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*Source / Izvornik:* **Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagradiensia, 2015, 60, 131 - 144**

**Journal article, Published version**

**Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:131:666464>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-09-09**



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UDC 821.111.09 De Quincey, T.

Original scientific paper

Received on 15 July 2015

Accepted for publication on 18 May 2016

## Romantic Confession: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas de Quincey

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In the introductory part of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), De Quincey makes a distinction between French and English confessional writings by saying that 'nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that "decent drapery" which time or indulgence to human frailty may have drawn over them'. French sensibility, according to De Quincey is 'spurious and defective' while the English is always concerned with the constitution of the moral faculties. Departing from De Quincey's remark and his confessional autobiography, this paper aims to explore the origins of Romantic confessional writing and possible overlapping between Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and De Quincey's work.

It will also try to locate 'confession' within Romantic autobiographical writings, stressing the importance of a truly autonomous subject, fully conscious of his uniqueness. Furthermore, the paper will try to deal with the poststructuralist vein of thinking, departing from Linda Anderson's contention that 'autobiography represents a privileged form for a Romantic writer because it confirms his plight: the perplexity of a self forever recasting and repeating itself as text.'

*Key-words:* Thomas De Quincey, drug autobiography, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, romantic confession, romantic subjectivity

It is no accident that the term 'autobiography', entailing a special amalgam of 'autos', 'bios' and 'graphie' (oneself, life and writing), was first used in 1797 in the *Monthly Review* by a well-known essayist and polyglot, translator of German romantic literature, William Taylor of Norwich. However, the term 'autobiographer' was first extensively used by an English Romantic poet, one of the Lake Poets, Robert Southey<sup>1</sup>. This does not mean that no autobiographies were written before the beginning of the nineteenth century. The classical writers wrote about famous figures of public life, the Middle Ages produced educated

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<sup>1</sup> He also wrote on 'autobiography' for the *Quarterly* in 1809. See Harding 2005: 447.

writers who wrote about saints' lives and from Renaissance onward people wrote about their own lives. However, autobiography, as an auto-reflexive telling of one's own life's story, presupposes a special understanding of one's 'self' and therefore, biographies and legends of Antiquity and the Middle Ages are fundamentally different from 'modern' autobiography, which postulates a truly autonomous subject, fully conscious of his/her own uniqueness<sup>2</sup>. Life-writing, whether in the form of biography or autobiography, occupied the central place in Romanticism. Autobiography would also often appear in disguise. One would immediately think of S. T. Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) which combines literary criticism and sketches from the author's life and opinions, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), which combines travel narrative and the author's own difficulties of travelling as a woman.

When one thinks about the first 'modern' secular autobiography, it is impossible to avoid the name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He calls his first autobiography *The Confessions*, thus aligning himself in the long Western tradition of confessional writings inaugurated by St. Augustine (354 – 430 AD). Though St. Augustine confesses to the almighty God and does not really perceive his own life as significant, there is another dimension of Augustine's legacy which is important for his Romantic inheritors: the dichotomies inherent in the Christian way of perceiving the world, namely the opposition of spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal, immutable/changing become ultimately emanations of a single binary opposition, that of inner and outer (Taylor 1989: 128). The substance of St. Augustine's piety is summed up by a single sentence from his *Confessions*:

“And how shall I call upon my God – my God and my Lord? For when I call on Him, I ask Him to come into me. And *what place is there in me* into which my God can come? (...) I could not therefore exist, could not exist at all, O my God, unless Thou wert in me.” (*Confessions*, book I, chapter 2, p. 2, emphasis mine)

The step towards inwardness was for Augustine the step towards Truth, i. e. God, and as Charles Taylor explains, this turn inward was a decisive one in the Western tradition of thought. The 'I' or the first person standpoint becomes unavoidable thereafter. It took a long way from Augustine's seeing these sources to reside in God to Rousseau's pivotal turn to inwardness without recourse to God. Of course, one must not lose sight of the developments in continental philosophy pre-dating Rousseau's work. René Descartes was the first to embrace

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<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Middle Ages would not speak about such concepts as 'the author' and one's 'individuality' and it is futile to seek in such texts the appertaining subject. When a Croatian fourteenth-century-author, Hanibal Lucić, writes about his life in a short text called *De regno Croatiae et Dalmatiae? Paulus de Paulo*, the last words indicate that the author perceives his life as being insignificant and invaluable. The nuns of the fourteenth century writing their own confessions had to use the third person pronoun to refer to themselves and the 'I' was reserved for God only. (See Zlatar 2000)

Augustinian thinking at the beginning of the modern era, and he was responsible for the articulation of the disengaged subject: the subject asserting that the real locus of all experience is in his own mind<sup>3</sup>. With the empiricist philosophy of John Locke and David Hume, who claimed that we reach the knowledge of the surrounding world through disengagement and procedural reason, there is further development towards an idea of the autonomous subject. Although their teachings seemed to leave no place for subjectivity as we know it today, still they were a vital step in redirecting the human gaze from the heavens to man's own existence.

Now, by calling his autobiography *Confessions* (of an English Opium-Eater), de Quincey also aligns himself in the long tradition of confessional writings. However, since we are dealing here with a drug autobiography i.e. a marginal genre within Romantic autobiographical writings devoted to the life of an addict, this paper wants to illuminate what characteristics, if any, it shares with the Romantic confessional narrative. If Rousseau was the first to inaugurate 'modern' autobiography, illuminating the inner space of his own subjectivity, his *Confessions* can be taken as a sort of ur-narrative for all subsequent attempts at narrating the self. In that sense de Quincey's text proves interesting as the first drug autobiography<sup>4</sup> where the author tries to illuminate his hallucinatory inner space.

One further incitement to compare the two autobiographies comes from an interesting sentence from the introductory part of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) where de Quincey makes a distinction between French and English confessional writings by saying that

'nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that "decent drapery" which time or indulgence to human frailty may have drawn over them'. (Introduction to the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821)).

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<sup>3</sup> Though St. Augustine anticipates Descartes in a number of ideas (reflexivity becomes central to our moral understanding and he brings attention not only to the order of things in the cosmos which I seek to *find* but also to the order which I *make* as I struggle to discern my true being etc.), one must be careful not to displace Descartes from his place in the history of Western thought. Though Augustine gives a real sense to the language of inwardness, he still does not perceive the moral sources as situated within us. The healing of our sins comes from within but not from a power which is ours. Turning inward leads man upward; he turns within to accede beyond, to reach the ultimate good which resides in God. In that sense Descartes is responsible for a radical twist in the Augustinian heritage, he situates the moral sources within us (see Taylor 1989: 143-157).

<sup>4</sup> He would be succeeded by Fitz Hugh Ludlow's *Hasheesh Eater* (1857), an anonymous author's *Opium-Eating: An Autobiographical Sketch by an Habituate* (1876), and Daniel Frederick MacMartin's *Thirty Years in Hell* (1921). (See Susan Zieger 'Pioneers of Inner Space, Drug Autobiography and Manifest Destiny' (2007))

French sensibility, according to de Quincey is 'spurious and defective' while the English is always concerned with the constitution of the moral faculties. Indeed, De Quincey gives voice to the general British opinion about Rousseau's *Confessions* which were seen as immoral, vain, lustful, deceitful and hypocritical. Though in 'The Character of Rousseau' William Hazlitt praised the states of his soul, Rousseau was still not a model to be imitated but a bad example to be avoided at all costs (Harding 2005: 454). Therefore, it makes it the more interesting to compare the two confessional narratives and to find out that there is numerous overlapping.

In that sense the two confessions show an array of similarities and encounter the same difficulties that, in a more general sense, pertain to the idea of autobiography as a genre.

The numerous studies on autobiography in the past 40 years<sup>5</sup>, from Philippe Lejeune, Georges Gusdorf, James Olney, Elizabeth Bruss to Linda Anderson have shown that in every autobiography, there exists an inherent contradiction between 'auto' and 'graphic'; the very act of autobiographical writing entails a state of being in the past.<sup>6</sup> This leads us to the question of autobiography as a genre which implies that the self has a defined structure. In fact, the basic assumption of such theorists of autobiography is that the self, constructed either by memory or by figurative language or both, is finally unified, coherent and capable of agency<sup>7</sup>. These critics have embraced the concept of 'intentionality', i.e. the belief that the author becomes the origin of the truth of the text. This assumption is also backed up by the Romantic autobiography itself. The author becomes the originator of the text and therefore responsible for the ethical component in his work as the consequence of the copyright law which came about in the eighteenth century (Harding 2005: 445). Thus the writer as a legal entity claims to speak the truth and wants the reader to believe him unconditionally.

In fact, the idea of dislocating the centre of reality from the all-knowing God and locating it instead in one's own self, leads to the assumption that one has a unique story to tell. For the reader of autobiography it means that a world can be viewed from an entirely different perspective. The Romantic autobiography, as revealed in confessional narratives of the two writers, is based on the idea that one's experiences are worth recording and revealing to the world because they are different from those of the rest of the world.

The words that Rousseau chose for the beginning of *The Confessions* could not be more revealing on this point:

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<sup>5</sup> Such theorists include James Olney, Barrett J. Mandel, Georges Gusdorf, Louis A. Renza, William L. Howarth, William C. Spengemann etc.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. David P. Haney: *The Emergence of the autobiographical figure in The Prelude*, Book I, p. 34

<sup>7</sup> Such ideas were contested by post-structuralists and most of all Paul de Man who would claim that autobiography is a figure of reading which appears in all texts (see his 'Autobiography as De-facement')

"I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature<sup>8</sup>, and the man I shall portray will be myself. Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow men. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different." (*The Confessions*, Book I, p. 1)

There is no doubt that the account of Rousseau's life does not start as a humble person's report but his personal egotism is less important than the textual 'I' put so bluntly before our eyes. In saying that he was 'different', Rousseau in fact meant that he was unique. His writing about the self was a way of giving birth to oneself and the written self becomes his narcissistic projection. It is well-known that Rousseau was worried about how he looked in paintings, engravings and sculptures. Thus, when David Hume insisted that Rousseau had his portrait painted by Allan Ramsay, a famous portraitist, Rousseau thought that his face on the painting everyone admired resembled that of a fearsome Cyclops<sup>9</sup>. He could not trust other people to give a truthful representation of who he was; he could only trust himself.

De Quincey's rhetorical gesture is surprisingly the same: he wants to portray his own experiences as different and unique. Therefore, he states that his whole life has been that of a philosopher: from his birth he was made an intellectual creature. He is aware that the consequences of opium-eating have never been recorded by another man<sup>10</sup> and is proud to announce that he was the only one 'to untwist, almost to its final links, the chain of addiction which fettered him' (Original Preface, 3).

In fact, his use of opium was a coincidence since somebody gave him advice on how to alleviate the extremity of pain from rheumatic toothache. As he was sharing some of his opium experiences with S.T. Coleridge, a well-known opium addict, the latter accused him of 'voluptuousness in the use of opium'. Therefore, already at the beginning of his *Confessions*, De Quincey has to vindicate his own usage of opium on the grounds that 'Coleridge's bodily affliction was simple rheumatism', while his was 'rheumatism in the face combined with toothache.' (which is worse even than cancer on the scale of torture,16) Furthermore, Coleridge became addicted to opium despite having the strongest moral motive for abstaining from it, while de Quincey boasts of his self-conquests.

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<sup>8</sup> In Rousseau's terms 'nature' has a double meaning: it is both, the internal and the external. Rousseau claims having been close to nature in terms of a "natural" character to be found in an innocent child (it is for this reason that childhood is given such prominence in the *Confessions*). Yet, nature is also the idyllic natural world surrounding him – the landscapes of Les Charmettes, the Hermitage and the island of St. Pierre where he feels the ultimate joys of life, the happiness of being merely human.

<sup>9</sup> See the Second Dialogue in *Dialogues* where Rousseau reports on that incident.

<sup>10</sup> Except by S.T. Coleridge who would write in a short preface to 'Kubla Khan' that the poem was written one night after he experienced an opium-influenced dream



In conclusion to his attack on Coleridge, he counts on the readership to believe him entirely:

“Upon which case I need say no more, as by this time the reader is aware that Coleridge’s entire statement is perfect moonshine, and, like the sculptured imagery of the pendulous lamp in *Christabel*, ‘All carved from the carver’s brain’” (16)

Apart from claiming to be ‘the expression of authors’ truth about themselves’, it is also clear from the outset of both confessional narratives that the autobiographical pact<sup>11</sup> also involves the reader. Though Rousseau later wrote solely for himself, the real hero of his books remains the reader who alone can master the final form of his works (Howarth in Olney, 1988: 88) De Quincey evokes the ‘courteous reader’ in the very first sentence of his *Confessions* and he counts on her ability to benefit from his narrative. Yet, the reader often tends to think of herself as a detective and to look for breaches of contract and therefore her position is thus superior to author’s own, because she is there to disentangle the intricate web of meanings to be found in a single work.

In critical discussions of autobiography, Linda Anderson claims, ‘intention’ is always defined as ‘a particular kind of ‘honest’ intention which then guarantees the ‘truth’ of the writing.’ (2-3) However, there seems to be a more general hermeneutics of suspicion in the reader’s interpretation of autobiography, as revealing truth about oneself might be very disconcerting for others. In other words, the reader might read her own experiences, fears and wishes into the acts of another. Problems regarding their readership surface in different ways in Rousseau’s and De Quincey’s texts. Having experienced ‘lugubrious silence’ when publicly reading his *Confessions*, Rousseau anticipates his reading public having such fears when he decides to leave the *Dialogues* on a church altar. De Quincey, on the other hand, complains about all the original names of opium addicts being struck out behind his back in the first edition of the book (35 years ago, see Preface). He was not consulted and did not discover the absurd blanks until months afterwards. As he says: ‘Nothing could have a more ludicrous effect than this appeal to shadows – to my Lord Dash, to Dean Dash, and to Mr. Secretary Dash.’ (Original Preface, 5). In describing his own unique experience, De Quincey hopes to render service to the whole class of opium-eaters and they are, as he says, a numerous class indeed.

So, the ‘truth’ to be revealed through writing is personal but it is also a shared ‘truth’ which everyone can endorse; the individual thus transcends both social and historical difference, each individual possesses a unique selfhood which is also the expression of a universal human nature. This is because autobiography

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Autobiographical pact’ is Philippe Lejeune’s term for the affirmation of the author’s identity in the text, referring back to the name of the author on the cover. For Lejeune, the entire existence of the person we call ‘the author’ is summed up by his proper name which is above the textual ‘I’.

is by no means only a personal matter; the 'self', as expressed in both Rousseau's and De Quincey's narratives, has a universal significance. In other words, if a more or less coherent system of values could be identified in the pre-romantic and romantic eras, this system would have to reveal itself also in Rousseau's and De Quincey's autobiographical writings. In the Neuchâtel preamble to *The Confessions*, Rousseau takes it on himself to be 'un autre' for all of humankind. In the same preamble he postulates that those who claim to possess the greatest knowledge of human nature frequently know nothing other than themselves. However, one has to be careful with the meaning of Rousseau's 'truth' – it is above all 'moral truth' and not 'factual truth'. In the 4<sup>th</sup> walk of the *Reveries* he openly declares: "Moral truth, which is infinitely superior to factual truth." (71) In that sense, the purpose of his autobiographical writing is ethical – he has the freedom to choose from his past experience, freedom to act according to his will and his feelings, and this freedom has, for Rousseau, a moral dimension.

This brings us closer to De Quincey's sentence from his *Original Preface* to the *Confessions* where he claims that French sensibility is 'spurious and defective' while English is always concerned 'with the constitution of the moral faculties'. In other words, if Rousseau decided to show his 'ulcers and scars' it was meant to be, just like De Quincey's account of opium addiction, solely for the moral purposes. Yet, one has to remember that Voltaire first attacked Rousseau in an anonymous pamphlet called *Le sentiment des citoyens* (1764) for his decision to abandon his five children to the Foundlings' Hospital<sup>12</sup> and that Rousseau decided to reply by writing the *Confessions*. In that sense, the *Confessions* is not so much about revealing the self as it is about defending the self.

De Quincey's *Confessions* also conform to such a self-defensive auto-portrait. He is keen on stressing his intellectual pursuits as opposed to sensual pleasures and when he admits that he has gone too far in using opium, he is intent on drawing other people in, as if saying childishly 'look I was not the only one, and besides Coleridge was far worse than myself'. Since his own writing of the *Confessions* follows Coleridge's public exposure of De Quincey's voluptuousness in the use of opium, he decides to satirize him even further in an anecdote about Coleridge hiring men in Bristol – porters, hackney coachmen, and others – to oppose by force his entrance into any druggist's shop. As the authority for stopping him was derived simply from himself, naturally these poor men found themselves in a metaphysical fix, and the following would occur:

"Porter: 'Oh sir, really you must not; consider sir, your wife and ...'

Transcendental Philosopher: 'Wife? What wife? I have no wife!'

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<sup>12</sup> The ultimate event to be revealed has nothing to do with those petty events of Rousseau's childhood but with the matter of his five children left in the Foundlings' Home where their fate was death or something not much better (in Rousseau's time of the children committed to foundling hospitals 70% died in their first year, only about 5% lived to mature years and most of that 5% ended as tramps or beggars).



Porter: 'But, really now, you must not sir. Didn't you say no longer than yesterday...'

Transcendental Philosopher: 'Pooh, pooh! Yesterday is a long time ago. Are you aware, my man, that people are known to have dropped down dead for timely want of opium?'

Porter: 'Ay, but you tell't me not to hearken ...'

Transcendental Philosopher: 'Oh nonsense. An emergency, a shocking emergency has arisen – quite unlooked for. No matter what I told you in times long past. That which I now tell you, is – that, if you don't remove that arm of yours from the doorway of this most respectable druggist, I shall have a good ground of action against you for assault and battery.'" (*The Confessions*, 20-21)

If the act of confession, as the OED would tell us, is an acknowledgment or declaration esp. of one's faults, misdeeds or crimes, this act entails two things: the incentive for confession must be one's feeling of guilt and by confessing one eases one's conscience. In confessing one's crimes, the Romantic writer has to rely on memory as the only means of retrieving the past experiences. But, this journey back to one's own beginnings was already defined by St. Augustine as a progressive journey from childhood to adulthood with the single aim to discover the magnitude of God. Thus in his *Confessions*, we read about descriptions of the sins of each of his ages – in his infancy he was guilty of crying for milk, in his boyhood he was guilty of stealing things, in his youth he was guilty of physical passion and in his maturity he was guilty of his interest in the Neo-Platonists. In trying to find the road to truth, St. Augustine tests all the influences upon his intellectual life (Virgil, Homer, Terence, Cicero, etc.) just to realize that the greatest influence upon his life has always been the Bible.

Inherited from St. Augustine, the plot of a Romantic narrative thus becomes that of a circuitous yet progressive self-education. The return to the past is a process of mental development, broken violently by crises of despair. In the end, the mind recovers integrity and reaches a higher level, incorporating that which has intervened. In other words, the mature mind will possess powers, depth and sensitivity of awareness and will be able to justify the experience of loss and suffering (Abrams 1971:77) The attempt at writing one's autogenesis is thus circular in shape – the end is nothing but a new beginning.

The history of humankind as rendered by Rousseau is in fact only a reformulation of the story of the Garden of Eden: the development of man's rational faculties drove man out of his innocent condition, thrusting him into the world of society. The possibility of redemption exists as a process of every individual's self-education with the final metaphorical return to one's point of origin. Thus, the point of departure for a confession is a committed sin and the entire life that follows is the consequence of that sin. Rousseau confesses his petty crimes like pissing into his neighbour's pot and stealing a girl's ribbon. Furthermore, Rousseau's life begins with a trauma, as he would kill his mother almost at birth (she died 9 days after giving birth to him) and yet, he clearly states that it was another 'traumatic'

experience that had a defining role in his life: he was accused of a crime he did not commit. His guardian, Mlle Lambercier, discovered that the teeth of one of her combs were broken off and the young Jean-Jacques was accused of the 'crime' because he was the only person who had been in the room. Now, in his mature years, Rousseau remembers the event with the same bitterness in his heart:

"It is now nearly 50 years since this occurrence and I have no fear of a fresh punishment for the offense. But I declare before Heaven that I was not guilty. I had not broken, nor so much as touched the comb.(...) But do not ask me how the mischief occurred." (Book I, 29)

At the moment of this unjustifiable accusation, a timid and a docile child went through a violent change of his feelings. He began to be secretive, to rebel and to lie:

"We stayed some months longer at Bossey. We lived as we are told the first man lived in the earthly paradise, but we no longer enjoyed it; in appearance our situation was unchanged but in reality it was an entirely different kind of existence. No longer were we young people bound by ties of respect, intimacy and confidence to our guardians; we no longer looked on them as gods who read our hearts; we were less ashamed of wrongdoing, and more afraid of being caught; we began to be secretive, to rebel and to lie. All the vices of our years began to corrupt our innocence and to give an ugly turn to our amusements. Even the country no longer had for us those sweet and simple charms that touch the heart; it seemed to our eyes depressing and empty, as if it had been covered by a veil that cloaked its beauties." (book I, 30-1)

From that moment on 'paradise is lost' for Rousseau because, in Jean Starobinski's words, 'paradise is the reciprocal transparency of consciousness, a trustful communication.' (271) At first his childhood was based on trust and transparency; once having been wrongly accused, Rousseau's 'innocent self' turns into an 'artificial self' because there is no way in which trustful communication between Rousseau and the rest of the society can be re-established. The failure of communication between Rousseau and the Lamberciers becomes emblematic of the repeated failures of communication he will go through later in his life. Interestingly enough, Rousseau never blames the family for their conviction of his guilt – this situation repeats the original sin – a cruel accusation follows a petty crime of which Rousseau was not guilty. From then on, life for Rousseau becomes a circuitous journey: cast away from paradise, he must embark on a lengthy voyage before returning to the original, innocent state.

If Rousseau justifies evil and suffering as necessary conditions to the achievement of maturity and the recognition of one's identity and aim, the same idea is not so clearly expressed in De Quincey. Though he records his own petty crimes of not practicing the piano and stealing some money from a letter gone astray, De Quincey's confession is much harder to fit into the Christian narrative of sin-punishment-repentance-redemption type.

De Quincey was accused of something he *did* commit - he ran away from his guardian, Rev. Samuel H. despite his mother's wish to stay with him and finish his schooling. The word 'guardian' still 'kindled a fiery thrilling in his nerves' (28). This hostile man represented a class, as De Quincey tells us, 'that class (...) who sympathize with no spiritual sense or spiritual capacities in man and who understand by religion simply a respectable code of ethics – leaning for support upon some great mysteries dimly traced in the background and commemorated in certain great church festivals by the elder churches of Christendom (...)' (28) Besides, his father who died when De Quincey was seven years old, had too exalted an opinion of his scholarship. De Quincey calls him 'an indifferent Grecian' who asked him to memorize his 330 sermons and produce miniature abstracts or rhetorical expansions, 'preserving the exact succession of thoughts'. He felt as a 'captive in a house of bondage' and decided to escape from it. In consequence of his decision, he felt 'senselessness of joy', just like his long-revered poet Wordsworth when he celebrated the festal state of France during her First Revolution (1788-1790).

On visiting his mother in North Wales, he learns that she is not willing to support his adventure. His uncle gives him a slender allowance of a guinea a-week and his mother disapproves of a larger allowance on account that 'any larger allowance was to make proclamation to his two younger brothers that rebellion bore a premium and that mutiny was the ready road to ease and comfort.' (108) De Quincey remembers having experienced 'something like an electric shock' on hearing these words. His conscience awoke and from that moment on he feared that the evil consequences from his own example might take effect upon his brothers<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, he finds that he cannot communicate with his mother, they always think about the same act but from two opposing perspectives. As de Quincey says:

"If in this world there is one misery having no relief, it is the pressure on the heart from the incommunicable. And if another Sphinx should arise to propose another enigma to man, saying – What burden is that which only is insupportable by human fortitude? I should answer at once – it is the burden of the incommunicable." (110)

From that moment on, the paradise is lost for De Quincey as well and there is no hope for re-establishing trustful communication between his mother and himself. Where he was hoping to find pardon, he found an accusation; instead of a warm embrace, he found a chilling austerity. If his sin was to run away from his guardian, his punishment was to be left on his own and to find himself in utter poverty. For Rousseau the escape from the first accusation was to become secretive and to lie while for De Quincey the escape comes with the usage of opium. Interestingly enough, both writers plead 'not guilty!' However, by excusing themselves, they all the more accuse themselves. In Derrida's phrasing:

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<sup>13</sup> Luckily, they never did though one of his brothers also eloped from a brutal tyrant but this was not due to any misleading of his.

"The '*plus de faute*, 'no more fault' becomes right away the *plus de faute*, all the more fault. The more one excuses oneself, the less one clears oneself. Guilt is thus an inscription that is ineffaceable." (101) The two gestures become inextricably bound together.

This is where another tension is established as the central experience for both writers: the tension between guilt and deceit and the claim to exemplary self-knowledge. (272) While claiming such exemplary self-knowledge, Rousseau was also deliberately self-deceptive in the sense that he was deliberately hiding from himself what he did not want to know. Yet, at other moments it seems as if he was in the grip of a fatality that lay well beyond the reach of his will. For De Quincey the opium intoxication becomes such 'grip of a fatality beyond the reach of his will'. He yearns for an unlimited psychic expansion and instead of the real world which is full of misery, he embraces the world of dreams.

As they both rely on memory as the only tool for recapturing the lost self, memory becomes more than just a capacity for recording events, it produces the pressure of an extended moral obligation, in Frances Ferguson's words, an obligation to re-examine one's own past actions to see if their value has been altered by subsequent events (527-8). Its demand is not for accuracy or truthfulness but for the legitimacy of individual experience (romantic consciousness is charged with the revaluation of actions) and it seems that it creates a mental apparatus for producing guilt much more rapidly than it can forgive it.

The question of a confessional narrative as a text comes to the forefront here.

Narrative, in the form of written language, takes a life of its own, and is by no means under the writer's control. Thus one of the fundamental problems at the heart of the romantic autobiographical project is that of having to use language – the only means for communicating what we had been in the past and are at the moment of writing. Rousseau falls into the trap of having no other means of communicating his self but his language. In James Olney's words:

"Instead of falling silent, (Rousseau) desperately multiplied words, writing more and even more, as if sheer number could counter and reverse logical impossibility and as if language could suddenly become something other than what Rousseau had always said it was" (Olney 1998: 205). (a corrupted form of speech)

Not only do the two writers multiply words, but they also multiply themselves: the confessional narrative thus becomes a confrontation with several selves along the timeline of one's life instead of a confrontation with one, single, unified self. De Quincey asks the reader openly to skip some eight years of his life and face another 'De Quincey'. So the reader is faced with several 'Rousseaus' and several 'De Quincey's' who are names rather than persons. These names also represent the problem of a signature that cannot sign for itself. We cannot expect the signature to sign the autobiographical pact since it is nothing but "the mark of articulation at the border between life and letters, body and language." (39), to use Peggy Kamuf's words. In de Man's phrasing, all texts are autobiographical and, by the same token, none of them is (1984:70).

Therefore, the narrative of *The Confessions* edges over into the dialogue of Rousseau, *judge of Jean-Jacques* and into the meditation of the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, just as the first experiences of opium-addiction in *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* edge over into the dream world of *Suspiria de Profundis*. Read together these works testify to the formation of an unstable Romantic subject whose formative basis is language itself. Paradoxically enough, in every attempt to perform itself, the subject will be irremediably split *in* and *by* language and by the link established between the authorial voice and its audience.

Rousseau seems to be aware of the fact when at the very beginning of his *Confessions*, he admits that he will need 'a new language' to express his unique being. On the one hand, he believes in the vatic power of words, while on the other hand, he despairs over their intransigency. In fact, without such 'new language' which would fill in the gaps in one's memory and finally 'tell it all', the whole project of confession ultimately proves to be a futile task. One can never rely entirely on memory, or imagination, or one's surroundings just as one can never treat language as an all-powerful tool for expressing the self. At one point, De Quincey realizes the impossibility of confession and says:

"But this case (the case of some dark forces moving within his mind uninvited, as if echoing the political menaces of the earth), in common with many others, exemplifies to my mind the mere impossibility of making full and frank 'Confessions'" (64)

The wide gap between the author of the narrative and his alter egos makes of them several consciousnesses and the freedom of artistic creation has for its other side the abyss of endless figuration (Jay 1984: iv) or as De Quincey put it 'the mere impossibility of making full and frank confessions'.

Both Rousseau's and De Quincey's confessional accounts demonstrate that a unified subject is nothing but an illusion. Their autobiographical projects obviously have to do more with self-presentation and self-fashioning than they would have us believe and it is through the violation of the autobiographical genre that their narratives relate to the very tradition of the genre.

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## Romantička ispovijest: Jean-Jacques Rousseau i Thomas de Quincey

U uvodnom dijelu Ispovijesti engleskog uživatelja opijuma (1821), De Quincey pravi razliku između francuske i engleske ispovjedne proze rekavši da 'ništa nije toliko odbojno engleskim osjećajima koliko je to uprizorenje moralnih grozota I ožiljaka jednog ljudskog bića, koje sa sebe skida 'finu koprenu' koju su stvorili vrijeme ili popustljivost prema ljudskim slabostima. Francuski je senzibilitet, kako dodaje De Quincey, 'pokvaren i defektan' dok se engleski uvijek primarno bavi izgrađivanjem etičkih vrijednosti. Polazeći od ove De Quinceyjeve tvrdnje i njegove ispovjedne proze ovisnika o opijumu, ovaj se članak bavi izvorima romantičkog ispovjednog žanra te sličnostima između Jean-Jacques Rousseaua i De Quinceyja.

Članak smješta ispovijest unutar romantičke autobiografije, naglašavajući važnost autonomnog subjekta, potpuno svjesnog svoje jedinstvenosti.

Osim toga, članak uzima poststrukturalističku tezu Linde Anderson da je 'autobiografija najvažnija forma za romantičkog pisca zato što samo potvrđuje ozbiljnost njegovog položaja, tj. kompleksnost romantičkog jastva koje se unedogled preoblikuje i ponavlja kao tekst.'

*Ključne riječi:* Thomas De Quincey, autobiografija ovisnika, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, romantička ispovjedna proza, romantičko jastvo

**Acknowledgements:** Research for this essay was supported by the Croatian Science Foundation funding of project 'A Cultural History of Capitalism: Britain, America, Croatia' (project leader: Professor Tatjana Jukić, English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia)