



Abstract: Depicted as hallucinations, hauntings, ghosts and dreams, the females of De Quincey's most controversial prose texts function as proto-feminist entities, where they usurp patriarchal linguistic structures by creating entirely new language systems. De Quincey's delirious dream sequences present a trifecta of female emotive power: analyzed through the feminist lens of De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, this essay demonstrates how De Quincey's 'lost girls' exceed Gothic supernatural conventions to control the agency of a female-dominated dreamscape.

De Quincey's Catastrophic Grief: The Four 'Lost Girls' of *Confessions of an English Opium- Eater and Suspiria de Profundis*

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Four female characters in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and *Suspiria de Profundis* demonstrate and then subvert the patriarchal feminine mystery trope through De Quincey's extension of traditional Gothic themes. Where Ann, Elizabeth, and Jane are initially perceived by the readers as 'real' individuals, through the progression of both *Confessions* and *Suspiria*, they are transitioned into hauntings, dreams, or divine shadows, along with the powerful ghostly figure of Levana. The function of the female figure in De Quincey's work is seen as proto-feminist and anti-misogynist: as an author, he presents characters that gain power through their manipulation of masculine emotions of grief and loss. The feminine is a source of emotive power

in both *Suspiria* and *Confessions*; happiness is stripped away from the patriarchal as a power dynamic is re-established that presents women as rulers of feeling. Proceeding in a ladder structure from Ann to Elizabeth and Jane and, finally, to Levana, this essay constructs an argument that De Quincey's female figures 'build up' in a triad of strength as we progress through his work. Where Ann functions as a somewhat liminal, strange creature, Levana eventually demonstrates true feminine power and passion. Read alongside the feminist lens of Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, this essay will demonstrate how De Quincey's 'lost' female figures exceed Gothic supernatural conventions of temporality, identity, and power to eventually present a female-dominated dreamscape that retains agency through the power of hallucination.

This essay will be divided into four sections. First, it will provide the reader with an overview of the chapter "Myth and Reality" from Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, describing the trope of the feminine mystery and analyzing the relationship of the feminine to textual male figures. The traditional patriarchal power dynamic will be defined and described, and feminine agency and capability will be discussed in relation to the overarching historical misogynist literary framework. Second, I will explicate De Quincey's gender politics, both in reference to the female Gothic of his time and his ideology on female writers. His constantly recurring dreams will be presented and studied within a framework of a triptych of female characters. Third, a brief background of De Quincey's use and extension of the Gothic will be given to help frame the argument within the context of

manipulated and exaggerated literary tropes applied to women in De Quincey's works. Finally, I perform a close reading of Ann, Jane and Elizabeth, and then Levana; these female entities in De Quincey's work will be presented as proto-feminist through their manipulation of De Beauvoir's feminine mystery trope as well as through their mutilation of traditional Gothic stereotypes.

The dichotomy and struggle between real and imaginary textual spaces initially emerges through the character of Ann. Ann, throughout *Confessions*, lacks speech. She is described through language and yet does not assert agency through possession of a linguistic system. We, as readers, only understand her through the gaze of De Quincey's narrator. Her inability to speak – a dearth of words – seemingly derails her autonomy and figure. The value of her life is summed up in relation to De Quincey's presence: she is valued in relation to the feminized trait of sacrifice and is painted as a Holy Mother figure, a Mary Magdalene by another name. De Quincey writes:

But the truth is, that at no time of my life have I been a person to hold myself polluted by the touch or approach of any creature that wore a human shape: on the contrary, from my very earliest youth it has been my pride to converse familiarly, *more Socratico*, with all human beings, man, woman, and child, that chance might fling in my way.

(*Confessions* 70; emphasis in original)

The Christian undercurrent is clear: the relationship between the narrator and Ann, against whom the narrator judges his pride,

seemingly mimics that of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Whereas, previously, the narrator was never “polluted by the touch or approach of any creature that wore a human shape” (70), Ann’s presence is subsequently rationalized as spiritual rather than as an ordinary encounter with a sex worker; she is not human but instead a strange other. De Quincey continues, claiming that man should “look upon himself as a Catholic creature” (70), investing sacrosanctity and holiness in his relationship with Ann. Yet Ann’s occupation as a sex worker doesn’t present her with any monetary or sexual power, only a devaluing of self – De Quincey’s narrator repeatedly emphasizes that he associates with Ann *despite* her occupation. From this perspective, Ann fits into an anti-feminist trope of a stereotyped feminine presence, and she is thus easily moulded into De Beauvoir’s feminine mystery trope.

De Beauvoir argues that literary myths about women promote a certain patriarchal view of the feminine, for “[t]o pose Woman is to pose the absolute Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being” (253), and this analysis can be read in line with similar Orientalist representations of east Asian figures and characters of colour. Just as De Quincey will later manipulate eastern imagery when depicting Ann, De Beauvoir argues that this binary othering emphasizes and values the male over the female, creating a structural break between the two genders. This process results in unique presentations of the feminine that are explicated through De Quincey’s writings. De Beauvoir argues that the feminine mystery is a trope just as common as that of the

goddess mother, the demon, the evil female, or the feminine muse. The feminine mystery is thus defined as absolute Other, the unknown and mysterious opposite to the known male figure, "permit[ting] an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable" (256).

The overarching stereotype of the myth of a woman, or feminine mystery, is highly advantageous to the ruling male class, as De Beauvoir notes. Male authors manipulate and utilize this pretext of a feminine mystery myth to justify their control of patriarchal privileges and rights. The feminine mystery is the most common trope, De Beauvoir argues, as "the man who 'does not understand' a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind" (256). She eventually formally defines "the Feminine Mystery . . . in the mythology of the absolute Other" (259), arguing that literature always fails to display this Other adequately. De Beauvoir's theory lacks a defining time period for the emergence of the feminine mystery, instead listing the various antonym pairs of femininity, such as female goddess versus the female demon. Women, whether negative or positive, only appear at the beginning or introduction as "strange, enigmatic figures" (259), and unless "the story remains unfinished they give up their secret in the end and they are then simply consistent and transparent persons" (260). The feminine mystery is a transgeneric trope; there is no teleological development of the myth itself. Instead, it functions as a common stereotype across spatial and temporal boundaries. As a theory, it is in effect anti-historicist. We can tie this broad theoretical conception to De Quincey's work with De Beauvoir's assertion that, "if the loved

one's behavior is capricious, her remarks stupid, then the mystery serves to excuse it all" (256). Does De Quincey attempt to 'excuse' his female characters' mystery, or do his female figures reclaim their mystery in radical new ways, exerting this mystery over the male character and dominating him through dreams?

De Beauvoir suggests that the presence of the female is relegated to a dream or a myth: her argument is that, while the feminine mystery is initially a desirable figure, by the conclusion of a novel, she is reduced to a series of dull stereotypes. In other words, the masculine *solves* the problem of the female by the conclusion, thus owning and controlling any sense of feminine agency. Through their very mystery, women are eventually denied recognition of self and success.

De Quincey's own relationship with women is conflicted and challenging to interpret, whether from a proto- or anti-feminist perspective. In *Thomas De Quincey*, Hugh Davies reveals that the fundamental coherence between *Confessions* and *Suspiria* lies in the themes of emotion and recollection, which are also intimately tied to the feminine by De Quincey. Davies claims that three female figures – Ann, Elizabeth, and Kate Wordsworth – are always woven interchangeably into De Quincey's recurring dreams of death and summer (30). This can be easily linked to the triptych of three ambiguously allegorical female characters functioning as metaphors of grief in *Confessions* and *Suspiria*. In De Quincey's memoirs, Davies claims, young girls are constantly correlated with summer, sunlight, Palestine, Jerusalem, and Easter Sunday (30-31); the contrasting link

is between beauty and death, a form of grief that occurs and haunts De Quincey in a holy, sacrosanct, or beautiful setting. This grief and 'haunting' indicates a loss of spirituality when the feminine mystery dissipates. These connections will later explain the entanglement between Ann and Jerusalem.

According to Robert Woof, editor of *Thomas De Quincey: An English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey wrote on 5 May 1803 that he pictured the heroine of a novel dying on the island of a lake: "[T]he morning of this event must be still – calm – balmy – beautifully blue, etc." (qtd. in Woof 40). De Quincey then claimed that he imagined another opposing figure, "a man in the dim and shadowy perspective and (as it were) in a dream . . . pass[ing] along in silence . . . he wraps himself up in the dark recesses of his own soul" (qtd. in Woof 40). There is a clear association of the female, summer days, and death with a male figure haunted, as a result, by the impact by the feminine. Again, this grief at the loss of a mysterious female figure causes a powerful emotional response in the male, transforming his existence into a silent haunting, and this transformation from noise to silence will feature prominently in my later discussion of gendered linguistic systems in *Suspiria*.

De Quincey's gender politics are complicated and ambiguous. In an essay titled "Style," De Quincey claims that the best women writers are not the ones currently published; instead, they are "well-educated women not professionally given to literature" (qtd. in Agnew 142). De Quincey argues that women speak with more truth and simplicity due to their biological difference and social circumstance. In

Thomas De Quincey: British Rhetoric's Romantic Turn, Lois Agnew synthesizes De Quincey's belief that women writers' "strong feelings give rise to the types of urgent situations that demand an authentic response" (100), and De Quincey is thus obviously influenced by ideas of class separation and boundaries. Agnew suggests that "De Quincey's hope that effective language use can be maintained . . . is bounded by both class and gender" (100). De Quincey presents a typical binary between men and women that venerates holy, innocent female literary figures, rather than allowing a multiplicity of experiences. Even so, for his time, De Quincey's theories on the capability of *some* women to produce excellent textual discourse *is* proto-feminist, although it would be anachronistic to argue that he entirely understood gender politics and gendered conversations about literary ability.¹

De Quincey's unusual gendered ideology is furthered through his manipulation and extension of the Gothic in both *Confessions* and *Suspiria*. According to Patrick Bridgwater in *De Quincey's Gothic Masquerade*, *Confessions* involves a so-called Gothification process that occurs between memory and nostalgia: his sentences "stretch along the edge of meaning, almost beyond meaning, thereby generating almost as much darkness and uncertainty as light and certainty" (88). This leads towards a proto-surreality that is transgressive, as its aim is to "reveal what nature chooses to conceal

¹ Rei Terada discusses De Quincey's understanding of gender further in "Living a Ruined Life: De Quincey Beyond the Worst," as does Julianne Smith in "Private Practice: Thomas De Quincey, Margaret Oliphant, and the Construction of Women's Rhetoric in the Victorian Periodical Press."

in order not to overburden consciousness" (88). Chronic concerns about anxiety, abandonment, betrayal, and treachery feature prominently in De Quincey's work, and these are extensions of traditional Gothic tropes. Additionally, his obsessions with mysteries and riddles exaggerates usual Gothic understandings of fear. The Romantic terror at the idea "of a universal conspiracy against society" (88) is seen through De Quincey's constant reference to hauntings and paranoia. Called into question are his ideas of guilt, loss, and paralysis from nostalgia. Bridgwater emphasizes that neither *Confessions* nor *Suspiria* is an entirely Gothic novel; rather, they create Gothic "interior space[s]" (89) wherein arises a sense of internal loss from grief, suffering, and trauma.

In a recent article, Joseph Crawford explores the role of ghosts and hauntings in De Quincey's prose, interpreting the effects as textual exorcisms and practical necromancies that function as tropes for Gothic memory. Crawford claims that even the act of "an autobiography is a sustained work of necromancy" (227), where De Quincey's writings figure as attempts to resolve deep psychological sufferings and trauma. The endless "echoing and re-echoing of Ann and De Quincey's final parting" (Crawford 230), as initially seen in *Confessions* and then consistently throughout his later works, functions as a haunting of the imagination and a Romantic model of suffering.

This idea that De Quincey's opium nightmares are Gothic revisions of reality blends well into De Quincey's experience in London. In *Confessions*, not only is De Quincey later tormented by

ghosts, but he also meets a "hunger-bitten" (67) child in the unoccupied house of a lawyer, a little girl who constantly suffers from a fear of spirits: "The house was large; and from the want of furniture, the noise of the rats made a prodigious echoing on the spacious stair-case and hall; and, amidst the real fleshly ills of the cold, and I fear, hunger, the forsaken child had found leisure to suffer still more (it appeared) from the self-created one of ghosts" (67). It would be difficult not to see the Gothic influence in the above description: De Quincey describes the house as filled with "rats" who make "echo[es]," containing a "spacious stair-case and hall," and, later, the office of the lawyer himself is characterized as a "Blue-beard room, which the poor child believed to be haunted" (69). All of these elements, combined with the suffering of the little girl, create a clear Gothic atmosphere. De Quincey goes on to proclaim that his sleep was tormented so severely that "I could hear myself moaning . . . wakened suddenly by my own voice," "a hideous sensation began to haunt me as soon as I fell into a slumber . . . a sort of twitching," and "I slept only from exhaustion" (67). It is not the house that terrifies De Quincey, unlike the little girl; the Gothic emerges through the vacuum of his dreams, a haunting that shifts the reader's perspective from day to night. This defocalization from obvious external stimuli, such as a haunted house, to an internal suffering displaces an entirely Gothic reading of De Quincey's text.

The question of Gothic temporality also raises liminal states in De Quincey's writings. Martin Wallen writes that in *Confessions*, "[t]he non-opium world is temporal, the opium world is atemporal" (100).

The opium-eater, Wallen argues, is simultaneously identical to the opium itself, as his will cannot be externalized from the very object; this correlation illustrates De Quincey's opium-induced dream narratives to appropriate infinity as well as 'real space.' Wallen notes that De Quincey's body on opium "expands by bringing the most disparate objects possible into a syntactic conjunction, periphrastically encompassing vast spaces, and managing to suggest even vaster ones" (101). Opium functions in *Confessions* to transform De Quincey's body into a version of a sacred soul, traveling through infinite dreams and nightmares in a supernatural way, "connecting him to the cosmos and to God" (101). What De Quincey balances, in fact, is the fantastical and the ordinary.

The spectacle of the Gothic fantasy and exaggeration further extends in *Confessions* to the dualistic properties of De Quincey's infamous descriptions of opium. Opium is not merely an over-the-counter narcotic: to De Quincey, it is a supernatural drink, a "dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain!" that is capable of inducing "heart-quaking vibrations of sad and happy remembrances!" (88). Just as De Quincey's *Confessions* hovers between autobiography and myth, opium functions in the tale as an unstable, hazy object, balanced between memories of ecstasy and devastation: "[H]ere was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered: happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket: portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint bottle: and peace of mind could be sent down in gallons by the mail coach" (89). There is a clear blending

here between the "celestial drug" (89) and common life: De Quincey melds together a seemingly magical drink and the monotonies of ordinary living. Suddenly, the reader is plunged into an environment in which one can walk to a druggist and buy a vial of pure happiness. De Quincey thus blurs the lines between the sacred and the biographical, and the Gothic supernatural surpasses its bounds. While opium is at once a physical item, it simultaneously occupies a spiritual space in De Quincey's imagination. This liminal existence, hovering between two states, functions similarly to De Quincey's understanding of femininity.

Identical to this Gothic blending of the real and the supernatural in De Quincey's descriptions of opium, Ann begins to regain agency and power over De Quincey's narrator through her presence in his dreams. Whereas her introduction as a half-human, half-dream can be read as reductive, her entrance fully into De Quincey's imagination marks an increase in power and importance. Ann morphs, through her entrance into De Quincey's dreamscape, into a personified, symbolic nostalgia, capable of evoking intense feelings of regret and loss. In other words, she emerges into a haunting.

Where Ann is described in the real world by De Quincey as a "poor, friendless girl" (71) whose greatest accomplishment is self-sacrifice for the masculine narrator, she ultimately emerges, through her inclusion in dreams, as a being capable of evoking powerful discontent in De Quincey's 'real' world. De Quincey writes, "But, to this hour, I have never [again] heard a syllable about her. This, amongst such troubles as most men meet with in this life, had been

my heaviest affliction" (83). Ann, unlike De Beauvoir's study of the feminine mystery, does not lose her haunting qualities by the end of *Confessions*. Instead, she subverts the trope of the feminine mystery by engaging with it in powerful ways against the masculine narrator.

Despite her inability to communicate to the reader, Ann re-emerges in the final section of *Confessions* as capable of evoking intense emotion. The narrator acknowledges her presence in his nightmares:

The scene was an oriental one; and there also it was Easter Sunday, and very early in the morning. And at a vast distance were visible, as a stain upon the horizon, the domes and cupolas of a great city [Jerusalem] . . . And not a bow-shot from me, upon a stone, and shaded by Judean plants, there sat a woman; and I looked; and it was – Ann! She fixed her eyes upon me earnestly; and I said to her at length: "So then I have found you at last." I waited: but she answered me not a word. (127-28)

This mix and association of Ann with both the Orient and Catholicism plays with the reader's understanding of the Other. That Ann *does not engage* in linguistic action with the narrator reveals her power; that is, her ability to deny speech and communication, her retaining of mystery. And that De Quincey uses the word "stain" to describe Jerusalem seems to suggest a binary switch-up, where the entire religious system is questioned and Ann, as Mary Magdalene, is revered as powerful. Set within the landscape of the Other, Ann finally regains agency by *denying* De Quincey linguistic clarification, afflicting

him with a feeling of loss, nostalgia, and grief. The masculine object is thus possessed and controlled by the emotional stronghold of the feminine subject. The relevance of Easter Sunday – the resurrection of Christ, Mary Magdalene visiting the sepulcher – cannot be ignored. The entire hierarchical structure of Christ rising from the dead is reversed: De Quincey watches Ann re-emerge as the sacrosanct and powerful feminine mystery, refusing to engage with the hegemonic patriarchal system.

This idea of a rebirth of the feminine arises again in *Suspiria* with the characters of Jane and Elizabeth, when De Quincey asks, “Summer and winter came again – crocuses and roses; why not little Jane?” (147). Both Jane and Elizabeth seem to gain importance through their deaths and eventual hauntings. It is only after these female figures (including Ann) are fully ‘lost’ that De Quincey seems to note the increasing problem of the feminine mystery; he is incapable of solving the trope of the mystery woman. Where other traditional, patriarchal authors reduce or simplify these mystery women, De Quincey becomes haunted.

There also arises a clear correlation between Elizabeth’s dead body and the infinite days of summer (which De Quincey notes in *Confessions*, too, remind him of death). He describes “midsummer at noonday,” when “it was not possible for eye to behold or for heart to conceive of any symbols more pathetic of life and the glory of life” (*Suspiria* 151). Just as these women are seen in the real world as mythic stereotypes, summed up as feminine mysteries, their entrance into death or their loss from reality transforms them into symbols of

De Quincey's grief. Their importance and significance becomes both pathetic and glorious. De Quincey grieves for their myth and is seemingly haunted by a reality that never could be. The subconscious realization seems to be that the women, by entering an imaginative dreamscape through death or loss, transform into the ultimate Other.

Elizabeth's death is associated with Jerusalem and Easter Sunday (just as Ann was conjured in a dream against the backdrop of Jerusalem on Easter Sunday). De Quincey writes: "Oriental climates . . . The cloudless sunlights of Syria – those seemed to argue everlasting summer; the disciples plucking the ears of corn – that must be summer, but above all, the very name of Palm Sunday . . . troubled me like an anthem . . . palms, as a product of nature, expressed the pomps of summer" (*Suspiria* 152). This explanation of biblical events and Elizabeth's death is described in exaggerated Gothic terminology. De Quincey continues, claiming that "it was indeed that the human had risen on wings from the grave; but for that reason there also it was that the divine had been swallowed up by the abyss; the lesser star could not rise, before the greater would submit to eclipse" (153). So long as Elizabeth haunts him through his connection of summer to death, and "through intricate relations to Scriptural scenery and events" (153), the feminine figure eclipses the weaker masculine and rises from the grave again, haunting him through feelings of mournful, woeful "symbol[s] of eternity" (153).

Like Ann, Elizabeth transforms from a mortal stereotype into an immortal sacred feminine, gaining power and agency through her death and entrance into the spirit world. Her mode of control is not

through a typified patriarchal linguistic communication system but through a reclaiming of sound and audible noise. De Quincey writes, when confronted with her dead body:

I stood checked for a moment; awe, not fear, fell upon me; and, whilst I stood, a solemn wind began to blow – the most mournful that ear ever heard. Mournful! that is saying nothing. It was a wind that had swept the fields of mortality for a hundred centuries. Many times since, upon a summer day, when the sun is about the hottest, I have remarked the same wind arising and uttering the same hollow, solemn Memnonian, but saintly swell. (153)

Sound without signifier replaces the English language, and Elizabeth thus gains importance through De Quincey's grief and nostalgia. (And Ann, too, was featured through imagery of wind and storm. In De Quincey's opium-induced nightmare, her face becomes cloudy after he attempts to rest his gaze upon her countenance: "I now gazed upon her with some awe, but suddenly her countenance grew dim, and turning to the mountains, I perceived vapours rolling between us; in a moment, all had vanished; a thick darkness came on" [*Confessions* 128].) This association of the feminine to raw sound or storm clearly links to the sublime. The female becomes interwoven with the sublime as a result of De Quincey's trauma and sense of loss; at Elizabeth's funeral, he even pauses to remark that "a sublime effect arises at this point through a sudden rapturous interpolation from the Apocalypse . . . I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write" (*Suspiria* 165). Music thus establishes a new relationship

between grief, the sublime, and the feminine: the commitment of Elizabeth's body into the ground, ashes to ashes, does not diminish the agency of the female figure but creates new linguistic links and ties for gendered communication. Ann and Elizabeth's lack of speech should be interpreted, therefore, not as anti-feminist but as proto-feminist. Their ability to craft new sign-signifier links symbolizes the development of an entirely new feminist communication system that exerts control over the patriarchal system through manipulation of negative emotions such as loss, trauma, and grief.

The triptych of female control over emotions and the development of a new feminine linguistic system reaches a peak in *Suspiria* with the introduction of Levana, which similarly represents feminine agency through themes of grief, nostalgia, and loss. Levana is introduced as "that mysterious lady, who never revealed her face" (195) and is presented by De Quincey as a figure cloaked in Pagan mystery and imagination. Where both Elizabeth and Ann were tied to reverse images of typified Christianity, Levana emerges as the first truly Pagan goddess, the "Roman goddess that performed for the new-born infant the earliest office of ennobling kindness . . . that grandeur that belongs to man every where" (195). Here is the theme of rebirth, the inauguration of a new power structure that begins to define the female as equal to the "grandeur" normally reserved for the masculine entity. Levana functions as a guard "over human education" (195), teaching all individuals "that mighty system of central forces hidden in the deep bosom of human life" (195).

By enabling Levana, a female dream character, to rule over the education of children, De Quincey creates a figure capable of smashing down the patriarchy, someone who “often communes with the powers that shake man’s heart: therefore it is that she doats upon grief” (196). Her power over masculinity stems from her emotive draw as a female, for she is the true ruler of grief, nostalgia, and trauma. Again, De Quincey invokes an idea of a triad or triptych: he relates the creation of Levana’s three Sorrows to the Furies and Graces – “even the *Muses* were but three” (196; emphasis in original) – and the trio mirrors the development, in his work, from Ann to Elizabeth and Jane and, finally, to Levana.

In addition to the numerical mirroring in Levana’s chapter, there is also a detailed discussion of how the linguistic capabilities Levana invokes result in a subversion of the patriarchal communication system:

Three sisters . . . I saw often conversing with Levana, and sometimes about myself. Do they talk then? Oh no! Mighty phantoms like these disdain the infirmities of language. They may utter voices through the organs of man when they dwell in human hearts, but amongst themselves is no voice nor sound – eternal silence reigns in *their* kingdoms. *They* spoke not as they talked with Levana . . . they utter their pleasure, not by sounds that perish, or by words that go astray, but by signs in heaven – by changes on earth – by pulses in secret rivers – heraldries painted on darkness – and hieroglyphics written on the tablets of the brain. (197; emphasis in original)

De Quincey's manipulation and extension of a Gothic version of haunting creates a new language system that exists primarily through raw symbols. The sign-signifier relationship is broken down, and, instead, Levana gains her power through the symbols she commands linguistically – “*mine* are the words” (197; emphasis in original) – subverting De Quincey's own patriarchal communication by refusing to engage with it. While the Sorrows and Levana were able to communicate with one another, their lack of speech with the ‘real world’ does not equate to a lack of agency: instead, it promotes a new, feminine form of control and communication over male figures through emotions of trauma and grief. De Quincey's assessment that “eternal silence reigns in their kingdom” (197) echoes and mirrors the strange “sole *audible* symbol of eternity” (153; emphasis in original) that he heard in the presence of Elizabeth's dead body on a summer day: silence as a strange, musical, audible anti-sound.

There is also a clear link with Levana's Sorrows as a more powerful version of Ann: De Quincey describes the eldest Sorrow's eyes as “sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy” (198), a contradiction incapable of being fully described and an association of Mater Lachrymarum with the clouds and wind: “I knew by childish memories that she could go abroad upon the winds, when she heard the sobbing of litanies or the thundering of organs, and when she beheld the mustering of summer clouds” (198). Just as Ann's face was wiped clear and her appearance was inscrutable to De Quincey due to the wind, Mater Lachrymarum is the figure who *controls* that wind in the face of grief and loss. Additionally, while De Quincey spent his last

years in his small cottage, the eldest Sorrow is capable of "open[ing] every cottage and every palace" (198), evidence of her ability to afflict those both rich and poor, a metaphor for the varying emotional states that De Quincey experiences throughout his complicated and strenuous life.

All three sisters are again and again associated with characteristics that other them, a purposeful choice by De Quincey to link the feminine mystery and the question of the Other's agency. *Mater Suspiriorum*, who communicates through inaudible "sighs . . . at intervals" (199), is the "visitor of the Pariah, of the Jew, of the bondsman to the oar in Mediterranean galleys, of the English criminal in Norfolk island . . . every woman sitting in darkness" (199). These comparisons indicate that the second sister is an embodiment of the Other – the Jew, the Pariah, the bondsman, the criminal – and yet she possesses incalculable agency over men, defying this relegation to the status of Other: "in the very highest ranks of man she finds chapels of her own" (200), men who "secretly have received her mark upon their foreheads" (200).

The final sister, and the youngest, represents the epitome of female power and subversive agency. De Quincey emphatically states that "within that kingdom all power is hers" (200); she even wears "the fierce light of a blazing misery" (200) and stands tall as "the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides" (200). There is a clear allegorical association between *Mater Tenebrarum* and a dark, pagan emotive power over men: "amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all" (200). Just as Ann in

Confessions began to question the links between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, and as Elizabeth began to Gothicize readings of the Bible, *Mater Tenebrarum* "is the defier of God" (200), the most powerful "Our Lady of Darkness" (200), who subverts the patriarchy through a new linguistic system that emerges through shadows and hauntings. This Gothic exaggeration and reclamation of the feminine mystery trope reveals these figures to be powerful proto-feminist women, capable of evoking great passions from their positions in nostalgia and dreams.

De Quincey concludes the *Levana* chapter with a claim that, in his dream, "MADONNA spoke . . . by mysterious hand . . . she beckoned to Our Lady of Sighs" (201). The inclusion and intermingling of pagan and Christian figures bestows a holy power onto these Sorrows and *Levana*. Concluding with a speech "translated out of the signs which (except in dreams) no man reads" (201), De Quincey settles the chapter with a clear understanding of the punishment that this feminine mystery can dole out on the unassuming patriarchal figures of the real world. He writes, speaking as Our Lady of Sighs: "Him I led astray, him I beguiled, and from heaven I stole away his young heart to mine. Through me did he become idolatrous . . . he worshipped the worm, and prayed to the wormy grave" (201). The ultimate feminine power is to drive a man to suicide, De Quincey suggests, darkly claiming that "[h]oly was the grave to him; lovely was its darkness; saintly was its corruption" (201). These women are not just made-up enchantresses living in a dream world: their emotional control can affect men in the real world, too, closing a gap

between liminal spaces. Our Lady of Sighs proclaims, "See that thy scepter lie heavy on his head. Suffer not woman and her tenderness to sit near him in his darkness" (201), a statement that reclaims feminine power. No longer is the feminine relegated to being a mere caretaker of man's whimsy; instead, the feminine mystery controls its own mystery and haunting by dictating the destiny of man. The curse continues:

[S]o shall he see the things that ought *not* to be seen – sights that are abominable, and secrets that are unutterable. So shall he read elder truths, sad truths, grand truths, fearful truths. So shall he rise again *before* he dies. And so shall our commission be accomplished which from God we had – to plague his heart until we had unfolded the capacities of his spirit. (201; emphasis in original)

The suggestion is that, through the education of men by Levana, man will "rise again *before* he dies," a clear link to Christianity and the story of Christ. Through the new feminine linguistic system, he will finally see and understand "sights that are abominable, and secrets that are unutterable," "grand truths, fearful truths" (201), that had previously been unknown to him. The "commission" of these powerful female figures is "from God," and their manipulation of masculine emotion is completed so to "unfold[] the capacities of his spirit." De Quincey's argument is that through heartbreak, loss, and trauma by the feminine, through this education in female powers and destruction by the feminine, man will finally be able to rise again and reach a Christ-like state, gaining enlightenment and empathy for the feminine

mystery. No longer simply a hazy, confusing mish-mash of themes, Levana and her three "Sublime Goddesses" (200) represent the pinnacle of female agency and power, built up in a triad ladder from Ann and the pair of Elizabeth and Jane. De Quincey has created in *Suspiria* and *Confessions* the development of female supremacy and influence, seen most clearly in the relationship of Levana to the outside masculine world.

Ann, Elizabeth and Jane, and Levana are not just De Quincey's lost girls. They are hauntings, powerful pagan dream creatures capable of disturbing and threatening male figures, resulting in a recouping of clout and gendered authority. This essay set out to describe and discover the exact links between catastrophic grief and gendered discourse in *Confessions* and *Suspiria*. A detailed close reading of the triptych structure of Ann, Elizabeth and Jane, and Levana has illustrated De Quincey's building up of feminine agency. And the recurrent binaries of sound and silence, reality and imagination, and masculine and feminine have been discussed through an understanding of proto-feminist disruptions of speech acts and a reclamation of feminine agency in the face of patriarchal hegemony. In *Confessions* and *Suspiria*, De Quincey subverts the feminine mystery trope by allowing Ann, Elizabeth, Jane, and Levana the linguistic ability to create an entirely new feminist communication system, undermining and destabilizing the patriarchal real world through control over dangerous emotions of loss, trauma, and grief. ©

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