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Thomas De Quincey's "Serpentine" Writings and Emily Dickinson's Reptiles

INTRODUCTION

In a note dated around 1859 to her close friend and later sister-in-law Susan Gilbert, Emily Dickinson utilized a woodcut reprint ("Young Timothy, Learnt Sin to fly") clipped from *The New England Primer*, in which "the unfortunate insect upon the left", which she identified as "Myself", was chased by "the Reptile upon the *right*" (emphasis hers), whom she called "my more immediate friends, and connections" (L214).¹ According to her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi, the note was "[s]ent over the morning after a revel", Dickinson's father having fetched her home before "the hour nearing indecent midnight" (Johnson 360).² While it appears that the guilt-ridden Dickinson fled from her father who was "*right*", or self-righteous with his parental authority, the original moral message in *The New England Primer*, unstated in the clipping, suggests another reading: young Dickinson, like young Timothy in the drawing, runs away from "Sin", personified by her father as the chasing reptile. To take the sense of irony a step further, Dickinson wrote beneath the drawing "My position"! and signed her name as "Cole" (L214), which both Judith Farr and Martha Nell Smith consider to be a gesture of her identification or alliance with Thomas Cole (Farr 69; Smith 82–84), a quintessential American painter of the sublime. Nevertheless, this satirical gesture, as Renée Bergland remarks, presents a view "as different from a Cole-ian prospect as it's possible to get," for Dickinson in the note "is small, ugly, and grounded, not abstract, romanticized, or high above it all" (141). Dickinson often identifies herself with small animals and insects, such as beetles and squirrels.³ With the juxtaposition of the weak and the powerful, the victim and the sinner, Dickinson's note reveals the connection between the victim and the sinner, the blurred distinction between innocence and indecency, in a playful manner. This

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moralistic sketch not only alludes to the comic midnight chase of her father, but also employs an emblematic convention to associate Cole's series of allegorical paintings with what is psychologically haunting in Dickinson's personal experiences.⁴

Dickinson's identification with "Cole" in the note may suggest another Thomas—Thomas De Quincey, who was also a friend of Cole (Farr 72). De Quincey took pleasure in the incongruous and the inconsistent; like Dickinson, he was accustomed to turning traditional morality on its head. Dickinson's insect-reptile drawing that shows an almost Darwinian evolutionary linkage between herself and her father,⁵ or more allegorically, innocence and sin, can find resonance in De Quincey's numerous encounters with primitive crocodiles in his narcotic dreams. De Quincey's writings were published in America in the 1850s. Up to 20 volumes were published between 1851 and 1859 by Ticknor, Reed & Fields, a publisher Dickinson also referred to in a later letter.⁶ In 1858, Dickinson made a request to Mrs. Joseph Haven for copies of De Quincey's *Klosterheim* and *The Confessions of an Opium Eater* (L191).⁷ According to Jack L. Capps, ten volumes of a twelve-volume set of De Quincey's works are in the Harvard Collection, on two of which pencil marks are shown and a note was made (81–82). In 1859, Dickinson's father was reading De Quincey's *The Avenger*, a story about a blood-thirsty criminal in London, to which Dickinson might have referred in one letter of the same year (Capps 81). It was also around the time when Dickinson made the clipping of the bug and the reptile. Dickinson's aesthetic taste for the combination of opposites corresponds with the American reception of an oxymoronic De Quincey in the 1850s; characterized by his American reviewers as snake-like for his typically long and often digressive sentences, frequent themes of murder and mystery, and his revelry in the Gothic. Karen Karbiener has persuasively argued that De Quincey's "immense popularity" in America is explicable through "America's curiosity and feelings of superiority over this particularly needy though nevertheless representative Englishman" in the 1850s, a time when his American contemporaries were determined to establish "an original American literary heritage as a distinctively un-British one" (1). The paper proposes to explore this Anglo-American literary relation further through the mixed American perception of De Quincey's "serpentine" writing, offering a preliminary investigation of Dickinson's likely reception of De Quincey, an area rarely explored by critics.⁸ It attempts to show a transatlantic literary tension that Dickinson might have recognized and responded to in her works, albeit in an ambiguous manner.

DE QUINCEY'S SERPENTINE WRITING

De Quincey gained his popularity in America when his collected works were published in the 1850s by James T. Fields, a Boston-based publisher.⁹ One 1850 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* praised De Quincey's "genius and logical perception"; his writing style was "like fire and frost" that "fulfill the paradox of 'embracing each other'" (147). The article extolled his long sentences as "full of life and of joints as a serpent", despite "his ungovernable habit of digression", his tendency to "go astray" and "explore both the way of Danger and that of Destruction" (147–48). The Boston publisher Ticknor, Reed & Fields, which began publishing De Quincey's writings in four volumes in 1851,¹⁰ celebrated the "naturalness" and "beautiful thoughts and images" of his writings in the *United States Democratic Review*, depicting his style as "dashing by with a quick, rapid motion, and sparkling with wit" (186). In his preface to an 1855 Boston edition Shelton Mackenzie considered *Klosterheim* (1832) as one of his best books because "[i]ts language is full of concentration" without "digressions and the waste of words" which "constitute the defective points in his subsequent writings" (xxiii). De Quincey's American reviewers in the 1850s had mixed receptions of De Quincey's writing style, which was regarded as either "witty" or "ungovernable"; his sentences were either full of "concentration" or "digression". They were either "dashing" rapidly like a snake, or descending into danger. Despite their unanimous agreement upon the beauty and ingenuity of De Quincey's works, their contradictory interpretations also imply how this English writer, with his master style, might be associated by his American reviewers and readers with the voice of a Miltonic snake, with its emblematic mixture of both seduction and deviance.

This mixed American perception of De Quincey's "serpentine" writing links to his depiction of the dreadful but mesmerizing crocodiles in his narcotic visions. In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), De Quincey portrays his opium dream about being harassed and chased repeatedly by an Asiatic crocodile. This recurrence of facing an obnoxious reptile, according to John Barrell, is De Quincey's "inoculation" against "the infection of the East" (16–17, 42–43):

The cursed crocodile became to me the object of more horror than almost all the rest. I was compelled to live with him . . . for centuries. I escaped sometimes, and found myself in Chinese houses, with cane tables, &c. All the feet of the tables, sofas, &c., soon became instinct with life: the abominable head of the crocodile, and his leering eyes, looked out at me, multiplied into

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a thousand repetitions; and I stood loathing and fascinated. (2009
125–26)

De Quincey's xenophobic sentiment is embodied in a "cursed crocodile", a paradoxical source of both horror and fascination. De Quincey finds himself physically entangled with these crocodiles in an almost erotic manner: "I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles; and laid, confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud" (2009 125). De Quincey negotiates this conflict between mental aversion and bodily intimacy in his narcotic visions later, analysing his own dream thus: "it may be observed, generally, that wherever two thoughts stand related to each other by a law of antagonism, and exist, as it were, by mutual repulsion, they are apt to suggest each other" (2009 126). In a manner similar to Dickinson, De Quincey also suggests the malicious reptiles to be his "immediate friends, and connections" from which he could not disentangle himself.

In "The English Mail-Coach" (1849), De Quincey elaborates on the man-beast and East-West connections. On the one hand, he emphasizes the symbolic significance of the mail-coach "as the national organ for publishing these mighty events" during the Napoleonic Wars (2003 V.16 409). On the other hand, he also compares the coachman of the Bath mail to a crocodile with human functions, for his "monstrous inaptitude for turning round" (2003 V.16 419). For De Quincey, humans and crocodiles commit similar mistakes: "The crocodile made the ridiculous blunder of supposing man to be meant chiefly for his own eating. Man, taking a different view of the subject, naturally met that mistake by another: he viewed the crocodile as a thing sometimes to worship, but always to run away from" (2003 V.16 420). De Quincey's fascination with and fear of "the cursed crocodile" come full circle here, when the Asiatic becomes the British, and the antagonism between humans and animals accounts for the reason why they are also deeply linked. As Barry Milligan comments, "De Quincey's essays repeatedly outline hierarchical divisions between East and West, inside and outside, self and other, only to invert the hierarchies and blur the divisions ... De Quincey implies that bottom and top, self and other, are interchangeable, that the spectrum of difference is not a line but a circle..." (46–47). Echoing what the American reviewers noted about the paradoxical nature of De Quincey's works, Milligan's remark highlights how De Quincey's imagery of reptiles, both the Asiatic and the British, might have become inseparable from his American reviewers' perception of his "serpentine" writing, the discourse of which is formed in a similarly circular rather than linear fashion.

The controversy of De Quincey's crocodile dreams seemed to have elicited a few responses in articles in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in the 1850s. An 1851 article, "Plea For British Reptiles", for example, argued for "English" reptiles: "Reptile passes for about the worst name you can call a man. This is unjust at any rate, in England" (813). The author claimed "good words and good-will" for "our unappreciated friend"—"our English reptiles" to readers that "may not yet have cultivated their acquaintance" (813). By offering a comprehensive introduction to the natural habits and physical traits of reptiles such as lizards, serpents and toads in England, the article seems to be a refutation of a naturalist against the "injustice" imposed upon by writers like De Quincey, who compared the coachman of the Bath mail to a blockhead and a crocodile. An 1854 article "Alligators" saw a similar attempt by providing a detailed account of "the mysterious mementoes which mark the eras of the earth's formation" (37). It alluded to the ambiguous description of Egyptian crocodiles by Anthony in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, a portrayal that might also have inspired De Quincey's nightmarish depiction of the metamorphosis of Asiatic crocodiles: "It is shaped, sir, like itself; it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs; it lives by that which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates" (38). The article further argued for the similarity between alligators and crocodiles, remarking that "The inhabitant of the East is the same as his prototype of the Western world", and noting the "really beautiful", "elongated, Chinese-looking" eyes of the alligator "one of the most striking figures that can be found in Eastern Imagery" in the Book of Job. Significantly different from the "leering eyes" of De Quincey's Asiatic crocodile, the article advocated for the mystery, power and beauty of alligators. These discussions about reptiles coincide with De Quincey's narcotic crocodiles that had grasped the imagination of the public in the 1850s, especially the reactions from nationalists and naturalists, American and English alike.

Besides his serpentine writing and mystification of crocodiles, De Quincey was often considered by his American contemporaries as an authority on the sanguinary, the Gothic and the revengeful. As A. S. Plumtree notes, his writings are "littered with references to murder and display an overall preoccupation with violence" (140–41). Essays such as "Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts" came to establish his reputation as a connoisseur of killing in his American reader's mind. Among De Quincey's admirers was T. W. Higginson, Dickinson's spiritual mentor. In "Nat Turner's Insurrection", published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1861), Higginson compared the dramatic event of the Virginian

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slave Nat Turner's rebellion to De Quincey's *The Avenger*. Higginson would subsequently evoke De Quincey's "murder" article in his 1863 *Outdoor Papers* to criticize the lack of physical education in American schools. De Quincey's name being synonymous with a murder expert can also be seen in another example—Bret Harte's California correspondence in 1866, published in the *Springfield Republican*, a newspaper the Dickinsons subscribed to.¹¹ Harte had been to Amherst and was entertained by Susan in the Evergreens (Habegger 372). In his comment on the recurrence of violence in California, Harte also referred to De Quincey's reputation for chronicling mysterious murder cases (Scharnhorst 52–53).¹² As De Quincey recorded in 1848, after his meeting with Ralph Waldo Emerson in Edinburgh, "By Emerson's own confession, the Opium Eater is the ruler of the *Night*".¹³

DICKINSON'S REPTILES

De Quincey's dramatic poise as "the ruler of the *Night*" makes him a great writer of irony.¹⁴ He likes to juxtapose antagonistic elements within his dreams, which he would later account for with his theory of "involute". Calling herself "The Queen of Calvary" (Fr347), Dickinson also enjoys exercising the power of irony. In her drawing, she exposes her own weakness as an "unfortunate bug" that, paradoxically, reveals her intimate connection with the more intimidating and dominant reptile-father. Like De Quincey, Dickinson relishes combining opposite positions and incoherent perspectives. She parallels the crawling bug with the malicious reptile, her clipping with Cole's elaborate portrayal of the American landscape, exposing the limitation of both perspectives to a comic effect.¹⁵ It would have been natural that, as David S. Reynolds' so-called "that rare oxymoronic being" (189), Dickinson showed an interest in equally oxymoronic writers like De Quincey, an "anomaly" among his Romantic and Victorian peers (Snyder xxiii). Even before De Quincey's works were systematically introduced into the American public, Dickinson would have been aware of De Quincey's association with opium addiction that, according to Karniener, subjected De Quincey to "the mercy of one of the tools of his beloved British imperialism" (3).¹⁶ The Boston Chinese museum Dickinson visited in 1846 used De Quincey as one of the authorities on the danger of opium addiction in its catalogue (67). The recipient of Dickinson's insect-reptile drawing—Susan Dickinson had also been an admirer of De Quincey; she quoted De Quincey in her typescript *The Annal of the Evergreens* on his aesthetic theory of human perception.¹⁷ Emily might have encountered De

Quincey's writings under the recommendation of Susan, discussed his ideas with Susan in one of their late night "revels",¹⁸ or even shared their thoughts on the haunting reptile in her comic clipping.¹⁹

De Quincey's popularity in America coincided with Dickinson's apparent interest in his works in the 1850s. In particular, the public praise of De Quincey's "serpentine" style, despite, or because of, its convergence of the condensed and the deviant, the witty and the dark, would not have been lost on Dickinson, who was also deeply attracted to the seductive and lethal power of language. Around the inception of De Quincey's American reception, Dickinson had also started to explore creativity through literary exercises. Just as De Quincey was simultaneously appalled and intrigued by the haunting/hunting grasps and "cancerous kisses" of Asiatic crocodiles, Dickinson was cautious of and attracted by the "serpentine", or even contagious power of fictions. In an 1850 letter to her close friend Abiah Root, Dickinson told a story about her imaginary encounter with the cold, personified as an European gentleman, travelling all the way from Switzerland. This "dear creature", however, was also a needy and erotic visitor who attempted to talk Dickinson into becoming its friend through its manipulative rhetoric and courteous but forceful manner:

I am occupied principally with a cold just now, and the dear creature will have so much attention that my time slips away amazingly. It has heard so much of New Englanders, of their kind attentions to strangers, that it's come all the way from the Alps to determine the truth of the tale. It says the half was n't told it, and I begin to be afraid it was n't. Only think – came all the way from that distant Switzerland to find what was the truth! ... It would n't get down, and commenced talking to itself: "Can't be New England – must have made some mistake – disappointed in my reception – don't agree with accounts. Oh, what a world of deception and fraud! Marm, will you tell me the name of this country – it's Asia Minor, isn't it? I intended to stop in New England." By this time I was so completely exhausted that I made no further effort to rid me of my load, and travelled home at a moderate jog, paying no attention whatever to it, got into the house, threw off both bonnet and shawl, and out flew my tormentor, and putting both arms around my neck, began to kiss me immoderately, and express so much love it completely bewildered me. Since then it has slept in my bed, eaten from my plate, lived with me everywhere, and will tag me through life for all I know. I think I'll wake first, and get out of bed, and leave it; but early or

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late, it is dressed before me, and sits on the side of the bed looking right into my face with such a comical expression it almost makes me laugh in spite of myself ... (L31)

Juxtaposing the chilly climate of Switzerland and the warmth of New England hospitality, Dickinson presented this bacteria-visitor as a tenacious and sensuous European caller, who undertook transatlantic air travel to visit Dickinson, overwhelming her with its immoderate and viperous kisses. This gentleman caller, like De Quincey's haunting crocodile, climbed on her back, kissed her, shares her food and bed, and eventually made her recommend it to her friend.²⁰ Despite its "curious" looks—his "huge pocket-handkerchief" and "a very red nose" that showed signs of abundance, "independence, and prosperity in business", and "would quite win your heart"—Dickinson's seemingly respectable and cordial Swiss visitor was also solicitous and duplicitous by nature; it caused Dickinson to sneeze "so loud one night that the family thought the last trump was sounding, and climbed into the currant-bushes to get out of the way" (L31). In the letter, the cold is distinctly European, and un-American; it appears urbane and attentive, and yet excessively luscious and dependent. Such a depiction recalls comments by the English Opium-Eater's American reviewers about his "ungovernable habit" and gravitation towards "Danger" and "Destruction" in his writing style, along with Higginson's observation of the "spasmodic" and "uncontrolled" quality of Dickinson's own poems (L265).²¹

Claiming in one poem that "I see - New Englandly -" (Fr256), Dickinson, like her contemporaries in the mid-nineteenth century, appears to have begun contemplating the distinctive national character of American literature, and its ambivalent literary relationship with Europe, especially England. Her account of this European gentlemen caller-suitor, comic and satirical as it was, also foreshadows the warning she gave to her friend Root later about the dangerous power of make-believe, when she compared imagination to a snake that might "lead astray foolish young women" like Abiah Root, or more pertinently, herself. Paradoxically, Dickinson's letter is also full of deviations from the factual to the fictional, from the figurative snake—"flowers of speech", to the real snake that would "slide around by your shoes in the grass" (L31).²² Dickinson asked her friend to avoid her fictions and "turn aside as from the *Bottle* snake"; while approving of "those little green ones", the budding writer appeared to take more interest in the bigger and striped ones in a manner similar to De Quincey's fascination with his crocodiles. She remarks wryly that "The big serpent bites the deepest, and we get so accustomed to it's bites that we dont mind about them", and then

continues to explain that “There is an air of misanthropy about the striped snake that will command itself at once to your taste, there is no monotony about it –”. The amused tone of Dickinson here implies that the “misanthropy” of these two unpleasant and unexpected visitors could also be appreciated for their lack of “monotony”.

These “misanthropic” and yet enchanting visitors of Dickinson would reoccur in a poem about dreams titled “In Winter in my Room” (Fr1742).²³ In the poem, her speaker encounters a worm unexpectedly in her room that soon morphs into a menacing snake:

In Winter in my Room
 I came upon a Worm
 Pink lank and warm
 But as he was a worm
 And worms presume
 Not quite with him at home
 Secured him by a string
 To something neighboring
 And went along -

A Trifle afterward
 A thing occurred
 I'd not believe it if I heard
 But state with creeping blood
 A snake with mottles rare
 Surveyed my chamber floor
 In feature as the worm before
 But ringed with power
 The very string with which
 I tied him - too
 When he was mean and new
 That string was there -

I shrank - “How fair you are”!
 Propitiation's Claw -
 “Afraid he hissed
 Of me”?
 “No Cordiality” -
 He fathomed me -
 Then to a Rhythm *Slim*
 Secreted in his Form
 As Patterns swim
 Projected him.

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That time I flew
Both eyes his way
Lest he pursue
Nor ever ceased to run
Till in a distant Town
Towns on from mine
I set me down
This was a dream -

In a manner similar to De Quincey's dreamy and slimy Nilotic crocodile, this "*Slim*" worm/snake of Dickinson also acts as an attraction and a threat that causes the speaker-dreamer to flee "Towns on from mine". Echoing her employment of spotted Asiatic imagery in some poems, Dickinson's speaker finds the worm turning a snake "fair" with his "mottles rare".²⁴ However, she also feels "Not quite with him at home", toward whom she holds "No Cordiality". The snake is exotic, "mean and new"; his rare patterns and lack of "Cordiality" in the poem recall the peculiar looks of her European cold-caller and his presupposition of New England hospitality from her, which makes Dickinson reconcile at "Propitiation's Claw". Peculiarly, her speaker-dreamer appears to have forsaken the practice of New England hospitality in the poem, attempting instead to harness the worm/snake visitor with a string to no avail. Páraic Finnerty relates this poem to her letter about the snake, noting that "Dickinson's dreamer is a latter-day Eve who flees from the seducing snake; her poem warns of the susceptibility of humankind to false and dangerous appearances" (98). Indeed, Dickinson seems to identify her speaker with the more prudish and protestant New England voice against the more "striped" and "mottled", flowery and immoderate kisses, "bites" or chase of the foreign "serpentine" visitor, which she would temporarily personify as European in her letter, while annulling the warning at the same time by acknowledging that fictive language is so affective or even addictive that "we dont mind about them". Like the emphasis of her poem on its being "a dream" in the end, Dickinson warned her friend of her "fictions" about the cold in her letter. Nevertheless, in a manner different from her dreamer-speaker, Dickinson's transatlantic bacteria-visitor was eventually recommended to her New England compatriot as "worth the having".

DE QUINCEY'S INVOLUTE

This literary interest of Dickinson in a more "mottled" and "striped" fashion reverberates with De Quincey's aesthetic taste for the contradictory

and the heterogeneous. In an account of his childhood memory in *Confessions*, De Quincey states that death is “more profoundly affecting in summer than in other parts of the year” because of “the antagonism between the tropical redundancy of life in summer and the dark sterilities of the grave” (2009 126). “The two coming into collusion”, De Quincey explains, each “exults the other into stronger relief” (2009 151). This tropical/sterile, bright/dark contrast is exemplified in his equivocal depiction of opium as both the light and the shadow, the sacred and the guilty. Through the law of antagonism, he develops a theory of involution to account for “the intricate formation of the mind” (Clej 100): “[F]ar more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of concrete objects, pass to us as involutes (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us directly, and in their own abstract shapes” (2009 151).²⁵ De Quincey’s philosophy of involute stresses the inability to “disentangle” what are incoherent or inconsistent, a principle he would also apply to his interpretation of human psychology. In *Essays on the Poets, and Other English Writers*, De Quincey comments that “Every man has two-edged tendencies lurking within himself, pointing in one direction to what will expand the elevating principles of his nature, pointing in another to what will tempt him to its degradation” (2003 Vol.16 316).²⁶ With a familiar dual structure, De Quincey attempts to theorize the antagonistic and yet co-present relationship not only between the inside and the outside, but also between oneself and its inner other.

This involution of dual vision is dramatized in “The English Mail-Coach”, in which De Quincey practices what Ian Balfour calls the “national sublime” (Morrison 2008 180). The victory of England during the Napoleonic Wars, represented by the Bath mail coach, is mixed with the vertiginous and “mind-boggling” apocalyptic scene of human destruction.²⁷ De Quincey extrapolates this conflicting vision by shifting the focus from European battlefields to the psychological landscape of humanity. In the section “The Vision of Sudden Death”, he imagines the existence of a murderer “lurking far down in the depths of human nature” (2003 V.16 432); his dreaming realm is turned into a Gothic version of espionage and conspiracy within one’s brain, in which “some horrid alien nature” occupies “some separate chamber” (2003 V.16 422). Typical of De Quincey is his intensification of this process of interior bifurcation by confronting himself with this unsolicited and illegitimate connection with the inner others:

What if it were his own nature repeated, – still, if the duality were distinctly perceptible, even that – even this mere numerical

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double of his own consciousness – might be a curse too mighty to be sustained. But how, if the alien nature contradicts alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five, are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself? These, however, are horrors his own, fights with it, perplexes, and confounds it? How, again, if not one alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five, are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself? These, however, are horrors from the kingdoms of anarchy and darkness, which, by their very intensity, challenge the sanctity of concealment, and gloomily retire from exposition. (2003 V.16 422–23)

The head of the crocodile in Chinese houses that “multiplied into a thousand repetitions”, like the image of the unknown girl in “the dreadful revelations”, resurfaces here and is incarnated as one’s “alien nature”—one’s “numerical double of his own consciousness”. These Gothicized foreign others, these “horrors from the kingdoms of anarchy and darkness”, become more sinister and threatening because the dreamer suddenly realizes the self-sameness of these alien beings. De Quincey’s *Klosterheim*, a story of vengeance and underground insurgence during the Thirty Years’s War in Europe, is also full of Doppelgangers and textual doubling, involuted images, convoluted plots and an intricate structure of a play within a play. Patrick Bridgewater thus compares De Quincey to Kafka who “cuts the ground from under his feet as he writes” to create suspense (144). His dual vision undergoes an accelerated procedure of division and then deconstruction, conducting what Lois Peters Agnew calls De Quincey’s “celebration of collapsing dichotomies” (113).

DICKINSON’S DOUBLING

Dickinson would have been intrigued by De Quincey’s dexterous utilization of doubling, particularly this secret invasion of the alien other that violates “the inviolable sanctuary” of oneself. Several of her poems, written in the early 1860s, also depict such an antagonized relationship with the inner other. In “The Soul unto itself” (Fr579), for example, the inner self is “an imperial friend” or “the most agonizing Spy” that “An Enemy - could send -”. In “Me from Myself - to banish -” (Fr709), these two selves are “mutual Monarch”. The attempt to “assault”, “subjugate” and “abdicate” the inner self comes to a deadlock. In “One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted -” (Fr407B), the self further risks murder, or as Sarah Blackwood calls it, “self-disidentity” (55), in the “Corridors” of her own brain. Written during the American Civil War,

these poems of doubling by Dickinson could be seen as employing vocabulary of martial connotations and Gothic references to reflect upon the binary division both within one's mind and without between the North and the South.²⁸ This poetic strategy is also familiar in De Quincey's writings about underground resistance, political tyranny and conspiracy in the Thirty Years' War and Napoleonic Wars, the developments of which are parallel to the invasion of these hidden "kingdoms of anarchy and darkness" in one's mind. Words such as "Spy", "Enemy" and "treason" in "The Soul unto itself", "banish", "assault", "subjugate" and "abdicate" in "Me from Myself - to banish -", and "Assassin" and "Revolver" in "One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted -" all indicate her appropriation of the imagery of military conflicts and political manoeuvring that are also common scenes in De Quincey's writings. Words such as "Monarch", "Sovereign" and "imperial" show Dickinson's pervasive adoption of metaphors that indicate shared cultural heritage between Europe and America to express and structure her perception and understanding of the conflicting and contested nature of the American society and the individual mind.

Furthermore, Dickinson, like De Quincey, frequently uses Gothic metaphors to explore how one fears,²⁹ to court the art "to be haunted" via the secret chamber of the brain:³⁰

One need not be a Chamber - to be Haunted -
 One need not be a House -
 The Brain has Corridors - surpassing
 Material Place -

 Far safer, of a midnight meeting
 External Ghost
 Than its interior confronting -
 That cooler Host -

 Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,
 The Stones a'chase -
 Than Unarmed, one's a'self encounter -
 In lonesome Place -

 Ourselves behind ourselves, concealed -
 Should startle most -
 Assassin hid in our Apartment
 Be Horror's least -

 The Body - borrows a Revolver -
 He bolts the Door -

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O'erlooking a superior spectre -
Or More -

As suggested in the phrase "Ourself behind ourself", Dickinson's perceptions of one's multiple selves, like De Quincey's divisible alien natures, are drastically reproduced and estranged, and yet are ironically identical and intimately intertwined. Her "Ourself" is both singular and plural; the duplication of "ourself" that hides behind "Ourself" indicates both sameness and doubling, connection and division. In addition, this assertion to do without a "Chamber" or an "Abbey" in the poem nearly transforms this celebration of Gothicism into a literary competition. This poem seems to be a sequel of "In Winter in my Room". In the worm/snake poem, the private chamber of the speaker is already the location of her eerie dream. The chamber poem further opens up another haunted chamber in one's head, demonstrating its effectiveness in comparison with its literary and textual counterparts. The "Material Place" in the poem not only refers to physical space, as critics have suggested,³¹ but also implies generic settings in stories by Gothic writers of her time such as Edgar Allan Poe and Ann Radcliffe (*St Armand* 97). Claiming the authority of "a superior spectre", the poem courts ghostly experiences beyond generic as well as physical confinement, competing with her contemporary Gothic writers across the Atlantic Ocean in instructing readers how to fear.

CONCLUSION

Both Dickinson and De Quincey adopt literary conventions of their time to account for the multilayered interiority of the human brain.³² In the backdrop of Anglo-American contentions and national turmoil, the works of both writers illustrate a more malleable borderline space between the self and the other, the domestic and the foreign. In particular, the popularity of De Quincey's "serpentine" writing in America shows a more nuanced picture of the Anglo-American literary relation, the ambivalence of which Dickinson might have recognized and subtly incorporated into the development of her own aesthetic taste. As a Gothic Romantist, De Quincey would have been one of these siren voices or seductive literary snakes across the Atlantic Ocean, especially for a poet in protestant New England, who was also experimenting with her own poetic voices in the 1850s. Dickinson's drawing, letter and poem about the chasing reptile and the seductive cold-caller, sardonic in tone and comic in effect, indicate her artistic experimentation with animal metaphors, an exercise that De Quincey also practices and makes famous with the

haunting image of the crocodile head in his narcotic dreams. Her interest in the “mottled” and the “ungovernable” reptile suggests her responsiveness towards the American reception of De Quincey’s unique writing style. Her later poems of doubling, especially the Gothic espionage of the inner other, reveal her perception of the shadowy side of humanity in a manner similar to De Quincey’s Gothicization of the multiplied and divided human natures. These similarities between these two writers indicate how Dickinson might have acknowledged, reflected upon or responded subtly to the literary relationship across the Atlantic in the mid-nineteenth century, which is ironically dichotomous and intimately connected.

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NOTES

1. The following abbreviations are used to refer to the writings of Emily Dickinson: Fr *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998. Citation by poem number; L *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Citation by letter number.
2. According to Thomas H. Johnson, the reprint was “made for distribution to all Yale graduates at commencement in 1850”. The date of this note, however, is speculative (360). Dickinson’s drawing and note are available at *Dickinson, Cartoonist*: <<http://archive.emilydickinson.org/cartoon/hb114.html>>.
3. In poems such as “Of Bronze - and Blaze -” (Fr319), Dickinson chooses between “Daisies” and its variant “Beetles” to describe the position of the speaker as an artist. In “Light is sufficient to itself -”, Dickinson’s speaker compares herself to a squirrel in the Himalayas.
4. Critics such as Bergland and Barton Levi St. Armand have pointed out the potential impact of Cole’s allegorical series on Dickinson (Bergland 141–42; Armand 78).
5. Scholars have recognized Dickinson’s Darwinian influences. Robin Peel, for example, devotes one chapter in *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* on Dickinson and Darwin (287–329). On Dickinson’s awareness of Darwin’s challenge to faith, see, for example, Richard Brantley’s *Experience and Faith: The Late-Romantic Imagination of Emily Dickinson* (62–71) and Patrick J. Keane’s *Emily Dickinson’s Approving God* (64–67). James R. Guthrie’s “Darwinian Dickinson: The Scandalous Rise and Noble Fall of the Common Clover” and Joan Kirkby’s “[W]e thought Darwin had thrown ‘the Redeemer’ away”: Darwinizing with Emily Dickinson” both show Dickinson’s affinity to Charles Darwin through her sensitivity towards suffering and loss in her poems.
6. In a letter to Susan Dickinson around 1866, Dickinson referred to the publication of Tennyson by the same publisher in her dream (L320). Susan Dickinson was also interested in De Quincey, quoting him in her “Annals of the Evergreens”, which was published posthumously (No.18).
7. The set of De Quincey’s works includes *Confessions of n Opium Eater*, but *Klosterheim*

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is in one of the volumes missing from the set (Capps 214).

8. Critics such as John Evangelist Walsh and Judith Farr have remarked upon Dickinson's potential influence by De Quincey (*The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson* 130; *The Passion of Emily Dickinson* 148–50, 202 & 290). However, a more systematic discussion is still to be had.
9. Both Grevel Lindop and Karbiener have noted De Quincey's massive popularity in mid-nineteenth century America (Lindop 367; Karbiener 4). As Robert Morrison observes, Ticknor, Reed and Fields had sold over 45,000 copies of De Quincey by 1853 (2009 364).
10. The collection *De Quincey's Writings* by Ticknor, Reed and Fields of Boston began in 1851, which grew to become 20 volumes by 1859. The first volume was *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater; and Suspiria de Profundis* (1851) (Faflak 15).
11. Samuel Bowles of the *Springfield Republican* and Warren Sawyer of the *Christian Register* invited Harte to be their California correspondent from the spring of 1866 until the end of 1867 (Nissen 82). De Quincey wrote two essays about the Californian gold rush in 1852 (Lindop 372), which might have interested Harte, who later became famous for his Californian romances.
12. Dickinson had read Higginson's *Outdoor Papers* with delight (L458), and might have taken note of Higginson's reference to De Quincey's literary "expertise". She wrote to Higginson in 1876, commenting on his book that "It is still as distinct as Paradise – the opening your first Book –" (L458). In her potential allusion to her father's reading of *The Avenger*, Dickinson depicted De Quincey's story with words such as "intelligence", "arrest" and "transportation", showing her familiarity with De Quincey's literary reputation (L200).
13. On Emerson's meeting with De Quincey in Edinburgh, see Grevel Lindop's edition of *The Works of Thomas De Quincey* (2003 Vol.16 511–512). See also Lindop's *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* and Robert Morrison's *The English Opium Eater: A Biography of Thomas De Quincey* (Lindop 367–68; Morrison 2009 355–356 & 369–371).
14. On De Quincey's Romantic irony, see John E. Jordan's "Grazing the Brink: De Quincey's Ironies". Barry Milligan and Lois Peters Agnew likewise argue for De Quincey's "celebration of collapsing dichotomies" (Agnew 113; Milligan 46). See also Sanjay Krishnan's *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives on Britain's Empire in Asia*. (92–93).
15. In her discussion of Dickinson's "humorous grotesquerie", Cristanne Miller comments on the excess humour of Dickinson's poems that "open up possibilities" for new perceptions (106).
16. Karbiener notes that De Quincey's opium addiction, along with the enterprising nature of James T. Fields, had accounted for his popular reception in a protestant and relatively drug-free America (7, 12).
17. See "Annals of the Evergreens" (18). Both typescripts and transcripts are available at: <<http://www.emilydickinson.org/susan/tannals18.html>>.
18. Dickinson had mentioned several evenings blissfully spent in the drawing room of the Evergreen, a house Dickinson's father helped to build in the 1850s for Dickinson's brother Austin and Susan to live in. In an 1858 letter to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Bowles, Dickinson wrote that "Tonight looks like 'Jerusalem.' I think Jerusalem must be like Sue's Drawing Room, when we are talking and laughing there, and you and Mrs Bowles are by" (L189). It is also the same year when Dickinson showed interest in De Quincey and sought a copy of De Quincey's books.

19. Domhnall Mitchell notes that Dickinson might have emulated Susan's literary practice by including clippings and drawings in her letters (299).
20. The sexual connotation of Dickinson's depiction of the cold is so explicit that in *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson*, John Cody would consider it as an expression of her sexual anxiety (175–180).
21. In an 1862 letter to Higginson, Dickinson responded to his remark in a previous letter, stating that "You think my gait 'spasmodic' – I am in danger – Sir – You think me 'uncontrolled' – I have no tribunal" (L265).
22. This letter is generally considered as Dickinson's exercise of the fictive power of language. See, for example, McNeil's *Emily Dickinson* (66–67) and Margaret Homans's *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (169). See also Páraic Finnerty's "A Dickinson Reverie: The Worm, the Snake, Marvel, and Nineteenth-Century Dreaming" (99).
23. The poem is often associated with Dickinson's snake letter. See David Sullivan's "Running the 'Double Risk': Emily Dickinson Fleeing the Worm's Secretions" and Finnerty's "A Dickinson Reverie: The Worm, the Snake, Marvel, and Nineteenth-Century Dreaming" (94–99).
24. As critics point out, Dickinson sometimes uses "mottled" imagery to depict female characters like herself in her poems. See, for example, Rebecca Patterson's *Emily Dickinson's Imagery* (148–156). On its association with Dickinson's reading of Shakespeare, see Paula Bernat Bennet's "The Orient is in the West: Emily Dickinson's Reading of *Anthony and Cleopatra*" (115) and Finnerty's *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (174).
25. The term "involute", according to Barrell, had been used in conchology before De Quincey's "coinage" (32).
26. A note is found on page 155 of the Dickinsons's collection of De Quincey's *Essays on the Poets* (Capps 82).
27. See V. A. De Luca's "De Quincey's Icons of Apocalypse: Some Romantic Analogues" (25 & 35).
28. As scholars have pointed out, around half of Dickinson's poems in her surviving manuscripts were composed or "copied out between 1861 and 1866", indicating the profound impact of the Civil War upon her poetic productivity (Smith and Loeffelholz 2).
29. Both authors have been noted for the Gothicism in their writings, particularly their use of architectural metaphors to account for the psychological landscape of the mind. Lindop and Alina Clej observe De Quincey's dependence upon or adoption of Gothic conventions and topics (Lindop 213; Clej 234). See also Bridgewater's *De Quincey's Gothic Masquerade* (2004). Dickinson scholars also point out the absorption of the Gothic convention in her poems. Wardrop Daneen devotes her book *Emily Dickinson's Gothic: Goblin with a Gauge* to Dickinson's Gothic imagery (1996). The poem, in particular, has been associated with the Gothic genre by critics such as Cynthia Griffin Wolff and St Armand (Wolff 464; Armand 97).
30. In an 1876 letter to Higginson, Dickinson states that "Nature is a Haunted House – but Art – a House that tries to be haunted" (L459A).
31. Critics have used this poem to showcase Dickinson's emphasis on spiritual existences over physical ones. See, for example, Inder Nath Kher's *The Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson's Poetry* (28) and Jane Donahue Eberwein's *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* (120).
32. The topic is explored more extensively in another paper of mine about De Quincey's notion of "the palimpsest" and Dickinson's poems of the brain. As part of my

thesis, the paper looks at the responses of both writers towards the development of telescopic astronomy of their time and its relationship with their aesthetic formation of human perception.

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 L *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958. Citation by letter number.

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