and dabbed the back of her bluish hand with tissue paper there was no longer any fear in her eyes, only certainty, and in their yellowish depths ecstasy. I knew at that moment she was impregnable” (26). The descriptions around Fay are somehow vague; she is “bluish” and “yellowish” in parts, but that tells little of the whole. Throughout the text she appears huddled in vast coats, her body and her presence hidden in and held together by them. She is only present in the text when heroin is to be taken; she exists as an extension of the drug – almost its personification. There is nothing to her except her addiction, and this vagueness as to the rest of her is put in relief, and pulled together, at this moment of “certainty”. Fay is remarkably detached in her impregnability: “It becomes more and more difficult to get through to her...It’s simply you have the impression you are in touch with an answering service, that Fay herself is not speaking to you, that she will certainly not feel committed to anything that’s agreed upon between you and whoever it is that replies” (36).

Stick to the facts. A fine empirical principle, but below the level of language the facts slide away like lava. Neither was there ever a simple act; in retrospect I couldn’t isolate such a thing. Even while I lived in my act, at each phase, after the decidings, it unfolded spontaneously, a frighteningly, and dangerously, at times like a disease run riot, at times like the growing morning sunlight, and if I find it difficult to remember and express, and difficult to express and remember, if sometimes words leap up, sudden, unnatural, squint and jingling skeletons from the page, accusing me and amusing me with their obscene shakes and making the world mad, I suppose it is because they take a kind of ancestral revenge upon me who at each moment is ready to marshal them again for death or resurrection. No doubt I shall go on

writing, stumbling across tundras of unmeaning, planting words like bloody flags in my wake.
(12)

The imagery as he describes this process, and the aberrant words which “leap up” (12) out of the text, like thoughts trying on signifiers he would not have given them at first, is reminiscent of de Quincey’s visions. The “squint and jingling skeletons” (12) are accusatory, much like the human-derived aspects of de Quincey’s terrors, but they are also amusing. Trocchi realises what they are – the ghosts of words, the spectres of facts, the bones of language – and thus enjoys their presence, “their obscene shakes”, because he is to some degree in control of them. He has come closer than de Quincey did in attempting to turn the dark corners of the mind, fuelled by opiates, into words, and thus has captured them, indicated by “me who is at each moment ready to marshal them again for death or resurrection” (12). The author picks words at will, ‘sentencing’ them as he wishes. The things which were so uncontrollably terrifying for de Quincey have been put into words, and thus they are just words. Sacks describes a similar method of dealing with frightening hallucinations: “the best way...was to write, to describe the hallucination in clear, almost clinical detail, and, in so doing, become an observer, even an explorer, not a helpless victim of the craziness inside me” (2012: 116). Trocchi can intimidate the skeletons, and not they him. He has written them, and they are his – his words employed as he wishes in his text, but they retain the spectral presence of other texts, other words, other terrors. This dark edge is an important presence for Trocchi, it is part of the stance. He needs there to be things in the shadow of the factual style of the text, its explicitness needs to be tinged by the implied, the unnamed. For all the peace of his writing and perception while high, the fix is after all an act of violence. The nearness of death, which to some extent heroin use taunts and mimics, is rarely forgotten.

Facts and his quasi-factual style are for Necchi a surface layer – they work with language, are contingent on it. “Below the level of language” they lose force, coherence, substance, but below is what he is concerned with, where he wants to go with the text. Yet his experience is bound by language, because he experiences through language. He also has heroin, but although it might facilitate exploring that depth, is not a fact, has no language or alternative to language. It can not produce a text, it cannot take him below the surface

and then back again in the same form, and the issue here is to retrieve something of what is found 'below'. He wants the text to operate on both levels. For Necchi to be whole, for the text to be whole, he needs the integrity of taking language below the surface, or bringing what is below the surface up to the level of language. Like de Quincey, he is fighting the 'underneath', the nightmare of the psyche, with fact, the "empirical principle", but his aim, and his demons, are different. He does not want to weaken the imaginary with fact, but rather to bring it out into the light, to integrate it into his language, his writing, his articulate self. Memory and expression, experience and representation, lose sequence here, or gain the possibility of alternative sequence. Does one first "express" or first "remember"? It matters on the level of language, where things are forced into an order of sorts, but less so on the level 'below', which is different and difficult partly because it rejects such order. What is and what is represented lose their hierarchy of fact, of truth. They become interchangeable, reliant on one another, neither false nor accurate.

In an introduction to a volume of Trocchi's poetry, Burroughs offers this suggestion: "Perhaps writers are actually *readers* from hidden books. These books are carefully concealed and surrounded by deadly snares. It is a dangerous expedition to find one of these books and bring back a few words" (Burroughs, 1972: viii). By scow into the void, by subway towards the periphery, as Burroughs does in *Junky*, by text into the future, as de Quincey aims to do, by heroin into the emptiness of self, for the sake of a few of the right words.

Trocchi sets the tone, or perhaps the rules, for his mode of representation early on.

Consider the opening paragraph:

My scow is tied up in the canal at Flushing, N.Y., alongside the landing stage of the Mac Asphalt and Construction Corporation. It is now just after five in the afternoon. Today at this time it is still afternoon, and the sun, striking the cinderblocks of the main building of the works, has turned them pink. The motor cranes and the decks of the other scows tied up round about are deserted.

Half an hour ago I gave myself a fix. (9)

There is a concern for the particular, an ease of maneuvering amongst technical terms in the description of the working docks, a precision in the language and an appreciation of

the odd musicality of American proper nouns – “Flushing, N.Y.”, the “Mac Asphalt” company. There is also the assertion that, for the purposes of writing, things can be as they appear. The cinderblocks ‘have been turned pink’. They do not appear that way, they are that way. It is the perception that matters. This is stated as being as much of a fact as the other descriptions which do not employ a momentary trick of perception, such as “the decks of the others scows tied up round about are deserted”. “Half an hour ago I gave myself a fix” is subject to the same gentle but firm insistence on perceived fact, a certainty about his actions and the choice of words to denote them, tempered by the slightly dreamy light of dusk.

Necchi is also indicating that he is writing this quite high, and if we assume that his state of mind inflects his perception and expression, the calm, still, contentedly desolate nature of the scene is striking. The experience is undramatic, whole, still. Yet when he considers writing itself, it is vastly different: violent, desperate, almost physical in its intensity. But in other instances, so is heroin, especially the act of injecting it. It is thus difficult to separate the two elements. Obviously, Necchi doesn’t type while fixing, but where these two chief modes of his existence run into each other becomes unclear. “To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves... We have been aided, inspired, multiplied” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 3). Perhaps, out of this mixture of chemical and creative impulses, the text comes into being like a photograph developed, soaked in the “black water of the Hudson” (McCarthy, 2006: 2). This notion of duality – of influences (heroin and self), being (Trocchi and Necchi, author and character), of perception (high and straight), of identity (alienated and inviolable) of positioning (within and without), is crucial to the text. Trocchi “finds it, in its most literal form, in a scow...moored off the edge of Manhattan, a spot from which he can peer back and see the city’s celebrated skyline dim and hazy in the distance, ‘like a mirage in which one isn’t involved’” (ibid). In this liminal space, in a helpless boat “towed at irregular intervals by tugs” (ibid) into “the even blacker water of the Atlantic in which he’s occasionally deposited for long stretches” (ibid), the surrounding stretches of water are hostile and home at the same time, alienating and complete. He describes the ocean as being like “a sheet of black ink”

(Trocchi in McCarthy, 2006: 3), “the dark, void-filled liquid, for him, really is like what’s inside his typewriter” (McCarthy, 2006: 3). Completing the joining of the three main elements into a single image, the other “dark, void-filled liquid” is heroin. “When he’s not immersed in the black liquid, he’s injecting it into himself” (ibid). The ocean becomes part of his space, water as black as ink, pervasive as heroin, an endless dark body symbolising what he’s on, where he’s writing from. The scow on the ocean encapsulates his lone existence: “a chair, a typewriter, a table, a single bed, a coal stove, a dresser, a cupboard, a man in a little wooden shack, two miles from the nearest land” (Trocchi in McCarthy, 2006: 3). For McCarthy, “this space is also where writing itself – the act, the practice and the stuff, the matter – comes from” (2006: 3) and from it, “he writes, ‘I’ve often wondered how far out a man could go without being obliterated’” (Trocchi in McCarthy, 2006: 2). How far out on the ocean, how far out into drugs, how far out in the writing, how far out in himself.

For Trocchi, heroin is a venture into himself, the ‘perception turned inward’, much like his writing. It is the same inward-looking drift Burroughs muses at when he observes that “I’m getting so far out one day I won’t come back at all” (Burroughs ed. Harris, 1993: 154) under similar circumstances. De Quincey was perhaps reaching for this in his constant positing of view, particularly sea view, as somehow encompassing his perception:

I yielded to my natural inclination for a solitary life...I often fell into such reveries after taking opium...when I have been seated at an open window, from which I could overlook the sea at a mile below me, and could at the same time command a view of some great town standing on a different radius of my circular prospect, but at nearly the same distance...Such a scene in all its elements was not unfrequently realised for me on the gentle eminence of Everton. Obliquely to the left lay the many-languaged town of Liverpool; obliquely to the right, the multitudinous sea. (194)

It is the same beguiling vantage point of within sight but out of reach, the ocean suggesting immersion, the cityscape company and community. Both New York and Liverpool are estuary-based port cities, suggesting by their very peripheral presence change and trade and coming and going. The vantage point posited in these texts suggests “the experience of visual and linguistic strangeness” (Williams, 1989: 50) overall. This is accentuated by De Quincey’s seeing Liverpool as “multilanguaged” and Trocchi and

Burroughs's attention to the slang, colloquial, and vernacular turns of phrase addiction and its urban lifestyle incorporates. This is the quintessentially Modernist view of what Raymond Williams terms "the lonely writer gazing down on the unknowable city from his shabby apartment" (1989: 50).

These ideas of alienation, of being an outcast, of transposing one's sense of wandering in the wilderness onto even the most urban, modern setting, carrying a "moveable void" within oneself (McCarthy, 2006: 3), are gathered for Trocchi around the story of Cain, from which the book takes its title. The tale is both rooted in a narrative of great cultural importance, and "one of our basic myths" (Forsyth, 1992: 84). What he attributes to the symbol of Cain is rooted in textual experience, being written down as an extension of the judgement – a permanent condemnation, an artifact of an archetype. *Cain's Book* is an extension of this idea, a documentation of the banishment, "Cain's testament, the product of those moments when I feel impelled to outflank my deep desire to be silent, to say nothing, expose nothing" (238). The banished are not much dwelt on in Biblical texts past the moment of being cast out, but by a certain logic they are extensively written of in the secular domain, the earthly, the profane, the human. This is crucial: not the Cain and Abel story, but what happens to Cain afterwards is significant, perhaps because it is such an empty space. By showing this transposition, moving Cain from one domain to the other, the religious to the secular, Trocchi highlights both Cain's alienation and his validity as a literary figure, underscoring his duality or liminality.

The myth refers back to ideas of the body in drug use and in text, the search for the perfect, or at least complete, body, as Szabados and Probert suggest, and of the text as somehow attempting a self-production or self-creation. Themes of violence and sacrifice, as the end of the body, the destruction of a twin ideal, another self, the acceptable self, and as the rejected, unwanted body are also relevant. Cain is made to wander, a situation in which, as Trocchi often implies in the novel, the vagrant body, the needy addicted body, is a burden which accentuates the metaphorical 'homelessness' of the outcast, and his need to situate himself textually. This relies on an understanding of text as flimsy, as subjective, reflective of mind, memory, self, but unable to fully hold them together. It

becomes an endless repetition of the oscillation between the emptiness of being banished and the autonomy of reflecting the self – to see the disjuncture is to have to soothe its grief, to face the void is to need to fill it, to be an addict is to keep on injecting.

Four: The Unwriting of William Lee

Junky is one of Burroughs's earliest texts, and predates the cut-up method which became the defining practice in much of his mature work. It has a more or less linear first-person narrative which traces the descent into heroin addiction, and with it, into the seedy underground of 1950s New York, of the narrator William Lee, whose name also serves as the author's pseudonym. Lee is to his author, Burroughs, what Joe Necchi is to Trocchi in *Cain's Book*. The original version published (as half of a two-in-one dimestore novel) was heavily edited and full of disclaimers; the subsequent British version, with the title spelt *Junkie* was closer to the original; the complete text, with Burroughs's own prologue, was finally released in 1977, with the title reverted to the American 'y' ending. This is the version of the text to which I refer, taking it to be closest to the author's version.

Trocchi writes in *Cain's Book* of "the anguish of this compulsion to record that swells beyond meaningful record" (113), a concern which seems to be prevalent in *Junky* as well. Although it seems to be an exercise in recording, upon examination it is concerned with something more. At some point the text "swells" beyond that idea of itself, becomes more, becomes about more. Olney, writing about autobiography as a literary form, notes that the autobiographical text "takes on a life of its own, and the self that was not really in existence in the beginning is in the end merely a matter of text and has nothing whatever to do with an authorizing author" (1980: 22).

William Lee is clearly a version of Burroughs. But the text is equally clearly not autobiography. Burroughs asserted that "the narrative is fiction, but it is based on facts of my experience" (Burroughs, 2003: 139). Oliver Harris ascribes this distinction to "holes so large they are easy to overlook" (2002: xv) in his critical introduction to the text, as well as a lack of actual biographies of Burroughs to serve as a basis for comparison until

Ted Morgan's *Literary Outlaw* was published in 1988. Even so, it is not merely a matter of comparative truth and conspicuous omission. Biographer Barry Miles notes that "the confessional form is normally used to reveal the inner life of the author...with Bill [Burroughs] there is no mention of an inner life. William Lee, the narrator, appears to have no inner life at all" (1992: 54). Lee is in a sense vacant, lacking Burroughs's own "inner life" and not given a fictional one. Annie Dillard writes in *Living by Fiction* that "traditional characters are 'rounded', or 'modeled'" or otherwise endowed with some sort of depth, which, she argues is, "a Renaissance invention analogous to painting's deep space" whereas "Modernist art, in painting and in fiction, is the art of surfaces" and "it no longer seeks to imitate nature" but instead "seeks...what might be called a new perspective, the careful flattening of forms on the surface" (1983: 40).

It has also frequently been noted that a certain anonymity or social invisibility was attributed to and cultivated by Burroughs himself. "Burroughs was an accumulation of negatives; he appeared to others, in his own description, as 'without context...perhaps a series of homo non sapiens...completely anonymous'" (Campbell, 1999: 6).

Lee is also the 'junky' of the title, and thus his inner life is heroin. In the introduction to *Queer*, which works as a sequel to *Junky*, Burroughs points out the "disintegration of self-image" (Burroughs, 1985: 90) which he associates with heroin addiction. He characterises Lee in *Junky* as "integrated and self-contained", whereas in *Queer* he is "disintegrated, desperately in need of contact" (ibid). Campbell notes that Burroughs went through a phase in the mid 1950s of "keeping a record of self-effacement" which he titled 'Lee's Journal' (Campbell, 1999: 198), a sample of which reads: "Lee's face, his whole person, seemed at first glance completely anonymous. He looked like an FBI man, like anybody. But the absence of trappings, of anything remotely picaresque or baroque, distinguished and delineated Lee, so that seen twice you would not forget him" (Burroughs in Campbell, 1999: 198). This 'Lee's Journal' seems to be, through the use of the third person narrator, not Lee's but Burroughs's. It goes so far towards seeking out anonymity and absence of the markers of self as to fall out the bottom of any such construct, achieving a negative sense of space, self and power. Although in the narrative

Lee is not concerned with attaining integrity as explicitly as Necchi is in *Cain's Book*, clearly a similar underlying dynamic is present. Without heroin, Lee is “disintegrated”, needy, wanting, and the promiscuity of *Queer* replaces the drug excesses of *Junky*. The fictionalisation of autobiography has implications for the protagonist, and these are considered by Lee as an almost surrealist imposition of form on his narrative.

A record involving the self is already different from a record in which one takes care to omit oneself. That, perhaps, is the first condition under which the record-keeping “swells” over into being something else – it becomes a version of the self, based on the facts but not tied to them, a new thing rather than simply a recreation of events. For the most part, especially in the beginning, “the horrors are cushioned by the narrator’s journalistic presence, his retrospection, his guiding perspective” (Tytell, 1976: 126), but in the second half of the book this stability is increasingly disrupted. Harris, discussing the writing of *Junky*, considers difficulties of plot and narrative which “can only have become worse as [Burroughs] ceased writing about events set safely in the past, and began having to deal with experiences from the more immediate present” (2002: xvi). In describing the progression of his addiction, Lee notes that “I was shooting every day now” (16). The change of tense mid-sentence, from ‘was’ to ‘now’, mirrors what happens in the text – he starts off in the past, and mid-narrative finds himself in the present, navigating without a clear path. The use of heroin accentuates this: things become increasingly unclear, yet his growing habit forces him to make choices and take risks. In another instance, a doctor says to Lee: “one more of these [bottles of tequila] and you were dead” (116). This episode takes place in Mexico, and the doctor does not speak fluent English, but the switching of tense again is hardly accidental – Burroughs uses the character’s lack of proficiency to voice an idea, the notion that he “was dead” in a projected future past which never materialised. This compromises the idea of record-making while opening up the potential to make more of the text. It forces the author to claim an agency greater than just transcribing events, forces him to look at, engage with, decide, act in, and write in, the complex present which does not yet have a linear narrative to be followed in the writing. In such instances the “realistic mode is extended almost to the surrealist intensity of *Naked Lunch* and the following works” (Tytell,

1976: 124). The more Burroughs claims this agency and engages with the present of the text, the more his alter ego, William Lee, allows things to happen to him, drifts from event to situation, renounces control of himself. In a version of the original introduction to *Junky* Burroughs had written: “I am using the known facts as a starting point in an attempt to reach facts that are not known” (Burroughs in Harris, 2003: xxv).

Lee’s first experience with opiates sets the tone for his later highs, and establishes a language and imagery which remains prevalent around such scenes throughout the text.

Morphine hits the back of the legs first, then the back of the neck, a spreading wave of relaxation slackening the muscles away from the bones so that you seem to float without outlines, like lying in warm salt water. As this relaxing wave spread through my tissues, I experienced a strong feeling of fear. I had the feeling that some horrible image was just beyond my field of vision, moving, as I turned my head, so that I never quite saw it. (6)

There is a definite incongruity between the physical and the mental in this passage. The language used to described his sensations dwells on a sense of nothingness, of formlessness, “so that you seem to float without outlines”, despite an acute awareness of the physicality of the body, the “muscles” “slackening” “away from the bones”, the “tissues” and “salt water” which make up the body; almost a sense of disintegration. This pervasive “relaxation” is contrasted by the emotions of fear and anxiety, the sense of something ominous “just beyond” the “field of vision”, there but unseen, a peripheral anxiety, a sense of there being “some omnipresent impinging supernatural horror” (Tytell, 1976: 123). When Lee overdoses, this darkness on the periphery of his vision closes in on him: “as soon as I took the needle out of the vein, I knew it wasn’t all right...Pat’s face began to get black around the edges, the blackness spreading to cover his face as though it were actually changing color” (62). Later, it is the physical, not the mental aspect of his use which causes him to attempt to quit (again), and again there is a strong awareness of the body, this time as brutalised rather than relaxed by drugs: “The needle clogged twice. Blood ran down my arm. The junk spread through my body, an injection of death. The dream was gone. I looked down at the blood that ran from elbow to wrist. I felt a sudden pity for the violated veins and tissue. Tenderly I wiped the blood off my arm” (105).

Later still, the sense of connection to the body which enables such tenderness is gone, either the empathy or the body itself replaced by heroin, become purely a vehicle for the habit, and the language around it hardens too. In an essay titled 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness' Burroughs writes of "stick[ing] a needle every hour into the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction" (Burroughs, 2005: 202). Scholar and critic F.R. Karl sees Burroughs's work as "a Sadean measurement of self against others" (1983: 205) and in such a project, "degradation is never distant from revelation. The overriding consideration is the self martyring itself in order to approach a form of joy otherwise unattainable. Everything must be experienced on the edge. To gain the junkie's paradise, one must sink to the junkie's hell; they are indistinguishable" (ibid). Thus they are a completeness, a unison of state or experience, much like the simultaneously revealed and healed and always perpetuated void of Trocchi's work.

Lee moves rapidly from his first experiences with morphine to being a full-time addict. Burroughs is concerned with the cycle of addiction, the desire for pleasure which becomes a need for stability, fulfillment, blankness, and a fear of withdrawals. "I experienced the agonizing deprivation of junk sickness, and the pleasure of relief when junk-thirsty cells drank from the needle. Perhaps all pleasure is relief" (xli). It is difficult to distinguish whether this is an observation mediated by years of addiction, or whether it is a perception Burroughs had, or would have had, without the 'conditioning' of heroin, which makes pleasure definable this way. This sense of pleasure-as-relief is, nevertheless, what drives the descriptions of heroin use in the text. "The kick of junk *is* that you have to have it", he writes, "the kick of junk is living under junk conditions" (82).

There is a series of tense, at times frantic, often paranoid, arrangements, deals, connections, purchases and losses, always culminating in a release, a relief, an absence of need. This is always temporarily, and then the sequence begins again. "Junk is not, like alcohol or weed, a means to increased enjoyment of life. Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life" (xli). The relative terms are significant here. Heroin is understood not as a high of "increased enjoyment", but of lessened need, of lessened tension, "Every time exactly that much less" (117). Although what is decreased is never discussed in the text, there

does seem to be a cumulative sense of loss accompanying Lee's addiction, as he loses himself in 'junk time'.

Lee quickly establishes a routine: "I stopped drinking, stopped going out at night, and fell into a routine schedule: a cap of junk three times per day, and the time in between to be filled somehow" (62). Just how consuming this structure is becomes clear when the certainty of the next fix is compromised: "We were running out of junk. Patently, we would be immobilized in a matter of hours" (21). The bigger the habit, the more completely "immobilized" the addict fears becoming, and the fewer the hours from the last fix until this starts happening. The deeper into the habit he is, the less other things matter, and 'junk time' is sped up, the cycle shorter and faster, the highs and lows happening in quickening succession, the shortages more dramatic and the stashes never big enough. This becomes the junky's life, he gets lost in it; it takes him over. "Aside from the junk itself, what you experience during a habit is flat, almost two-dimensional" (102), he notes, which suggests that the text might be a way of countering that flatness, filling out the contours of the time he was addicted. What pre-empts Lee's most serious attempt to quit is what characterised heroin for him: the fact that it is an addiction. "If I could have made a single decision, I would have decided no more junk ever. But when it came to the process of quitting, I did not have the drive. It gave me a terrible feeling of helplessness to watch myself break every schedule I set up as though I did not have control over my actions" (105). The loss of control is crucial to his breakdown; the writing of the episode is an attempt to discern where and how control is lost and gained, though the writing remains detached, descriptive, clearly taking place after the events, and not as a part of them. Beginning the process of withdrawing, Lee notes that "junk is an inoculation of death that keeps the body in a condition of emergency" (106). This idea of an "inoculation" suggests a measure of control over death, whereas the constant sense of emergency suggests chaos only marginally kept at bay.

With the 'control' of junk time and addiction removed, Lee throws himself frantically in the opposite direction, seeking to lose any semblance of control, to place himself in a timeless fugue as a means of renouncing his need for 'junk time'. "When you quit junk,

everything seems flat, but you remember the shot schedule, the static horror of junk, your life draining into your arm three times a day” (117). Lee longs for the schedule even though he recognizes its destructiveness, its imposed paralysis in a sense of “static horror”, except to remove, draw away, leaving “every time exactly that much less” (117). In other passages, the addicted body itself becomes the habit, wholly subsumed. Here, the heroin is not seen as a foreign substance to consume or be consumed by, but rather something already in or of the user, “your life” being made less each time it enters the body. Physically, this makes sense, in that heroin, like all other drugs, changes the way chemicals are produced and used in the body, as well as how they alter the central nervous system responds to stimuli. Painkillers do not remove pain, they block the body’s ability to perceive and respond to it. On a psychological level, much literature dealing with addiction suggests that social risk factors as well as genetic predisposition can prefigure addiction.

In *Junky* Burroughs writes that: “at first I started drinking at five in the afternoon. After a week, I started drinking at eight in the morning, stayed drunk all day and all night, and woke up drunk the next morning” (106). The language here indicates a sense of being habituated to a structure, a heavily regimented day, in contrast with the content of the day which is a more or less constant state throughout. “Then I lay back and closed my eyes and tried to piece together the night before and yesterday. Often, I drew a blank from noon on” (107). Lee has created a situation where he is continually drunk, cannot differentiate or remember days, and yet thinks in such a way that he feels compelled to reconstruct, to “piece together” something of his life, which was previously held together by routine. The record-keeping project becomes futile, impossible, inappropriate. He notes that in attempting to recall his immediate past, a task made more difficult by the fact that the days are largely spent in the same way “the line between saying and thinking is blurred. Did you say it or just think it?” (107). Lee is not free of his habit, he is avoiding it by drinking heavily, trying to maintain the high of alcohol not so much as a replacement for, but a contrast to, heroin. Lee is in a state of perpetuating instability, which “exacerbates all the worst and most dangerous aspects of the withdrawal sickness: reckless, unseemly, outrageous, maudlin...behaviour” (Burroughs, 1985: 91). His self-

assessment at this point is not pleasing. “After ten days of the cure I had deteriorated shockingly...My emotions spilled out everywhere” (107).

It is telling that for Burroughs being “unseemly” is one of the “worst and most dangerous” aspects of withdrawal, that such loss of emotional and behavioural control troubles him so. This indicates the importance of ‘control’ for him, and the absolute depths of unrestraint into which Lee throws himself. This is not sustainable, and a friend tells him: “better you should go back to stuff than drink like this” (107), which leaves him nowhere, stuck between two habits, and with no more control over either them or himself. The following night, he drinks himself into delirium, and it seems as though he has found his way into someone’s dream – the imagery uncannily echoes de Quincey’s nightmare visions, owing either to subcultural shorthand of grotesquery, or a more universal shared library of drug-induced visions. These include the insects-beneath-the-skin sensation of withdrawals, or the harmless but puzzling miniature people often seen in organic hallucinations (Jay, 2013: 17). The pink elephants of *delirium tremens* seem to belong to the mythology of withdrawal in advanced alcoholism, although colourful animals of different kinds have often been reported, and documented in fictional accounts of the state.

When I closed my eyes I saw an Oriental face, the lips and nose eaten away by disease. The disease spread, melting the face into an amoeboid mass in which the eyes floated, dull crustacean eyes. A series of faces, hieroglyphs, distorted and leading to the final place where the human road ends, where the human form can no longer contain the crustacean horror that has grown inside it.
I watched curiously. ‘I got the horrors,’ I thought matter of factly. (111)

Lee’s perception of his realisation of what is happening, his ability to apprehend that he has “the horrors” while he is having them suggests that like the text, he operates on more than one level. He can distance himself from his mind, in fact needs to. He tears up floorboards looking for a forgotten, or imagined, stash of opium, and eventually passes out, waking up to a combination of renewed withdrawals, a hangover, and a general depression, which propels him to abandon the idea of quitting, and he takes a shot of morphine. “I lay back on the bed like I was in a warm bath” (114); and he is back where he started, with his first fix, and a case of uremia as well. He is seen by two doctors, one

Chinese, the other with a “round, smiling, Oriental face” (116), echoing the imagery of his delirium. After this episode, he stops drinking for a time, and “I stayed off the junk” (116) suggesting that somehow he has fallen apart and regrouped, driven himself over the limit and emerged whole, subject to neither the overwhelming control of heroin addiction, nor the absolute abandon of alcohol abuse. How this happens is not explained in detail. It is almost a magical transformation, a sense of excess and abandon being experienced to some sort of innate limit, and then exhausted and abandoned. Lee’s ‘recovery’ is not given any remarkable significance, nor is any moral or spiritual value attached to it. It simply happens, and because the text is about addiction, not rehabilitation, it ends at this juncture.

Five: Exposures and Reflections

The development of the addict-author persona is one of the major concerns shared by all three texts. Another is the liminal positioning of the self in writing autobiographical experience mediated by the altered states and preoccupations of addiction. There is a constant engagement with liminality, be it social or personal, wanting to stand outside of society in such a way as to be noticed by it, or an alienation from and reintegration of the physical or psychic self. This is explored through the act of writing as well as through the ritualised practice of addiction. “Discipline and addiction. Practice your scales. Repetition” (1992: 27) writes Ronell in *Crack Wars*. In the addict’s schedule of states, this repetitiveness must be the most liminal, the most vacant reference point, the most threatening to the sense of self; the most ‘far out’ in Trocchi and Burroughs’s parlance. It is the addicted self, rather than the peak of the high, which seems to be the furthest point reached in any of the texts.

McCarthy suggests that in some places, or in some ways, *Cain’s Book* captures a sense of the “bleak, monotonous, quasi-repetitive, the same and not the same at the same time” (2006: 2). This idea of ‘quasi-repetition’ of cycles and differences, sameness and difference, indicates a mode which through “monotonous” repetition, allows for breaks, aberrations, differences. The cyclical, self-absorbed nature of the addict’s life which

Trocchi describes, a routine dictated by the need/desire of heroin, comes through in the writing as such a repetition, always the same and yet always a little different, structured in the same way but depicted differently, or depicted similarly but with different outcomes. The ritual of fixing is repeated, but the subsequent experience varies. The framework of high perception is the same, but what is made of it changes. The substance remains the same, but the substance of writing alters through repeated use.

All writing is addiction, and all writers are hooked...Drink talks easily, Baudelaire observed. But drugs and written words are matters profound, sometimes isolating, solitude, the stuff of very private investigations which are never easily shared. Drugs take writers to extremes with which they are all too familiar: sentenced to find words for what seem to be intensely subjective and wordless worlds, weary and frustrated by the inexpressible, condemned to claustrophobic panic when the words run dry, and yet endlessly compelled to try, hunting through the bookshelves and streets in a desperate search for inspiration, stimulation, any kind of fix. (Plant, 1999: 132)

Boothroyd argues in *Culture on Drugs* that deconstruction is an appropriate way of addressing the discourse of/on drugs, because it itself is metaphorically concerned with “an abusive investigation which introduces beforehand what it seeks to find” (Derrida in Boothroyd, 2000: 47). In other words, it seeks and claims from the ‘legitimate’ operation of the world and text what it knows to be there, under the guise of experimentation or exploration. This is what many problem users do with drugs – that is, identify a source or lack in the self. The decision is made and the anticipation shapes the outcomes before the taking of the forbidden substance. This anticipation, and the experience itself, is shaped in some measure by the experiences of others, just as de Quincey’s experiences, including that of writing about addiction, influence those of Trocchi and Burroughs.

Deconstructive reading, argues Boothroyd, is familiar with the modes of ‘abuse’, elsewhere termed a ‘parasitical’ relationship, with the ‘legitimate’ or ‘true’ modes of engaging experience. “It has...always recognised the importance, even the necessity, of ‘abuse’ in another sense: as a tactic in its strategic underminings, loosening, erosions, subversions” which are “abusive...from the perspective of those orthodoxies, authorities, institutions...which underwrite the ‘truth’ about *everything*” (Boothroyd, 2000: 47). But at stake is the creative intervention that tests and therefore establishes or denigrates that truth, of which drugs and writing-on-drugs are a part. In particular there is a mode of testing the truths of both literary production and the antisocial self-on-drugs, and their

powerful though unstable allegiance, in order to ascertain the validity of that identity through textual exploration of experience.

Without some sort of break with regulation and with modernity's decision of the meaning of 'drugs', without some sort of upset regarding 'propriety' in general and with respect to anything in particular (not just drugs), nothing would ever happen. Without experimentation, without acting on the urge to excess, without 'aggressions' or 'infidelities', in *whatever* cultural forms these take...there would never have been anything worthy of the name 'culture.'" (Boothroyd, 2000: 47)

Furthermore, "drugs could not be made an 'object' of deconstruction if they were not, from the outset, a marker of the rips and tears, resulting from the 'infidelities and aggressions', in the general metaphysical diktat by which Reason attempts to assert its authority over Unreason, madness, intoxication" (Boothroyd, 2006: 56). Yet "it is because the drug will always be apprehended as both antidote and poison that it is intrinsically undecidable, liminal *and* transgressive. But because there are no pure exemplars, there are no narcotic means of transcendence either" (ibid: 58). So by circumstance of metaphorised drug use in relation to writing and creation of an author-user persona, the liminal position remains in habitual use. Even if "the desire and pursuit, by any means, of the dual perspective of seeing things from the supposed border between them is impossible" (ibid: 57) philosophically, people continue to desire and pursue that vantage point, and continue to see things worth writing about from it. Derrida essentially dismisses this as "a characteristic trait of the 'liminal' intellectual, artist or writer, or drug taker" (ibid), but the fact that it is such a defining feature is significant.

In an interview for *Points...*, Derrida links drug use, and drug writing in particular, to the concept of the *pharmakon*. The problem of drugs in writing is that they serve as "a *pharmakon* not for memory (*mnēmē*) but rather for recollection (*hypnomnesis*)" (Derrida, 1995: 234). While drug writing is open to exploring these issues of the work of memory and recollection in relation to text, the basic structure of the argument here is unchallenged by it. "'Good' repetition is always haunted or contaminated by 'bad' repetition, and so much the better or the worse for it" (ibid: 235). "As 'drug', *pharmakon* carries the sense of both 'antidote' and 'poison', but it is also (in Plato) a metaphor for writing" (Boothroyd, 2006: 51). It is the space between the two, when 'repetition' as in 'recollection' engages or enables the creative space of memory, "mimesis, itself the

product of a technique which at once recalls and opposes itself to an original model” (ibid) which drug writing exploits.

This argument about reading, writing, memory and repetition is developed around the *Phaedrus* in which, Boothroyd argues, Plato posits “models of both good and bad *repetition* of the same speech” (2006: 32). ‘Speech’ in this sense exists as a text to be recited, and one to be interpreted, and, Boothroyd argues, works ‘like a drug’. The difference is that “bad repetition occurs where the speech/drug is *possessed* and blindly re-presented, in which case the potency of the substance is confused with its effect” (ibid). The same is true of drugs, and of texts. A strong drug taken thoughtlessly is more likely to lead to death than insight; a text which only repeats the ideas of others, such as a run-of-the-mill ‘rehab memoir’, is all sensation but no substance. “Good repetition occurs where the speech/drug is *used* in the furtherance of dialectic” (ibid). In other words, repetition which allows for difference, such as building on the texts of others in a creative intervention of one’s own, and taking drugs mindfully, can be effective. “For this *the drug must be subject to a prescription*” (ibid).

The usage of ‘prescription’ here implies the understanding that the balance of the *pharmakon* relies on dosage of substance in relation to taker. But it also implies that in order to be effective in the sense of enabling ‘good repetition’ the drug must be ‘pre-written’, exist in text to further writing, and thus be accounted for. Zieger points out that even de Quincey’s *Confessions* “conjures up the autobiographical illusion of subjectivity not as unique personhood but as the capacity to reproduce ideas from other texts or images originating in an artificial substance” (2007: 1534).

“These concerns of *measure* (rather than propriety) serve to emphasize that it is precisely the problem of the *in-between* of sobriety and intoxication that this entire reflection is aimed at...To be hooked on such a project is to be caught up in a circle of bad repetition. And it is a form of bad repetition which characterises modernity’s experience of being-on-drugs” (Boothroyd, 2000: 59). But the project in this instance is undertaken through literature, and as such it invokes and uses, perhaps ingests, “modernity’s experience” as

part of its own. It is the concrete, profane, and intrinsically real-through-autobiography modern writer on drugs at stake here, not a hypothetical one. And that author, in all three of these texts, stakes a claim for addicted authorial selfhood. “The ‘addicted condition’ has its counterpart in the holier-than-thou preference for being-straight and ‘drug free’, were such a thing possible in the miasma of influences tipping de Quincey into a too-early modernist mode, and Trocchi and Burroughs into postmodernism as they hang on to the structure of the novel precisely by denigrating it. They make a bastion of the “addicted condition”. They seek it out, they immortalise it, and thus are trapped within it, personally, textually, and by legacy and reputation. They write themselves into it, and achieve ownership of immersive subjective experience through positioning the troubled self as the subject of their work.

Derrida develops the idea of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ modes of writing in relation to memory and reality, suggesting that the same way of thinking, of distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is applicable, or applied, to drug use. “What do we hold against the drug addict?...That he cuts himself off from the world...that he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction” (Derrida, 1995:235). In other words, that the experience the addict chooses is not a shared experience of reality. It is not only different and solitary, it is ‘false’, artificial, a matter of “simulacrum” rather than ‘truth’. But what about the addicted author, or the fictional addict, or the hybrid constructed in the opiate novel, the literary addict? This constructed self is both and neither, on the cusp of the contradiction. Derrida’s distinction only works if we subscribe to a particular framework of characterising what constitutes ‘reality’ and what is held to be artificial. Is the addict’s experience not a reality? If it is as significant to the user as consensual ‘reality’, if to some extent it is ‘truer’ for him, however limited this might seem to another, does this disqualify it from authenticity? From within a heroin-induced fugue, Necchi writes: “...the illusory sense of adequacy induced in a man by the drug. Illusory? Can a... ‘datum’ be false? Inadequate? In relation to what? The facts? What facts? Marxian facts? Freudian facts? Mendelian facts? More and more I find it necessary to suspend such facts, to exist simply in abeyance” (11).

For Necchi, the drug experience, which he is perfectly able to distinguish from ‘reality’, and equally able to let it merge with exterior ‘reality’ when he feels the text requires it, is, like writing, a matter of authenticity, wholeness, integrity. Without the stepping-stone of a moral judgement the distinction is difficult to make. Trocchi explicitly, and de Quincey and Burroughs implicitly, insist on the validity of this position of liminal identity, of ‘existing’ “in abeyance” as neither addicts or writers, but as the particular modern literary hybrid author-addicts they themselves have written into being.

If in ‘modernity’ we still suppose there to be some affinity between, on the one hand, the experience of fiction...and, on the other hand, the world of drug use; and if we imagine this affinity even when the poet does not search for any ‘artificial paradise’, in that case the writer is accepted only to the degree that he allows himself to be reintegrated by the institutions.” (Derrida, 1995:236)

These three authors not only believe in such an ‘affinity’, but insist on it, and allow their textual personas to play out this central relationship. They flatly refuse to be “reintegrated” to any extent; they refuse the system outlined by Derrida. Yet they are concerned with production, not with a completely internalised experience. They write in search of the “legitimation” that “has to do with the evaluation of a productivity which is at least interpreted as a source of truth, albeit one that comes through the medium of fiction” (ibid), but this ‘truth’ is a very subjective, personal one. It is the focus of not one isolated text but several, a body of work of which these three are exemplary. The idea of personal ‘truth’ in relation to addiction and writing forms an ‘illegitimate’ tradition, a deviant lineage.

Derrida likens the idea of the drug-inspired origin of writing as, rather than being an aberration in a secularly sanctified space of literature in culture, a continuation of notions of “gods, the daemon, the muse, inspiration” (Derrida, 1995:238). The distinction, if one can be made, would be along “nature/culture” or “nature/convention” (Derrida, 1995:240) or authentic/ artificial lines, but the constructed nature of notions like “the daemon” or “the muse” through literary (over)use, along with the changing shape of the ‘real’ ‘natural’ context of cultural life and production makes it difficult to do so. The modern and postmodern natural context is increasingly inorganic, urban, technological. The notion that “even if the work...[is] submitted to the dictation of the other, still we require

that this alterity be authentic and not factitious, neither simulated nor stimulated by artificial projections”, “this authenticity” being the grounds on which “drug addiction is condemned” (Derrida, 1995: 241) has for some time now been becoming tenuous. There is a concern with authenticity, with being true to an alternative sense of the ‘real’ which is strengthened in drug texts. This is problematic, but it can no longer, if it ever could, be discredited on grounds of ‘inauthenticity’.

Derrida calls these ideas of ‘inspiration’ “forms of originary alienation” (ibid), and that, rather than the form such alienation might have ascribed to it, seems to be the issue. If drugs can function like muses in writing, on some level, it is because they represent that “originary alienation” which the searching for or openness to or even belief in ‘inspiration’ stems from. In this sense, there is a ‘rupture’ behind the drug use of the writer, as well as behind the writing. On this level the two come together – they are both attempts to deal with, work around, and derive from, that gap, that “originary alienation”. There are drug addicts who don’t write and writers who don’t take drugs, and they are a majority. But in those instances where the two come together, this might be why. “If you simply put heroin down you are avoiding the issue”, Necchi notes in *Cain’s Book*, “It isn’t the horse...It is the pale rider” (76). Although drug use, especially on Trocchi’s level, can be understood as (self) destructive, and writing creative, they are both engaged with encountering and remedying that gap, that pervasive sense of alienation. Perhaps if something is added, like a drug, or if something is taken out, like a text, an equilibrium, a ‘body’, a wholeness, can be attained. Paradoxically, both behaviours, drug use and writing, serve to reinforce that sense of alienation as/at source, and thus to constantly recreate and dismantle a perpetual space of liminality. Boon stresses that “Derrida...seeks to stress that the desire and pursuit, by any means, of the dual perspective of seeing things from the supposed border between them, is also impossible, and moreover a characteristic trait of the ‘liminal’ intellectual, artist or writer, or drug-taker” (Boon, 2000: 53). This false positioning is unsatisfactory, or naïve, he seems to suggest, but nevertheless it is favoured and entrenched, perhaps to the point of making an unstable position too fixed, too comfortable. “That drugs cannot be a means of transcendence, of passage to an ‘elsewhere’, is not only made clear in everything Derrida has said about the *pharmakon*,

but is echoed again in his discussion of 'drugs' in 'The Rhetoric of Drugs'" (Boon, 2000: 55). But in this type of drug writing, to which his ideas seem most appropriately matched, transcendence, other than the methodological in terms of breaching the surface layer of language, is not the issue. Wholeness and integration are, but the 'going far out' articulated by Burroughs, hinted at by de Quincey, and described by Trocchi, is not in search of a beyond, but a within from which to perceive and write. That is where the experimentation takes place, not in the already entrenched addiction and the narrative reasoning around it.

Hallucinogenic drugs are usually taken in pursuit of transcendence and/or enhanced multisensory experience. Narcotic drugs, chiefly the opiates, are taken at least partly for a sense of closing in, the possibility of a smaller world around a patched-up selfhood.

The average everydayness of concern becomes blind to its possibilities, and tranquilizes itself with that which is merely 'actual'. This tranquilizing does not rule out a high degree of diligence in one's concern, but arouses it. In this case no positive new possibilities are willed, but that which is at one's disposal becomes 'tactically' altered in such a way that there is a semblance of something happening. (Ronell, 1992: 37)

Trocchi watching the desolate industrial portscape; Burroughs staring at his shoe. Both witnessing their bodies made into a distanced site of alienation, strangeness, otherness. Trocchi at sea, Burroughs underground, both attending endlessly to their need, to their typewriters, to their endless ingestion, inhabitation, and expletion of an inky substance; a murky being.

Campbell contextualises the choices made explicit in the two later novels, and thus their significance, which makes them connected to but also different from de Quincey's. "To adopt the identity of the junkie was to refuse society's own narcotics: work, marriage, civic responsibility, family duty; it was to make oneself avant garde, the anti-man; it was to escape the bounds of social consciousness, which deadened creativity, and take up residence in inner space" (Campbell, 1992: 460). Such a choice is problematic in execution, but not invalid, and partially justified by the writing produced under such self-imposed circumstances.

Other modes of radical refusal of society's metaphorical opiates seldom come under as much aggressive moral scrutiny as drug addiction. Yet it is precisely the literary space of addiction that investigates the melding of memory, identity and the influence of the opiates into literary memory, narrative, identity and voice. It also affords literary texts the spatiality of levels of experience, of which language is but one, and the idea of getting to the beneath or 'rock bottom' of experience while going increasingly further out of societal, temporal, spatial, and language realms. In this way addiction also takes on a short-hand symbolism of socio-political stance, for autonomy and against conventional structures of being, at any cost, no matter how high. It takes on as solitary, subjective, and textual the realisation, reconstitution, and repetition of the void, and the pursuit of wholeness, no matter how terminally flawed that whole.