

*RSV*

Rivista di Studi Vittoriani

---

*Volume stampato con il contributo del Dipartimento di Scienze  
Filosofiche, Pedagogiche ed Economico-Quantitative dell'Uni-  
versità degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" di Chieti e Pescara.*

Gli articoli proposti per la pubblicazione sono esaminati da due referees coperti da anonimato. Le eventuali revisioni sono obbligatorie ai fini dell'accettazione.

ISSN 1128-2290  
ISBN 978-88-3305-090-4

© 2018, Gruppo Editoriale Tabula Fati  
66100 Chieti - Via Colonna n. 148  
Tel. 0871 561806 - 335 6499393  
rsv@unich.it

Supplemento al n. 19 di IF (Aut. Trib. Chieti n. 5 del 20/06/2011)  
Direttore Responsabile: Carlo Bordoni

Finito di stampare nel mese di Gennaio 2018 dalla Digital Team di Fano (PU)

# ***RSV***

## **Rivista di Studi Vittoriani**

---

**Anno XXII**

**Luglio 2017**

**Fascicolo 44**

---

### **Direttore**

Francesco Marroni

### **Vicedirettore**

Anna Enrichetta Soccio

### **Comitato Editoriale**

Mariaconcetta Costantini, Renzo D'Agnillo,  
Michela Marroni, Tania Zulli

### **Comitato Scientifico**

Ian Campbell (University of Edinburgh)  
J.A.V. Chapple (University of Hull)  
Allan C. Christensen (John Cabot University)  
Cristina Giorcelli (Università di Roma III)  
Andrew King (University of Greenwich)  
Jacob Korg (University of Washington)  
Phillip Mallett (University of St. Andrews)  
Franco Marucci (Università di Venezia)  
Rosemarie Morgan (Yale University)  
Norman Page (University of Nottingham)  
Carlo Pagetti (Università di Milano)  
David Paroissien (University of Buckingham)  
Alan Shelston (University of Manchester)  
Sally Shuttleworth (University of Oxford)

### **Segreteria di Redazione**

Francesca D'Alfonso

*Con la collaborazione scientifica del C.U.S.V.E.  
(Centro Universitario di Studi Vittoriani e Edoardiani Chieti-Pescara)*

## SOMMARIO

### SAGGI

**Francesco Marroni**

Unweaving the Oriental Rainbow:  
Charlotte Brontë and the Byronic Paradigm ..... 7

**Yvonne Bezrucka**

Food for Dreams and an Appetite for Nations:  
Opium and Darwinian Metaphors  
in Victorian Literature ..... 31

### CONTRIBUTI

**Giovanni Bassi**

*Imagery* floreale e mito afroditico in Algernon  
Charles Swinburne: un confronto intertestuale  
fra *Poems and Ballads* e l'opera  
di Gabriele d'Annunzio ..... 53

**Francesca Caraceni**

*Loss and Gain* e il romanzo religioso: testualizzazione  
della conversione e dislocazioni dell'Io ..... 69

**Angelo Riccioni**

Maurice Hewlett and the "Sheer Magic" of Botticelli ..... 89

**Adriana D'Angelo**

Trollope e la lingua irlandese: problemi  
di idiomi e di classi sociali ..... 105

**Sylvia Handschuhmacher**

Hermeneutisches Übersetzen. Schleiermachers

Theorien als Nährboden für die moderne

Übersetzungswissenschaft ..... 119

*Recensioni di Francesca Crisante, Francesca D'Alfonso,  
Michela Marroni, Saverio Tomaiuolo.*

**Yvonne Bezrucka**

Food for Dreams and an Appetite for Nations:  
Opium and Darwinian Metaphors  
in Victorian Literature

Thou only givest these gifts to man;  
and thou hast the keys of Paradise,  
O just, subtle, and mighty opium!

— Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an Opium Eater*

1. Opium starts to appear insistently in some masterpieces of nineteenth-century English literature, and this essay aims to examine the metaphoric relevance this drug has in the literature of the period. The works I am going to take into consideration are Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), Charles Dickens's unfinished novel *Edwin Drood* (1870), Rudyard Kipling's *The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows* (1884), Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* (1890), and Joseph Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* (1895). In all these literary works, and in various ways, opium assumes a distinguished and relevant significance.

Besides being both a medicine and a dangerous drug, in these texts opium works as a powerful metonymy of the Orient, representing in strict essentialist terms the Eastern cultural identity in its supposed *otherness*. By extension, the non-oriental body that takes it, according to a dichotomous logic, is itself directly transformed into a typological cypher of the Western identity of its eater<sup>1</sup> and of its whole body, or better, organism.

<sup>1</sup> During the nineteenth century, opium was ingested in the form of

I link these collective geographical and spatial identity-readings to Herbert Spencer's demagogic and populist misreading of Darwinism. Charles Darwin, as is well-known, in his work *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) gave the status of *organism* to all biological creatures, whatever their size. He explained species in biological and evolutionary terms seeing them as the result of their environment. Their peculiar habitats and unique living-predicament constituted for him the conditions to which organisms had to adapt themselves to "biologically" survive: this meant evolving sometimes progressively, sometimes regressively. Darwin applied this same double standpoint to his conception of ethics, which he saw as an unconsciously evolutionary acquired value-system, transmitted by parents, schools, the church, or one's clan, i.e. one's specific culture. Even though these values coincide with the *doxa* and the tradition of a place, they are often wrongly perceived as being personal opinions. Nevertheless, for him and for us, but not for Spencer, individuals remain always "unique", i.e. they, easily disagree on issues, and are thus in no way culturally homogenisable. Even if people live in a predominantly imposed and inadvertently shared cultural environment, this does not necessarily mean that they share the same ethical values, as Spencer seemed to think.

For a biological species, things are different. Relevant for a possible biological retrogressive result is Darwin's five-year study of the cirripede, a small animal that adapts to its habitat by losing parts of his body, rather than producing new ones, in order to conform itself to its peculiar environment, that is, regressing as a species<sup>2</sup>.

Herbert Spencer, this is my point, appositely misreads both retrogressive and progressive Darwinian evolutionary metaphors by imprinting on both issues, biology and culture, a single and forward teleological arrow-like evolutionary direction, a fact which will have dramatic consequences for humanity.

laudanum. The substance derives from the dried sap of the *Papaver Somniferum*, whose principal alkaloid, or active substance, is morphine.

<sup>2</sup> See Yvonne Bezrucka, "The Well-Beloved": Thomas Hardy's Manifesto of Regional Aesthetics", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36, 1, 2008, pp. 227-245, where I comment on this so-called regressive development, which is probably, in reality, the best possible one, i.e. according to the specific environment in which evolution takes place.

Forgetting the example of Darwin's *cirripede*, Spencer envisages the adaptation process as being a one-direction progressive-evolution, by introducing, to get rid of anomalies, the formula of the "survival of the fittest"<sup>3</sup>. The fittest<sup>4</sup> he intends not only as the biologically "strongest", but also as axiologically best, i.e. as the ethnic most evolved species, privileged as being thus the most entitled to survival.

Spencer, subdividing the world-species on a renewed sort of medieval *scala naturae*, ranks them according to an apparently scientific logic along mere racial and ethnic stages of evolution. The Westerners are for him the strongest, most capable, most evolved species; the others are their inferiors. Projecting his own theory of civilisation peaks, Spencer portrays the cultures of the world as unequal ethnicities rather than considering them as different but equal peoples with their own rights to their specific cultural regionalism<sup>5</sup>. He created thus a taxonomical and racial ranking of "identities" amongst us — a species that is always biologically just "one" — although it is composed by the regionally diversified "many"<sup>6</sup>. What in reality he did was to provide an irrational justification for colonialism.

The books we are going to analyze speak thus of single opium eaters, that are nevertheless indirectly hinted at by their authors as if they were icons of a *collective national* identity, i.e. erasing both their single nation's cultural liminality

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Spencer used the formula in his book *Principles of Biology*, [1864], Forest Grove, OR, Pacific University Press 2002, vol. I, p. 444, but Darwin used the adjective only to mean adaptation to the peculiar environment in which a species lives, see Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, [1857] *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Darwin also uses the lemma "fittest" but intending it as fittest in adapting themselves to a specific environment, as e.g. the cirripede, a strategic difference from Spencer's misunderstanding of Darwin.

<sup>5</sup> I have examined the issue of "critical" and "strong regionalism" or essentialism in Yvonne Bezrucka, *The Invention of Northern Aesthetics in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century English Literature*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars, 2017, Chapter 4.5, pp. 147-170; in Bezrucka, "'The Well-Beloved': Thomas Hardy's Manifesto of Regional Aesthetics", *cit.*, and Yvonne Bezrucka, *Regionalismo e antiregionalismo* Trento, Luoghi/Edizioni, 1999, *Forme e caratteri del regionalismo. Mitteleuropa ed oltre*, Trento, Luoghi/Edizioni, 1997, *Le identità regionali e l'Europa*, Trento, Luoghi/Edizioni, 1997 and *Tra passato e futuro. Assaggi di teoria dell'architettura*, Trento, Autem, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 301 and p. 299.

and variety, by portraying heterogeneous people as if they were just culturally “one”. This is done from the point of view of the nation-creation and nation-narration agenda, so to pursue wanted demagogic and affect-reactions through destabilization and neglect, and, on top of these and most importantly, fear. Fear, as we shall see, is the most destabilizing emotion for humankind, a cognitive reaction to the unknown, to a perceived, even if only imagined forecast threat. Fear forces us, so to say, to find a protection from an affective intolerable present overshadowed by menace, which is often appositely evoked and called in to justify what Bernard Massumi has called “preemptive actions”<sup>7</sup>.

Implied in the opium literature we therefore find the classical Renaissance *body-politics* extension which reads the intrusion in the body/nation — the fixed and perfect organism — of a drug, as the invasion of the alien/foreign Other — opium being the metonymy of the Orient — a so-called virus that infects the body creating addiction/miscegenation. Accordingly, the body becomes a metonymy of the whole Western world, threatened to be conquered by a dangerous Eastern malady, the uncanny Freudian *Other*, objectified in the addiction we cannot get rid of.

My contention is that opium is thus used as a vehicle to instil fear, i.e. the dread for what Stephen Arata has called “reverse colonisation” and miscegenation<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, the drug will overturn the victimizer/victim code: it is the East that gains the dominating role, through opium, and not the other way around, opium being the powerful substance capable of enfeebling and enervating the citizens of England. The gamut of its presence allows its exploitation and rhetorical eristic declension as fear, used as a xenophobic vehicle, or as a sort of poetic justice revenge for the Empire’s greedy appetite for nations. Indeed, as we shall see, the Empire had used opium as the vehicle for the commercial colonisation of new territories, and China, in particular.

<sup>7</sup> See Brian Massumi, “The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seighworth, Durham, London, Duke University Press, pp. 52-70.

<sup>8</sup> See Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, Chapter 5, “The Occidental Tourist. Stoker and Reverse Colonisation”, pp. 107-132.

The opium theme will reach an explicit climax towards the turn of the century when the decline of the imperial colonial enterprise and its rebound effects will become visible in England. Signs of it will be the maimed soldiers and disoriented public officers that come back from the East, alongside with the new immigrants, arriving from the colonies to their new homeland.

Opium is, therefore, a highly loaded symbol, and, because of addiction, a palindromic symbol of both 'direct' colonisation and of 'reverse' colonisation, as the product of revenge. Nevertheless, to be clear, opium finally is a *shared* enslavement tool of which all, Easterners, Westerners, Southerners, and Northerners, become victims<sup>9</sup>.

Opium, as we have seen, is a drug, which can be ingested as laudanum, injected as cocaine, or smoked in, usually, bamboo pipes. It is nevertheless a very special sort of *food*, with unique properties: it is a powerful anaesthetic which produces relaxation, dreams, and, in these various forms, it became popular and widely used in the nineteenth century. The physician Thomas Sydenham, concocted laudanum as a compound of wine, opium, saffron and cinnamon in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, preceded by dr. George Turner who had been the first, in 1601, to sell the drug and call it "laudanum"<sup>10</sup>. Later known as *Godfrey's Cordial* or *Dover's Powder*, it was used to cure diseases, fever and all sorts of illnesses. Whether it is the food of dreams as it is for Coleridge, or, the agent to oblivion and amnesia for others, opium, first of all, produces dependence. The sluggishness it induces was soon connected with the stereotype reading of the supposed laxity of Orientals and made into an attribute of their exoticism, seeing it as an

<sup>9</sup> For an examination of the opium topic in literature see M.H. Abrams, *The Milk of Paradise: The Effects of Opium Visions on the Works of De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1934; E. Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1953; Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, London, Faber and Faber, 1968; Barry Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Charlottesville, Virginia University Press, 1995. For an analysis and a study of the legacy that the opium wars have had and still have today for the nations implied in the trade see Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of China*, Picador, London, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Hodgson, *In the Arms of Morpheus: The Tragic History of Laudanum, Morphine and Patent Medicines*, New York, Firefly, 2001, p. 104.

endemic characteristic of theirs<sup>11</sup>. What it produced, though, was a panacea effect for all who took it: the flight from responsibilities and roles, an escape from conformism and conventions, and oblivion from/of remorse, unhappiness, guilt.

It is in this final unforeseen outcome that opium will exemplify contamination and reverse infection and its development into an upturn of the initial terms of the dependence of the East on the West, rather than the contrary, colonisers becoming themselves colonised. The effects of addiction, the transformation of dreams into nightmares, so well described by De Quincey and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, will thus, on the one hand, instil curiosity about the drug but, on the other, will also inspire fears for a possible contamination. Contamination, in its turn, was to be related to the openly racist and dreaded possibility of ethnic miscegenation that xenophobes wanted to prevent at all costs. The meeting of East and West and a new “ethnicity” that this might produce (*Dracula docet*), which, rightly seen, is only the result of the history of humanity and its migrations: the engrafting of peoples on peoples creating new people. Fearful images are thus covertly conveyed and rhetorically hinted at, at first to foster discrimination, but secondly, towards the end of the century, also leading to a downright racist attitude, with Stoker’s *Dracula* but also in some debatable works by Conan Doyle<sup>12</sup>. The scary outcome of opium ingestion — that of a body now colonised by a likely lifelong addiction, like the virus that the vampire spreads — becomes thus a prior vehicle and means for an emotional affect-reaction: the ethnic hate that apparently neutral images, in reality, hide: the vampire, for example, sucks the blood (a metonymy for race) from its victims enfeebling them (a metonymy for miscegenation).

These perilous and racist images were used to create metaphors that the most successful horror story of the nineteenth century would exploit to its paramount excess: Bram Stoker’s *Count Dracula* (1897) will literally *embody* all the issues

<sup>11</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London, Penguin, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> See my *Oggetti e collezioni nella letteratura inglese dell’Ottocento*, Part 2, Chapter 6, pp. 147-166, available at <https://uinvr.academia.edu/YvonneBezrucka/Papers> (last accessed 18 February, 2018).

connected with the fear of ethnic contact through explicit contamination images related to blood. Being an Easterner, and being infectious, the Count graphically stands for the complex corpus of issues previously developed in the terms of opium infection and addiction. Not by chance, the pack of friends, defenders of Lucy, his victim, that will, in the end, get rid of him, will be Englishmen and Americans. The battle between East and West is disclosed by Lucy's surname, "Westenra", a name, not by chance, homophonic with *Westerner*, the essentialist interpretation of Western-ness being here put in peril. Furthermore, the book leaves its readers with the sense of an uncompleted mission: the infected retinue of Dracula's race of vampires has not been entirely eradicated, an omen to stay on one's guard.

However, let us now start with the history connected to opium. Opium was at first used by the English, that brought it from India, to have some material goods to trade with, in payment of the Chinese peasants to avoid paying for their merchandise in specie. The Chinese people, whose Emperor Yongzheng had banned the non-medical use of opium in 1729, had indeed got very soon addicted to the drug, and willingly accepted it, in Canton, in payment for their merchandise, eschewing the ban on its importation emitted in 1796. The trade was forbidden by the Chinese state because its use had far to quickly spread even among troops. Lin Zexu, a phenomenal imperial commissioner, did all he could to stop the traffic even writing a letter addressed to Queen Victoria herself:

We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand *Li* from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making a great profit. The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Lin Zexu, "Open Letter Addressed to the Sovereign of England and Published in canton" (1839), in Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, *China's*

The Queen, apparently, never received it. This, in the end, gave rise to the Opium Wars. The I Opium War (1840-1842) broke out and ended with the acquisition of Hong Kong by the British. The Arrow War or Second Opium War (1856-1858) ended with the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858 which granted the English a diplomatic representation in Peking, and, more importantly, which legalized the opium trade. Furthermore, it gave over to the English the 99-year lease on Hong Kong that, as we all know, lasted even longer than that, indeed till 30th of June 1997<sup>14</sup>. The English had won: they got the right to sell opium in China, but they also got their reversal drawback: this did not protect them from becoming addicted to it themselves.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, we know from material proofs scattered in the works of Percy B. Shelley, William Wilberforce, Lord Byron, Walter Scott, John Keats, George Crabbe, Francis Thompson, William Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson, that the drug was diffused and a quite common cordial and that all these artists made use of opium. We must nevertheless keep in our mind that the drug was thought to be a medicine, officially recognised as poison only in the Sale of Poisons Bill of 1857. Famous French users were Honoré de Balzac — opium is mentioned in his *Massimilla Doni* — not to mention Charles Baudelaire and his *Les Paradis artificiels* (1860).

In England, Parliament progressively passed a series of laws to regulate the consumption of opium. These were boosted by the foundation, in 1841, of the Pharmaceutical Society, which separated chemists from pharmacists. The Pharmacy Act of 1852 confirmed this distinction and furthermore separated also GPs from pharmacists who had now to belong to a state register drawn upon the passing of an examination. In 1860, the United Society of Chemists and Druggists was constituted, but in 1863, to control the indiscriminate selling of drugs, pharmacists passed under the supervision of the medical body and the selling of laudanum needed now a medical prescription. The Pharmacy Act of 1868, eventually, regulated the consumption of the drug linking it to the necessity of a formal medical prescription.

*Response to the West*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954, pp. 24-27.

<sup>14</sup> Betty Wei, *Culture Shock! Hong Kong: A Survival Guide to Custom and Etiquette*, Tarrytown, NY, Marshall Cavendish, 2008, pp. 17-40.

Nevertheless, only in 1920, when the Dangerous Drugs Act was passed, cocaine and heroin were definitively outlawed and banned in England, preceded by the foundation of the Anglo-Oriental Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade (1874).

But to come back to literature, let us just focus on a public user, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and his work *Kubla Kahn*<sup>15</sup>. The poem explicitly mentions the drug as “honeydew” or as “milk of Paradise”, and the description of the Chinese emperor’s palace is notoriously considered to be a verbal transcription (a hypothyposis) of an opium dream.

2. The first book to render the English public aware of what an opium addiction meant was De Quincey’s autobiography, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821)<sup>16</sup>. The book portrays its author’s fascination with altered states of consciousness and his double-sided relationship with opium. Indeed, the work presents both opium pleasures and opium pains, the latter being descriptions that can be taken as emblematic for the trespassing of *limina*. Drug addiction was for De Quincey the result of an attempt to cure his stomach irritation, so much so that in the year 1813 he became a regular and confirmed opium-eater. The quantity of laudanum he took daily is impressive, “8000 drops” comparable to seven wine glasses, or “320 grains of solid opium” per day (QC, p. 71). Apart from a few years of reduced daily intake, corresponding to the first years of his marriage, in 1818 he returned to the usual doses, sometimes even reaching 12000 drops per day. This is the period when the pleasure of the “just, subtle, and mighty opium!” (QC, p. 63) will be overturned into the opium-horrors described in his *Confessions*. From these, we know that, as Coleridge also had to witness, laudanum produced, in the end, a “paralysis” of the will<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> See Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and ‘Kubla Khan’*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp. 24-27.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. William Sharp, Walter Scott, London, 1896. References to this text appear in the text as QC followed by page number.

<sup>17</sup> See Coleridge’s poem *Dejection an Ode* and the comments of Rosemary Ashtone in *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, p. 207.

Nevertheless, remarkable are the images that opium produces in his mind. We know that his father, working in the colonial business, returned home from the East only to die of tuberculosis and that Thomas was, at that time, only seven years old<sup>18</sup>. The East and the fevers one could catch remained a constant element of fearful dread for the little child. This is testified by the: “unimaginable horror which [...] dreams of oriental imagery, and mythological tortures, impressed upon me” (QC, p. 96), fears capable of producing nightmares set in Asian sceneries just as those induced by a fortuitous visit of a turbaned Malay man in 1818 (QC, p. 72). Southern Asia is constantly present and greatly exaggerated in his dreams: “Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sun-lights, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances, that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Indostan” (QC, p. 96).

De Quincey, thus, transforms the Orient and its fruit, opium, from an anodyne and medical relief — “a panacea [...] for all human woes” (QC, p. 48) — into a terrifying gothic horror:

I have often thought that, if I were compelled to forgo England, and to live in China, among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep, and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. [...] Some slight abstraction I thus attempt of my oriental dreams, which filled me always with such amazement at the monstrous scenery that horror seemed absorbed for a while in sheer astonishment (QC, p. 96).

I seemed every night to descend – into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever re-ascend. [...] 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. Sometimes I seemed to have lived for seventy or a hundred years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience (QC, p. 89).

<sup>18</sup> David Masson, *De Quincey*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1882, p. 6.

The remedy, as we see, becomes insidious and starts to take its revenge.

In Wilkie Collins's novel, *The Moonstone* (1868), opium becomes the pivotal element of the story, reifying Eastern revenge against Western misdoings, and an instrumental means for producing moral uprightness. In this work, it is used by Collins as the perfect metonymy of the Indian people. In contrast to De Quincey's novel no opium *pleasures* appear here, even though we know that Collins was himself a consumer of laudanum, which he used to cure his rheumatic disease. The plot of the story revolves around the Moonstone diamond donated by John Herncastle to his niece, Rachel. Originally, the precious stone was stolen by Herncastle from the Temple of the God of the Moon, a holy God of the Hindu, at the House of Sultan Tippoo, in India, in 1799. The year marks the English victory at Seringapatam<sup>19</sup> during the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. Of interest is the fact that rather than celebrating the English triumph, Collins focuses on the misdeeds of the English troops which he epitomizes in Herncastle's killing of the three Brahmins safeguarding the precious stone. Collins presents the atrocious act as the climax of the brutishness of the British Troops in India. This attack represented an unprecedented English nonconformist self-criticism and did not comply with the standard view that adventure books about India promoted. These, rather, preferred to turn things exactly the other way around, in orientalist terms, underlining the violence of the Indian people and whose standard view was to present the colonial enterprise as a civilising mission, in line with Kipling's *White Man's Burden* ideology.

Collins, on the contrary, focuses on the misbehaviour of the English troops that must meet the promised revenge of the dying Indian officers: "The Moonstone will have its vengeance [...] on you and yours!"<sup>20</sup> Revenge will come through opium. Once back in England, the curse starts working. Herncastle's

<sup>19</sup> In 1799, with the death in battle of Sultan Tipu, India lost the war and had to give over more than half of its territory to the British East India Company.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, London, Oxford University Press, 1928, p. 5. References to this text appear in the text as CM followed by page number.

encounter with the Orient has enslaved him to opium. The drug-addict, unable to return to a normal life, attends the “lowest slums in London” (CM, p. 34), the obnubilating dens, where also *Dorian Gray* can be found<sup>21</sup>, and where Herncastle leads his “solitary, vicious, underground life” (CM, p. 34). Once the diamond is given as a present to Rachel’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, it is unconsciously stolen by Franklin Blake, who, himself under the influence of opium, is acting as if he were an agent of the East. The precious stone will later pass into the hands of Godfrey Ablewhite and then, eventually and rightfully, get back on the forehead of its Indian God. The Orient that the English have colonised and used as a repository of precious loot takes its vengeance by enslaving their conquerors and through opium recovers its due. Confirmation comes from the fact that Herncastle always speaks of the “vengeance” the drug takes on him (CM, p. 5, p. 456, p. 440).

Kipling, in his 1888 short story “The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows”<sup>22</sup>, warns the English of what opium exactly means. The short story is an excellent description of an opium den, a real material evidence of the effects of this drug, described by the half-caste Gabral Masquitta, a real or fictional friend of Kipling, who describes in precise terms how addiction works. The drug produces fantastic dreams that, in this case, enliven static images of dragons on a coffin. However, if this, in the beginning, happens after three pipes, later, it takes a dozen to gain the same effect. Interesting is what the den stands for. It represents the denial and forgetfulness of what one cannot tolerate anymore. Committed murders, one’s failure in life, the necessity to forget the horrors one has seen, wrongdoings, etc., are all put to rest by bringing in indifference about everything, the induced “Heaven” attained “for a pipe” (KG, p. 2). The short story focuses on ten people who originally come to the den and, one by one, in less than ten years, die out. If the speaker thinks opium to be dangerous for both black and white people, the

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Curtis Marez, “The Other Addict: Reflections on Colonialism and Oscar Wilde’s Opium Smoke Screen”, *ELH*, vol. 64, No. 1, 1997, pp. 257-287.

<sup>22</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows”, in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, available at <http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/kplng046.pdf>, (last access 10 June 2016). References to this text appear in the text as KG followed by page number.

white show more propensity to addiction: “Nothing grows on you so much, if you’re white, as the Black smoke” (KG, p. 3), probably implying that these have more things than others to forget. Indeed, the “English loafer — MacSomebody” (KG, p. 4), who both drinks and smokes, is the first to die, and so does a woman only six months after trespassing the Gate of forgetfulness. The others age before time, but in the den, time does not matter, here one becomes “quiet [...] soothed and contented” (KG, p. 4). Notable is that Kipling, as underlined, is careful in internationalising the people who are the victims of opium, Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese, Indian, half-castes and so on, attributing its working to psychological motivations rather than seeing it as an internalised social problem. Oblivion covers sins and soothes private and collective failures.

The devastating effect of opium will be apparent to another fictional user: Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle’s<sup>23</sup> indictment of the drug comes to Holmes through his secretary Watson who, in “The Sign of Four”, explains to him what his thrice-daily dose can lead him to:

“Which is to-day?” I asked, — morphine or cocaine?” He raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he had opened. “It is cocaine,” he said, — “a seven-per-cent solution. Would you care to try it?” “No, indeed,” I answered, brusquely. [...] “Perhaps you are right, Watson,” he said. I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment.” “But consider!” I said earnestly. “Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. [...] Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed?”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A very convincing reading of the opium issue in Doyle’s works comes from S. Cannon Harris, “Pathological Possibilities: Contagion and Empire in Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes Stories”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31, 2 (2003), pp. 447-466.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, Gutenberg e-text: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2097/2097-h/2097-h.htm> (last accessed 15 June 2016).

Following a sort of contrary drive to the smokers in Kipling, Holmes uses cocaine as a positive tool “to rebel at stagnation”.

Opium effects are clearly outlined also in another short story: “The Man with the Twisted Lip”<sup>25</sup>. Watson’s description of the drug-addict is explicit: “a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives [...] yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man”. In the den “a sallow Malay” welcomes visitors with a ready opium pipe. The den is described as a body-snatchers’ shop who buy cadavers that presumably nobody reclaims, to sell them to doctors prepared to pay 1000 Pound each, for outland research and dissecting purposes. The East, once more, shows how well it has learnt the *thirst for money* lesson in using the English the same courtesy that they had previously used them.

Horror-like nightmares are also neatly registered in a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “A True Dream”, dated 1833, but published posthumously in 1914<sup>26</sup>. Barrett got addicted to opium for a spinal injury occurred to her when she was fifteen years old. Opium was her amreeta, her elixir. Even though she used it for medical reasons, as the incipit of her poem makes clear: “I had no evil end in view // Tho’ I trod the evil way // And why I practised the magic art // My dream it did not say”<sup>27</sup>, her 40 drops is the dose of an addict. The slimy serpents and the images of evil and death that appear in the poem make it clear that its effects completely possess her.

3. Opium also appears in Dickens’s last novel *Edwin Drood* (1870)<sup>28</sup>. Being unfinished, we can only infer how Dickens wanted to complete it but, from various hints, we know that in this detective-novel opium would have played a key role, in the

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Man with the Twisted Lip”, in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, available at <https://sherlock-holm.es/stories/pdf/a4/1-sided/adv.pdf> (last accessed 18 February 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *A True Dream*, New York, Macmillan, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, London, Penguin, 2002, “Introduction” by David Paroissien, pp. XIII-XLIII. References to this novel are in the text as ED followed by page number.

disappearance and probably the murder of the protagonist Edwin Drood<sup>29</sup>.

John Jasper, Edwin's uncle, is madly in love with Rosa, his nephew's intended. Dickens's biographer, John Forster<sup>30</sup>, refers how Dickens had summarised the novel to him: it "was to be the murder of a nephew by his uncle", which "by means of a gold ring which resisted the corrosive effects of the lime into which he had thrown the body, not only the person murdered was to be identified but the locality of the crime and the man who committed it" (LCD, II, p. 452). In Dickens's intention, the offence would have been narrated by the murderer, in his condemned cell "as if told of another" (LCD, II p. 452), probably to connect it to his campaign against capital punishment and his interest in criminal minds<sup>31</sup>. Foster continues: "Rosa was to marry Tartar, and Crisparkle the sister of Landless, who was himself, I think, to have perished in assisting Tartar in finally to unmask and seize the murderer" (LCD, II, p. 453). As R.A. Proctor points out, the theme of the murderer relating his crime, as if he were speaking of another, had already been used by Dickens twice, in "Madman's Manuscript" in *Pickwick Papers*, and in "Clock Case Confession" in *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Besides, it is in this book that Proctor posits the *resurrectionist theory* that Datchery is Drood under disguise<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Many critics have produced hypotheses on how the novel might have ended had Dickens lived to complete it, and this starting immediately after the sudden death of Dickens. Two main theories have been asserted, during the years, one taking up the clue given by John Forster that Edwin gets killed by his uncle, and the other line of thought, of the so-called "resurrectionists" like Richard A. Proctor, that believe Edwin has survived Jasper's attack, see J. Cuming Walters (ed.), *The Complete Mystery of Edwin Drood*, London, Chapman & Hall, 1912. For the opium-topic see Wenying Xu, "The Opium Trade and 'Little Dorrit': A Case of Reading Silences", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25, 1 (1997), pp. 53-66.

<sup>30</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols., London, Chapman & Hall, 1872-1873. References to this work are in the text as LCD followed by page number.

<sup>31</sup> See on this my article "A Tale of Two Cities: Charles Dickens's Political Examination of Law, Legalized Violence, Authority, and Retributive Justice", in *Practising Equity, Addressing Law: Equity in Law and Literature*, Daniela Carpi (ed.), Heidelberg, Winter, 2008, pp. 317-333, available at <https://uinvr.academia.edu/YvonneBezrucka/Papers> (last accessed 18 February 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Richard A. Proctor, *Watched by The Dead: A Loving Study of Dickens's*

If opium is the deforming substance of reality, the forger of “Paradises and Hells of visions” (ED, p. 214) into which Jasper “rushe[s]” (ED, p. 214), as he candidly tells Rosa, it is even more than that, probably the trigger for murder or, attempted, murder. However, how is it linked to the Orient?

Opium and the Orient appear distinctively in the incipit of the novel populating the dreams of John Jasper, the choir leader and would-be murderer, while he is lying in his London opium den where Princess Puffer, the den’s keeper, is supervising the situation. Once awake, Jasper is very much preoccupied to ascertain whether he has said anything that could compromise him, and Princess Puffer tries her best in reassuring him that nobody has heard anything, omitting to tell what she has heard. The power opium has of cancelling memories is thus immediately introduced and, most likely, resumed from Wilkie Collins’s novel.

John Jasper, in his dreams in the opium den, sees Sultan’s dancing-girls that strew flowers, he hears cymbals while the Sultan and his retinue retire to their Palace. Elephants come in caparisoned in gorgeous colours. We know that Princess Puffer goes twice to Cloisterham, where Jasper lives, and coming across Edwin, she tells him that “Ned”, the name used only by his uncle in calling him, is: “a bad name to have just now’. [...] ‘A threatened name. A dangerous name” (ED, p. 161), thus linking Jasper’s opium dreams to Edwin. The second time she will follow Jasper in hiding, and we know that she will express to Deputy her intention to visit the Cathedral and its crypt.

Interestingly, two Eastern characters appear in the novel, Helena and Neville Landless, whose patronymic, given Dickens’s ability to exploit symbolic connections, would probably have been used, had the book been completed. They come from Ceylon and are set by their guardian under the protection of Canon Crisparkle, but nobody exactly knows why they are in Cloisterham. We can only surmise that probably Dickens wanted somehow to relate them to Edwin Drood. They are at any rate present in the evening when Rosa feels the avid eyes of Jasper on her, while she is singing, and when Neville falls in love with her. The quarrel Neville has with Jasper and Jasper’s

*Half-Told Tale*, London, Allen, 1887, pp. 23-24, and 125, available online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015054467983;view=1up;seq=5> (last accessed 18 February 2018).

offensive word to Neville to mind his own business or that of the people of his same dark complexion: “You may know a black common fellow, or a black common boaster, when you see him [...] but you are no judge of white men” (ED, p. 79) that the narrator defines as an “insulting allusion” (ED, p. 79) will provide Jasper with the possibility of transferring doubts about the disappearance of Edwin on Neville, rather than on himself. The presence of the Oriental Landless, nevertheless, hinting at miscegenation and connected to feared ethnic decline, a standard topic for the writers alighting the fear of reverse colonisation at the end of the century, will be undermined by Dickens, as Forster refers, by his planned happy-ending marriage of Helena and Chrisparker. In this sense, even the BBC transcoding, the brilliant 2012 film adaptation of the novel by Gwyneth Hughes, will push miscegenation even further, positing the hypothesis that Neville and Helena are illegitimate siblings of Edwin, which would, not at all, have been an amiss Dickens’s spectacular *finale*. The same movie sees Jasper, under the effect of opium, kill his own brother, and Edwin’s father who was only thought to be dead, and casts a living Edwin, returning from Egypt, where he initially was meant to go.

Let us then draw a summary before analysing our last novel: opium, as was seen, is a powerful metaphor of reverse colonisation. Indeed, used by the English to enslave the Chinese; it brought about the obverse result of colonising the colonisers. We have seen that the drawbacks of addiction are analysed in Coleridge, De Quincey, Rossetti, and in its transformative aggrandizing powers in Conan Doyle. If in Collins, it is the instrument of vengeance and poetic justice, Kipling connects it to the most extreme form of exoticism, the ethical downfall of the evasion of one’s responsibilities. Dickens, for his part, measures it in psychological terms as the power capable of erasing all moral inhibitions, leading to a final loss of control, or reality-denial, unbinding the most hidden and perilous uncanny drives and evil manifestations of man’s soul, drives, that can unleash murder. These interpretations are all, apart from Collins’s hints, the shades of a unique framework that reinstates the arch-semiotic orientalist dichotomy of Eastern confusion infecting Western rationality.

4. What about Conrad? Conrad, we could say, turns matters

upside down, or, reworking the title of one of his books, looks at the issue “under Eastern eyes”, depicting the opium revenge as a deserved and just punishment for the West<sup>33</sup>.

In Conrad’s very first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1894)<sup>34</sup>, opium represents the final revenge the East exerts on the West, not only because the Western attempt to colonise the East has completely gone wrong, but because Westerners do not, Darwinistically, adapt to the new colonial environment. Opium is in this novel directly connected to all the problems settlement produces, but Conrad turns it upside down developing a revolutionary standpoint on the opium issue in nineteenth-century literature: the East reacts against the West because Westerners do not dialogue or mediate with Easterners.

The book is the story of Kaspar Almayer, a Dutch coloniser, son of a civil officer in Java, who hates his job and his native wife and is constantly dreaming of going back to the Netherlands. Almayer, following the money goal of his Australian patron, and pirate, Tom Lingard, goes to Simbal in Malesia to find a gold and diamonds mine — the re-actualization of the original, colonial, Eldorado myth — a treasure on which the two will never put their hands. Following Lingard’s advice, and in expectation of Lingard’s promised inheritance, Almayer has married a Malay woman. The woman, who is always referred to as “Mrs Almayer’s”, had been adopted by Lingard as a child after he had killed her parents. Ironically enough, he has put her into a convent to be educated in the Christian religion and into *Western* manners.

Lingard’s behaviour is revealing. The first message about the East-West relationships we get from the book is the indictment of the Westerners who act incoherently, marking a split between theory and practice, thinking and acting. Illogicality is, furthermore, confirmed by Almayer, who hates

<sup>33</sup> The indictment of the West for its role in the opium trade has recently found another important literary voice, that of Amitav Ghosh. In his “Tbis Trilogy”, composed respectively by *Sea of Poppies*, John Murray, London, 2008, *River of Smoke*, John Murray, London, 2011, whose third and last volume is *Flood of Fire*, John Murray, London, 2015, Ghosh examines the opium wars and the consequences the war has created for all the involved nations. See Amitav Ghosh’s personal blog: <http://www.amitavghosh.com/index.html> (last accessed 25 March, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, hereafter referred to in the text as CA followed by page number.

his intended but marries her, notwithstanding. This will induce his wife's rebellion and lead her to recover her native identity of "savage tigress" (CA, p. 148). Accordingly, she will also leave him and show him her disrespect, resentment and disdain both in chewing betel-nut and in collaborating with his commercial rival, the Arab Abdulla bin Selim.

Almayer's main personality trait is his acute money greed. His acquisitiveness is constantly underlined and disappointed, as when his commercial hopes get eventually crushed when the protection of the old Rajah will not be renewed by the Rajah's heir Lakamba. Furthermore, once Lakamba also dies, *helped* by Abdulla bin Selim, the great trader of Sambir and the whole Pantai region, this latter will take over even Almayer's business role with his countrymen, the Dutch, called "Orang Blanda" (CA, p. 14).

Almayer's daughter, Nina, who has come back from Singapore, where she has studied, attracts everybody's attention, and everyone wants to see her, even the new Rajah, Lakamba. However, Nina baffles both his father and the Rajah in not showing up. Even Abdulla offers money to buy her for 3000 dollars for his nephew, Syed Reshid promising to Almayer that she will become his "first wife" (CA, p. 39) out of the four allowed ones, promising him she will have the others as "her slaves" (CA, p. 40). Although Almayer does not accept, we come to understand that his thirst for money impedes him "to refuse point-blank, nor yet to say anything compromising" (CA, p. 40).

Nina is a split personality, neither a Native nor a Westerner, and the identity issue relating to her cultural belonging is at the core of her behaviour and consequent choices. She hates the Singapore society that has outcast her because she is a non-white half-caste, and she is acutely aware of her father's money hopes about her. He, on the contrary, colours his dream of going back to Amsterdam with reasons he attributes to her, grounds concocted by his egotistical mind, interested only in leaving the "miserable swamp" (CA, p. 18). Indeed, he justifies his greed for wealth and power with his belief that once back in Europe affluence would cancel Nina's "mixed blood" (CA, p. 7); thus, he erases and ignores her disillusioned feelings for the white people completely. He interprets reality from his standpoint only, missing what is going on, both at a personal and at a social level.

His, and the Western, egoism, about settlement and

colonisation is masterfully condensed in the primary symbol of the novel, the Western house<sup>35</sup>, that Kaspar, a modern Robinson Crusoe, tries to build in the exotic Borneo. The house exposes and reveals what he tries to hide even to himself. It renders the colonial taboo and goal, money — blatantly overwritten by the *White Man's Burden* logic and underwritten by the Spencerian hierarchical and racial reading of species — apparent. It, furthermore, reveals its logic, that of systematically and semiotically inscribing the original untameable landscape anew, i.e. erasing it, in a final act of appropriation. Almayer's attempt, like all similar Western endeavours to do so, will be thwarted, if not by the natives by Nature, that Darwinistically re-appropriates what is, ultimately, her own.

In the hope that a British Borneo Company will be established in Simbal he imagines "future engineers, agents, and settlers of the new Company" that will never arrive (CA, p. 153). Indeed, the foreign politics of London will leave the control of Borneo to the Dutch, who will collaborate with the Arabs. It becomes clear that the Western house — the arch-symbol of an attempted colonisation — will neither colonise the land nor be used by anyone. Seamen start to call it "Almayer's Folly" (CA, p. 152). The house, nevertheless, symbolizes the failure of the entire imperial project, but it also becomes the perfect emblem of Almayer's non-integration, which will bring about his personal, but also a collective — as Westerners — final defeat which will come through Nina's different way of relating to her own people.

Nina, not understanding Almayer's contempt for her mother, is torn between her two identities. After three years in "the quagmire of barbarism" (CA, p. 161), she can detect no difference between the "natures as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests" (CA, p. 161), and the *cultured* Europeans, recognizing in both "only the same manifestations of love and hate and sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes" (CA, p. 161). In the end, she will prefer "the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her

<sup>35</sup> For another examination of the house-topic in this novel see Krzysztof Oleksy, "The House-Motif and the Execution of the Motto in Joseph Conrad's 'Almayer's Folly'", *The Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society (U.K.)*, 4, June 1979, pp. 8-11.

Malay kinsmen” combatting “the sleek hypocrisy of [...] white people” (CA, p. 162), people that had outcast her from their society for her impossibility to be “white” (CA, p. 150).

Almayer will be utterly disappointed when Nina will scorchingly belittle his Westerner’s dreams by marrying a native, the Malay prince, Dain Maroola, abandoning him to his destiny in adopting the same eye for eye logic he had used with her mother.

Before this last event, we know that Almayer had never sought consolation “in opium” (CA, p. 150), “his white man’s pride [had] saved him from that degradation” (CA, p. 150). However, as Nina leaves with Dain and his house gets burnt, his life’s aims will lose all meaning, and he will interiorize “Almayer’s Folly” physically and psychologically.

Possessions are taken from him without reaction. What remains is only his despair (CA, p. 295) in not being able to overcome his mind, as his leitmotiv, “I cannot forget” (CA, p. 295), underlines. A Chinaman, Jim Eng, squatters into the remains of Almayer’s house, without him even realising it. Soon after, Almayer takes to smoking opium. The Chinese man gives to the house a new name, as colonisers had renamed the conquered land, and Almayer’s Folly becomes now the House of Heavenly Delight. Revenge and poetic justice come through opium that, mightily, allows Almayer, through a self-poisoning suicide, the possibility “to forget before he die[s]” (CA, p. 168).

The folly of Almayer, “the chaotic disorder of his thoughts” (CA, p. 155), is, nevertheless, not only Almayer’s own, it is the first instance of Kurtz’s, later, perceived “horror”. It is the folly of European magnitude, that of the imperial enterprise, that Almayer embodies, and on which Conrad will masterfully return with his masterpiece *Heart of Darkness*. Colonialism and cultural proselytism rather than dialogue, with what is considered to be *other*, is, already in Conrad’s very first novel, a scandalous abuse of power, epitomized in Almayer’s inability to overcome his fixed and unchangeable “one idea [...] not to forgive her; only [...] to forget her” (CA, p. 155). Nina, finally, embodies what he, in his pride and self-aggrandisement, has not been able to do: to mediate and adapt. Even when, at a certain point, a different solution comes to Almayer’s mind, his pride leaves it unheard:

What if he should let the memory of his love for her  
weaken the sense of his dignity? [...] What if he should

suddenly take her to his heart, forget his shame, and pain, and anger, and — follow her. What if he changed his heart if not his skin and made her life easier between the two loves [Almayer and Dain] that would guard her from any mischance. His heart yearned for her. What if he should say that his love for her was greater than [...] “I will never forgive you, Nina!” (CA, p. 156).

The Western house is the perfect emblem of his cultural narrowness and patronising attitude towards the place he lives in and to which he is not able to adapt. This incapacity will lead him directly to “the undying folly of his heart” (CA, p. 162). His arrogance and his unwillingness to integrate in the East — a world capable of killing Westerners just with its gnats — is wholly inadequate and severely criticized by the narrator in its colonial *hybris* and human pettiness: “That was his idea of his duty to himself — to his race — to his respectable connections; to the whole universe unsettled and shaken by this frightful catastrophe of his life” (CA, p. 155). It is a duty that, sadly, corresponds to the banality of evil of Arendtian memory that can be stopped if only something different steps in: “Forgiveness is the only way to reverse the irreversible flow of history”<sup>36</sup>.

The East, the neglected environment to which Almayer has not been able to adapt, Darwinistically, wins. Simply by absorbing him, the Orient wipes him out, completely. The East, and its agent, opium, makes him a dead branch of the existential tree, but, as Conrad underlines, rightly so. Ethically the Orient punishes him with its means to oblivion, opium, but it also wipes out the pride of all ethnic groups who can neither change nor integrate, and that can thus only face a cultural failure and downfall. Conrad, in positing Almayer as the one who does it wrong, strongly rewrites the narrative of Spencer, undermining his only positive arrow-like progressive evolution of the Westerners themselves. Almayer’s identity-protection makes the whole of the human species lose, in that mechanisms of peaceful cohabitation, usually due to migrations, have to be based on mutual acts of Darwinian adaptation so as to respect other peoples’ cultural regionalisms and this done so wherever one moves to and by whomever is going to move.

<sup>36</sup> J.B. Shepard, *Aspects of Love: An Exploration of 1 Corinthians 13*, Eugene, Wipfs and Stock, 1995, p. 76.